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THE TESTAMENT OF *DICHTUNG UND WAHRHEIT*:  
AN ENQUIRY INTO GOETHE'S MODE OF SECULARIZATION

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS OF THE  
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## NOTES

Reference to Goethe's correspondence and reported conversations is made, unless otherwise noted, to the *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, ed. Ernst Beutler, Zürich, 1949. (Henceforth abbreviated to GA, followed by the volume number in large Roman numerals, and the page reference in Arabic numerals.) All other references to Goethe's works are to the *Hamburger Ausgabe*, ed. Erich Trunz, (*Zwölfte, neubearbeitete Auflage*), München, 1981. (Henceforth abbreviated to HA, followed by the volume in large Roman numerals, and the page reference in Arabic numerals.)

The few translations which are not otherwise acknowledged are my own.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's use of his inherited religious tradition in his autobiography *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit*. It has as its premise the contention that, although scholarship has addressed to a considerable extent the question of Goethe's personal religious beliefs and their bearing on his works, there has emerged no manifest scholarly agreement on the nature and significance of Goethe's attitude to religion. This lack of consensus is explored, and possible reasons for it are posited. It is concluded that any attempt to define Goethe's putative personally held beliefs is of limited historical and critical interest, and the focus of this study on Goethe's application in his written works of material derived from the tradition of religion is justified. The use of religious concepts in an ostensibly non-religious context introduces the concept of secularization, which is analyzed in terms of its etymological and epistemological origins and implications. From this analysis emerges the relevance of the concept of binary synthesis for an appreciation of Goethe's use of elements of his inherited religious tradition. Binary synthesis is defined as a heuristic, and then applied to the apparent polarities of sacral and secular, and of past entity and present formulation, in Goethe's depiction of religious material in his autobiography. It is the titular paradox of the work which principally justifies the focus on *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, since the 'truth' of what the author is concerned to reveal to his reading public is explicitly couched in a veil of what he allusively calls 'poetry'. The relationship of conceptual meaning and rhetorical form in Goethe's representation of inherited religious material in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is analyzed in terms of what recent scholarship on Goethe's attitude to his inherited tradition in general has adduced as a binary synthesis of form and meaning, through which the text functions *aesthetically* on the psyche of the perceptive reader. When applied to the representation of *religion*, it is contended that in Goethe's representation of his religious tradition in the context of his autobiography there exists to be perceived a sense of the very essence of that tradition which is a deep-seated feeling of faith. Thus Goethe's mode of secularization, by which elements of the sacral tradition are represented for renewed appraisal in the secular context of the literary text, it is argued, is to be understood as a binary synthesis of sacral material and secular form which operates on the reader in a particular way.

Goethe's mode of secularization is to be viewed against the cultural background of his contemporary philosophical environment, and hence Goethe's own attitude to his religious tradition is placed in the historical context of the Enlightenment as a general European phenomenon and in the specifically relevant context of the German *Aufklärung*. As precursors and prefigurations of the particular use to which Goethe put his religious tradition in his autobiography, the views and expressions of the principal exponents of enlightened thought and philosophy are adumbrated, with a view to clarifying the focus on Goethe's own particular contribution. This contribution is adduced primarily through an analysis of Goethe's account of his contemporary philosophical milieu in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, and then through detailed analysis of the relationship of form and meaning, and the significance of binary synthesis therein, in his treatment of the material of inherited religious culture in his autobiography. The implications of Goethe's mode of secularization in representing for renewed appraisal and appreciation the essence of the sacral tradition are explored. In conclusion, some wider implications of what is to be understood as a peculiarly Goethean mode of secularization for an understanding and appreciation of the cultural role and function of the religious tradition are suggested.

## INTRODUCTION

'It may well be asked', runs the preface to a major study of Goethe's Protestant upbringing and its lasting effect on him, 'whether it is possible to add much new material to what is already known concerning Goethe's views on religion and Christianity'<sup>1</sup>. The religious furrow of the extensive Goethean field is one to which many scholars have applied their plough, delving ever deeper into this specific area in the course of their consideration of religion in its relation to sundry other aspects of Goethe's life and work. The question of Goethe's religion is one which has fascinated readers and attracted a great deal of intense academic scrutiny, to the extent that this particular aspect of scholarship on Goethe, having been subjected to such a concentrated cycle of ploughing, sowing and harvesting, is now - if one takes the above remark as representative - considered barren and fruitless, and to have nothing further of note, merit or interest, to yield. However, the subject cannot be considered closed - all critical enquiry exhausted, all avenues explored, all questions answered and all answers consolidated - when it is apparent to the scholar approaching the field for the first time that what has emerged from this prodigious amount of investigative research into Goethe's attitude to religion is little more than an imbroglio of incohesive, fragmentary, and often contradictory impressions of Goethe's personal faith and its bearing on his works. The title of Reinhold Schneider's essay of 1948, 'Das ungelöste Problem: Goethes Glaube'<sup>2</sup> points to the ongoing failure of scholarship (at least as far as the immediate post-war years) to solve this problem; and more recent scholarship does not appear to have progressed very far from this acknowledgement of critical uncertainty: Schneider's title is readily cited by one of the most prolific writers on Goethe's religion of the latter half of the twentieth century, the late Derek Bowman, as unequivocal evidence of the ultimate insolubility of the problem<sup>3</sup>.

My decision to concentrate on the area of Goethe's religion was inspired by an *ad hoc* remark made by my subsequent supervisor, R H Stephenson, that despite the

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Loewen, *Goethe's Response to Protestantism*, Berne, Frankfurt am Main, 1972, (p.7).

<sup>2</sup> In Schneider, *Über Dichter und Dichtung*, Köln, 1953, pp.227-246.

<sup>3</sup> See Derek Bowman, 'Goethe's Attitude to Religion in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*', in *German Life and Letters*, Vol.20 (1966-67), pp.316-325: 'Even to this day the problem is still with us; Reinhold Schneider, for example, writes an essay entitled "Das ungelöste Problem - Goethes Glaube"' (p.324). Some twenty years elapsed from Schneider's essay to Bowman's: the 'problem', for Bowman at least, remained unsolved.

above-noted questioning of the need for, or potential contribution of, yet another investigation into Goethe's religious view, there still remained much to be researched and written in respect of Goethe's understanding of, and attitude to, the religious tradition in general and Christianity in particular. The following study is an attempt to divert from the course of primarily biographical and hence historically limited avenues of scholarship into Goethe's religion. I seek to view 'religion' as one crucial aspect of a general tradition which Goethe was concerned to uphold through a particular kind of representation, eliciting a particular response, in his written works. I shall argue that the ongoing failure of scholarship to reach a critical consensus on the problem of Goethe's religion lies not in the latter's putative insolubility, but in the, in my view, misplaced concern to elucidate the nature of Goethe's personal faith and to adduce a definitive structure of his 'religious' world-view. My own concern is more modest, but, I believe, potentially more enlightening: to consider Goethe's 'religion' in terms of his *use* of the religious tradition in which he inherited in the context of the written word; to examine his deployment of his religious heritage; to present an analysis, not of what Goethe might have *believed*, but of what he *does* with the sacral tradition in the secular context of his writings. In this way I hope to transcend the affected cynicism of my borrowed starting-point by offering a wholly different approach to the question of Goethe's religion in terms of his attitude to, and treatment of, a *tradition* of religion within his wider treatment and assimilation of inherited culture as a whole.

With this in mind, some justification is perhaps necessary of the decision to concentrate here on the explicitly autobiographical work *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit*. To a large extent - and possibly more so than with any other major author within the Western tradition - Goethe's life and his works - literary, scientific and historical - have been viewed as complementary parts which together form the 'whole' Goethe, the 'real' Goethe as posterity appreciates him and scholarship understands him. Wolfgang Leppmann's study *The German Image of Goethe* notes the part played in the perpetuation of Goethe's reputation by the countless accounts and impressions bequeathed to posterity by Goethe and his contemporaries: the image we have of Goethe, an image which underpins all consideration of his artistic and scientific endeavours, is shaped, according to Leppmann, in part if not in whole by the image projected consciously by Goethe of

himself<sup>4</sup>.

Perhaps more so than with any other of Goethe's highly pregnant but apparently throwaway remarks, his allusion in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* to all his works as 'Bruchstücke einer großen Konfession'<sup>5</sup> has been a honey-pot of potential nourishment to which scholars have, understandably, swarmed and clung. Goethe's life and his works are generally viewed as a coherent whole: the works are determined by the life which produced them, and this life is held to be implicit in the works it brought forth. As Caroline M Cooper's 1973 thesis discusses in depth, critical reception of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* has hinged, in the main, on the 'confessional' aspects of the autobiography<sup>6</sup>. Derek Bowman's *Life into Autobiography* focusses on this primary example of Goethe's autobiographical writings as, Bowman supposes, the closest available approximation, within a creative context, of Goethe's own true standpoint. Bowman's introductory justification of his study ends, in fact, on the premise:

But when all is said and done, the prime concern of the autobiographer is himself, and it is hoped that above all light will be cast on Goethe the man,

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<sup>4</sup> Oxford, 1961. 'Goethe enjoys some distinct advantages, in regard to the survival of his fame and influence, over the other indisputably "classical" authors of Western literature. He was so famous among his contemporaries that the story of his life became common knowledge to millions of them; he lived so recently that this knowledge has come down to us essentially intact; and he lived so long that he was able to add to it, in autobiographical writings and in commenting on what others said about him. Thus we have not one but two avenues leading to him: his works, and the story of his life, which is known to us in such detail as to let him emerge as a distinct human being even if none of the works had been preserved. In this, Goethe was more fortunate than Homer, who lived so long ago that his very existence is often denied, or Shakespeare, so obscure in life that even the authorship of part or all of "his" works is still occasionally disputed' (p.xi). A somewhat different attitude to the prodigious amount of biographical material available on Goethe is adopted by Nicholas Boyle in the recently published first volume of his *Goethe: The Poet and the Age* (Oxford, 1991). D J Enright's review notes that Boyle's preface commences, 'altogether correctly alas, that more must be known, "or at any rate there must be more to know" about him than about almost any other human being', 'A heart with testicles', *London Review of Books*, 25 April 1991, pp.9-10 (p.9).

<sup>5</sup> HA IX 283.

<sup>6</sup> Caroline Mary Cooper, *Goethe's 'Dichtung und Wahrheit'. A Methodological Study of Possible Approaches to the Autobiography of a Poet* (unpubl. diss., University of London, 1973). It is worth noting here the curious assertion made by Walter Kaufmann in *Discovering the Mind*, Volume I, *Goethe, Kant and Hegel* (New York etc., 1980) of the initial and ongoing critical reaction to the publication of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*: 'The impact of this work was immense. It pointed the way for subsequent studies not only of Goethe but also of other poets and artists, and eventually of every human being' (p.32). Curious because this is in fact Kaufmann's only mention of the work he considers so seminal in his discussion of Goethe's contribution to the sciences of philosophy and metaphysics. Cooper's thesis puts in perspective why contemporary and subsequent reception of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, while acknowledging the work's significance, has not apparently articulated this significance coherently, and Kaufmann's study of Goethe's 'mind' evidently follows in this long-standing tradition.

whose life and works, if anybody's, are all of a piece.<sup>7</sup>

Bowman's concentration on *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is justified, then, in terms of the evidence provided in this text of the views and attitudes of the man: the work, for Bowman, is wholly determined by the facts of the lived life it depicts, and the depiction is consequently viewed as an accurate, self-sufficient account of the life it charts.

But Goethe's autobiography is more - because its very title claims less - than a factual description of the events of his life as he lived it. He presents details, items and commentaries 'aus seinem Leben', not a complete picture; his 'confession' is fragmentary, not an absolute whole<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, far from presenting a complete chronological picture of the life it describes, Goethe's autobiography ends with his departure for the court at Weimar, at the point where, some would argue, his life - certainly with regard to the pinnacles of his artistic creation, scientific experimentation, and social intercourse - was just beginning<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, Goethe's titular linking of the concepts of 'Dichtung' and 'Wahrheit', as well as casting doubts on the uncompromising veracity of his account (which, as Cooper suggests, displeased his receiving public) also implies an equilibrium between the two elements which indicates the inadequacy, for example, of Bowman's subordination of the 'poetry' of Goethe's creative writing to the 'truth' of the events depicted. That Goethe ultimately reversed his original order of these elements from his working title 'Wahrheit und Dichtung' surely implies a deal of hesitancy over the necessity of according one element an initial, and the other a final emphasis. Erich Trunz, in his commentary to the *Hamburger Ausgabe* of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, argues repeatedly that the paradox

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<sup>7</sup> Derek Bowman, *Life into Autobiography. A study of Goethe's "Dichtung und Wahrheit"*, Berne, 1971, (p.11).

<sup>8</sup> Cooper notes that historical veracity, and hence personal confession, was the expected hallmark of autobiography in the eighteenth century, and discusses the significance of Goethe's failure to present a cohesive and comprehensive account of his life in terms of contemporary expectations and reception: 'the "Vorwort" to *Dichtung und Wahrheit* contained no assurance that Goethe's account of his life was complete, or even accurate. And not content with refraining from giving such assurance, he positively invites mistrust by requiring his readers to accept an autobiography which, apparently, lacked the very qualities which they had come to consider essential to the genre' (op. cit., p.36).

<sup>9</sup> Herbert von Einem notes in his commentary to the *Hamburger Ausgabe* of Goethe's *Italienische Reise* that this work was originally intended to provide the second instalment of Goethe's autobiography: 'Im Erstdruck von 1816 und 1817 kam der autobiographische Charakter des Buches deutlich zum Ausdruck. Sein Titel hieß nicht *Italienische Reise*, sondern: *Aus meinem Leben. Zweiter Abteilung Erster und Zweiter Teil*. Erst die *Ausgabe letzter Hand* gab ihm 1829 den Titel *Italienische Reise*. Die "Erste Abteilung" ist *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, deren *dritter Teil* 1814 im Druck vorlag' (HA XI 572f.). Nevertheless, the Weimar years remain autobiographically neglected, and Goethe deals explicitly with only the first half of his life.

of the title inheres in the 'poetry' of the creative hand of the artist forming the 'truth' of a lived life<sup>10</sup>. Benjamin C Sax, in his recent study *Images of Identity*, while claiming that the reversal of the titular concepts was 'for euphonic reasons', points to the integral inter-relationship of 'Wahrheit' and 'Dichtung' in revealing the significance of the life Goethe depicts<sup>11</sup>. That Goethe himself was aware of the possible misinterpretations of his titular paradox is apparent in his apologetic letter of 12th January 1830 to King Ludwig I of Bavaria, in which he explains his title and its implications:

Was den freilich einigermaßen paradoxalen Titel der Vertraulichkeiten aus meinem Leben Wahrheit und Dichtung betrifft, so ward derselbige durch die Erfahrung veranlaßt, daß das Publikum immer an der Wahrhaftigkeit solcher biographischen Versuche einigen Zweifel hege. Diesem zu begegnen, bekannte ich mich von einer Art von Fiktion, gewissermaßen ohne Not, durch einen gewissen Widerspruchs-Geist getrieben, denn es war mein ernstestes Bestreben das eigentliche Grundwahre, das, insofern ich es einsah, in meinem Leben obgewaltet hatte, möglichst darzustellen und auszudrücken.<sup>12</sup>

The present focus on *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, then, is justified on two counts. Firstly, it is in autobiography - even in 'that most misleading of autobiographies', as Nicholas Boyle somewhat allusively calls Goethe's<sup>13</sup> - that one expects to find the most candid expression of personal views and experiences that the author is prepared to give; secondly, and more pertinently, Goethe explicitly refuses to disassociate the concepts of experience and the relation thereof in a literary context. This study of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as a particular kind of religious testament is founded on the notion of a 'Widerspruchs-Geist' on Goethe's part which prompts him to portray in an artistic context the 'truths' of a religious tradition of which he had direct experience. My intention is to consider Goethe's treatment of religious material - the language and images of the Bible, the apocryphal canon, the liturgy, the psalter and hymnal, the conceptual argumentations of the entire theological tradition - in the light of this 'Widerspruchs-Geist' which portrays 'poetically' (the term requires, and will receive, further elucidation) the events of a lived life, and accords the 'poetry' a stamp, an

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<sup>10</sup> See HA IX 611 and 640.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin C Sax, *Images of Identity. Goethe and the Problem of Self-Conception in the Nineteenth Century*, New York, Bern, Frankfurt am Main, Paris, 1987, pp.111f.

<sup>12</sup> Trunz notes (HA IX 640) that Goethe sent a copy of this letter one month later to Karl Friedrich Zelter (see GA XXI 891), banking on the future publication of their correspondence and doubtless concerned that his reading public should be privy to his avowed intentions.

<sup>13</sup> *Goethe. The Poet and the Age*, op. cit., p.101.

intuition, of possible truth. The legacy from Goethe in producing his autobiography, the 'testament' of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, lies, I shall argue, in the invitation to participate in an appreciation of 'truth' in poetic form and 'poetry' in the relation of facts and events.

Concentration with regard to 'religion' on the Western Judaeo-Christian tradition in its broadest sense is to be justified purely in terms of Goethe's predominant concern with the religious tradition to which he owed his religious education and experience, and which constituted the general religious temper of his world. Other religious traditions - particularly those of Eastern myth, cult and rite - are, of course, not exempt from Goethe's consideration, but are dealt with here only in terms of their direct bearing on *Dichtung und Wahrheit*: the sundry and breakaway religious sects of Goethe's own religious milieu are in this respect more significant, given their overall contribution to the religious temper of the German eighteenth century. It is the tradition of Judaeo-Christianity which exercised the most constant and far-reaching influence on Goethe's thought and expression, an influence which is evident from his earliest published poem, 'Poetische Gedanken über die Höllenfahrt Jesu Christi' of 1765<sup>14</sup>, to the last recorded conversation with Eckermann of 11th March 1832, just a few days before Goethe's death, which bears moving testimony to a final acknowledgement of the spiritual and ethical force of the Christian tradition:

Mag die geistige Kultur nun immer fortschreiten, mögen die Naturwissenschaften in immer breiterer Ausdehnung und Tiefe wachsen, und der menschliche Geist sich erweitern, wie er will, über die Hoheit und sittliche Kultur des Christentums, wie es in den Evangelien schimmert und leuchtet, wird er nicht hinauskommen!<sup>15</sup>

Autobiography is, of course, a pre-eminent genre for religious self-expression within the Christian tradition. Derek Bowman's account of Goethe's attitude to religion in *Life into Autobiography*, for instance, places *Dichtung und Wahrheit* firmly within the tradition of autobiographies which are confessional in a religious sense:

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<sup>14</sup> HA I 9ff. David Luke notes in a recently published essay that Goethe later recalled to Eckermann that this poem, the theology of which is unquestionably orthodoxly Christian, was in fact written at the request of Susanne von Klettenberg, and that Goethe was apparently acutely embarrassed by its unauthorized publication in Frankfurt the following year. See Luke, "Vor Deinem Jammerkreuz": Goethe's Attitude to Christian Belief, *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, New Series [henceforth abbreviated to *PEGS*, N S] Vol.59 (1988-89), pp.35-58 (p.39). See also Boyle, op. cit., p.68.

<sup>15</sup> GA XXIV 771f.

For centuries autobiography and religious confession were virtually identical, and it might well be argued that for better or for worse they are indissolubly bound together, for if the autobiographer cannot trace his life in the spirit of faith, whether orthodox or personal, then all he can see is a confusing succession of years swept away in triviality and pointlessness into the past. The faithless man is presented with a welter of time; the man of faith is sure of the pattern of his life.<sup>16</sup>

For Bowman, then, *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is not only a work of personal confession, but also, by definition, a religious testimony; and hence, logically, evidence of the personal faith of its author. Bowman conducted some searching studies into the religious impulse of autobiography in general, and *Dichtung und Wahrheit* in particular. His principal thesis, that religion is the main impetus of all autobiography, is an arresting, if at first sight unwarranted, assertion<sup>17</sup>. Bowman's essay entitled "Goethe and the Christian Autobiographical Tradition" mentions several possible 'forefathers' and models which Goethe might have been following in writing *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as a testament of his own religious experience<sup>18</sup>. Bowman's understanding of autobiography as religious testament rests on acceptance of the fundamentally confessional aspects of the genre and, it seems, on an unequivocally evangelistic approach to Christianity by which the written word is designed - or, indeed, 'given' to the world - to testify to the lived and living faith of the writer, and should in turn encourage the reader to seek this faith in and for the self.

A more theologically specified understanding of autobiography is provided by Rudolf Bultmann in his work *Geschichte und Eschatologie*, which states the verifiable historico-literary fact that 'real autobiography arose for the first time within

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<sup>16</sup> Op. cit., p.49.

<sup>17</sup> The argument for a specifically Christian basis for all autobiography has stimulating implications for an analysis of, for example, Bertrand Russell's autobiography, or Friedrich Engel's memoirs, or *Mein Kampf!* The religious impulse allegedly present in all autobiography presupposes a far more general conception of religion than is catered for within the categorically Christian premise of Bowman's thesis. Bowman does present a more general definition of the 'religious' impulse of autobiography which admits of such writers as Edward Gibbon and Rousseau, but his insistence that it is only the 'man of faith' who is sure enough of the pattern of his life to present a coherent literary account thereof narrows the perspective of autobiographical reflection once again to the specifically Christian standpoint.

<sup>18</sup> *PEGS*, NS, Vol. 41 (1971), pp.21-44 (p.22).

Christianity"<sup>19</sup>. Bultmann, however, is less concerned with the evangelical potential of the written word than with the historical view of man, central to the Christian way of thinking, by which man is prompted to view himself in his historical context, and to categorize his (Christian) being in terms of the tradition which forms his life. For Bowman, autobiography is a Christian genre, and serves - or should serve - to spread the Christian message: for Bultmann, the doctrines of Christianity prompt man to search for, identify, and account for himself. The religious impulse of autobiography is to be explained in terms of Christianity's recognition of the historicity of man; autobiography being considered the most effective means available to man of expressing and conveying a sense of historical, geographical and social context.

M H Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism* takes the implications of historicity within Christianity to their logical historico-literary extreme in positing the notion of a *Heilsgeschichte* within a specifically Christian autobiographical tradition, which corresponds with the general *Bildungsgeschichte* of a certain kind of novel charting progressive self-education through life. As a *Heilsgeschichte*, autobiography explicitly owes its existence to the Christian tradition, and charts, for Abrams, progressive self-education towards that central notion of Christianity, 'redemption', being the attainment of ultimate salvation through discovery of the 'self'. *Geschichte*, then, implies both the historical context and the (written) relation of it, and the affirmation of historicity is at the same time evidence of a striving towards a redemptive goal<sup>20</sup>.

Now, there is precious little overt evidence of a search for Christian redemption in the pages of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*: indeed, Derek Bowman finds cause gently to berate Goethe on several occasions for not showing enough reverence

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<sup>19</sup> 'Aber kein Zweifel kann daran sein, daß ein radikales Verständnis der Geschichtlichkeit *im christlichen Glauben* - vorbereitet im Alten Testament - aufgebrochen ist, wie dadurch dokumentiert wird, daß erst im Christentum die Autobiographien entstanden sind.' Rudolph Bultmann, *Geschichte und Eschatologie*, Zweite Auflage, Tübingen 1964, p.178. (The essays contained in this collection were delivered as a series of Gifford lectures in Edinburgh, 1955, and first published as *History and Eschatology*, Edinburgh, 1957 [see p.149]).

<sup>20</sup> M H Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*. Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature, London, 1971, pp.189f. Caroline Cooper's discussion of the extent to which *Dichtung und Wahrheit* may be considered a religious autobiography starts, interestingly, with a suggestion of 'the absence of any insistence on a gulf between spiritual and worldly life', thus placing *Dichtung und Wahrheit* outwith the conventional tradition of religious autobiography, and goes on to stress the self-developmental aspects of the work in terms which echo the conventions of the *Bildungsroman*: 'Goethe ... sees self-development, self-knowledge and -understanding as attainable only through interchange with his environment', (op. cit., p.170).

before 'the Almighty' in his quest for himself<sup>21</sup>. But Goethe does affirm the principle of historical contextuality as the first task of autobiography:

Denn dieses scheint die Hauptaufgabe der Biographie zu sein, den Menschen in seinen Zeitverhältnissen darzustellen, und zu zeigen, inwiefern ihm das Ganze widerstrebt, inwiefern es ihn begünstigt, und wie er sie, wenn er Künstler, Dichter, Schriftsteller ist, wieder nach außen abgespiegelt.<sup>22</sup>

This is, however, no explicit avowal that he is working within a specifically Christian tradition. There is no reason to suppose that Goethe's autobiography is to be read as a conscious expression of his progression towards spiritual redemption in any specifically Christian sense. He is, ostensibly, reporting on the events of his life and on the personalities met in the course of experience. Nothing in the tone or tenor of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* would seem to confirm Abrams' conception of an autobiographical *Heilsgeschichte*, or to corroborate Bowman's consideration of the work as paradigmatic of an explicitly and exclusively Christian genre. If *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is to be read as a religious testament, then, this aspect of the work is not manifest in any overt evangelical message, or in the self-conscious charting of a journey through life towards salvation and redemption. The 'religious' message within *Dichtung und Wahrheit* - and scholarship on the work seems generally agreed that this exists - is evidently subtle, diffuse, difficult to perceive and even more difficult to evaluate.

Chapter One of this study discusses some of Goethe's manifold references to God, Christ, and the religious tradition in general, and adumbrates his important utterances on religion with explicit reference to himself. This is attempted primarily through a presentation of the problem of Goethe's 'religion' in terms of the critical debate which has dealt specifically or obliquely with this area of research. The aim of this overview is to clarify the focus of this study by contrast with the prominent and recurrent views adduced by past investigation of Goethe's religion. Such an approach

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, *Life into Autobiography*, op. cit., p.58 and passim. Elsewhere, however, Bowman qualifies his abhorrence at Goethe's lack of reverence with the observation that 'Goethe never indulges in irony or mockery for their own sake when treating religion in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*', pointing out that Goethe was appalled by Voltaire's persistently malicious attacks on the Church (see 'Goethe's Attitude to Religion in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*', loc. cit., p.324). Perhaps Bowman's unwillingness to proceed beyond his concern to make a Christian out of Goethe blinds him, as will be discussed, to the underlying implications of irony in general and of the ironic treatment of religious matters in particular.

<sup>22</sup> HA IX 9.

immediately encounters a subordinate and related problem: the critical debate on Goethe's religion does not reveal any clear chronological development or internal coherence, and successive commentators seem more concerned to argue for the application of a definitive and exclusive 'label' to the nature of Goethe's religious beliefs. What the analysis in the first chapter of this study attempts to present, then, is not an exhaustive study of the relative merits and demerits of all scholarly investigations into Goethe's religion; but a general overview of the main trends which have influenced the debate, the views of the principal scholars who have emerged therefrom, the attitudes they bring to bear and any particularly pertinent points they make in their discussion of Goethe's religion. In this respect, the main works of criticism referred to, be they in contradiction or corroboration of one another, are included as being paradigmatic of successive trends in investigations of Goethe's attitude to religion.

One conclusion common to many accounts of the question of Goethe's religion is the argument for a deep-seated religious belief on his part, which manifests itself, not in any orthodox adherence to accepted religious practice, but in a personal and idiosyncratic way. It is this perception of a relationship between life and art, and more particularly, between religious faith and its expression, which in my opinion particularly justifies a concentration on *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, where the relationship between personal experience and artistic formulation is most explicit. My purpose, then, is to examine Goethe's various utterances on religion in his autobiography with a view to determining the nature, and more particularly the function, of this personal expression of religion.

Goethe does of course state explicitly in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* that he evolved his own conception of Christianity for his own personal use, 'ein Christentum zu meinem Privatgebrauch'<sup>23</sup>. What is not always recognized, however, is that Goethe acknowledges this private response to, and use of, Christianity as a *topos* of his cultural milieu; as a commonplace of religious life, argument, and philosophy in the age in which he operated. The nebulous notion of 'Privatchristentum', which scholarship seems to attribute to Goethe purely on the strength of the above autobiographical reference, is in fact a commonly-held proposition of Goethe's day in its function as an explicitly recognized and specifically

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<sup>23</sup> HA X 45.

embraced standpoint which is not peculiar to Goethe, but to which he may have evolved a particular attitude, and of which he may have acquired an individual understanding. 'Privatchristentum' as a critical concept has propagated two primary and apparently irreconcilable views of Goethe's response to religion: an effete, vague and other-worldly internalization of faith in the face of an antagonistic world; or an egotistic and exploitative use of the trappings of Christianity for personal aggrandizement. Common to both these views is their underlying polar opposition of the realms of religion and religious faith on the one hand, and of secular manifestation and concretion on the other. It is, in my view, the failure of scholarship to relate Goethe's appreciation of the nature and function of polar oppositions in general to this very particular polarity of the sacral and the secular which has led to the manifold interpretations of Goethe's personal religion and hence to the contention that the 'problem' of Goethe's religion is, and remains, insoluble. I shall argue that Goethe's use of his Christian heritage is indeed 'private', in that it is peculiar to him, but that the relevance of this particular usage transcends the historically limited relevance of a personal faith, having a crucial bearing on critical understanding of the nature and function of Goethe's use of religious material, since Goethe's 'Privatchristentum' necessarily involves the re-manifestation, for public appraisal, of inherited religious notions in the secular context of the written word.

The whole area of the utilization of sacral material in a secular context is a sensitive issue, due perhaps in the main to the popular idea that matters religious are somehow 'sacrosanct' and therefore beyond human exploitation. That Goethe did not shy away from using spiritual notions and sacral images in a secular context is apparent from even the most cursory glance at his literary works and autobiographical writings. Religion in general was a crucial element of the cultural tradition in which he inherited, and his concern with the perpetuation of this tradition in general is, of course, widely recognized. Indeed, perhaps one of the most significant and fruitful aspects of scholarship on Goethe and Schiller in the latter half of the twentieth century is the recognition that the exponents of Weimar Classicism embarked on a conscious and sustained programme concerned with the understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage in general, and the representation of this heritage in a form which invited its re-thinking, re-vitalization, and hence its perpetuation. This concern on Goethe's part

is explicit in one of his best-known and most-quoted maxims:

Alles Gescheite ist schon gedacht worden, man muß nur versuchen, es noch einmal zu denken.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, this aphorism, so well-known as almost to fulfil its own implicit prophecy by appearing trite and trivial, raises many pertinent questions about the nature and essence of authorial originality. Even the thought itself is not peculiar to Goethe, but is, as Hecker's commentary suggests<sup>25</sup>, modelled on Terence (*nullum est jam dictum, quod non dictum sit prius*). It is the specific concern of this study to adduce and define Goethe's particular way of dealing with the religious aspect of this cultural tradition; to perceive the 'alles Gescheite' of the Christian tradition in Goethe's reformulation of religious material, and to define how Goethe invites us to *think it all through again*<sup>26</sup>. I shall argue that in the fabric of Goethe's re-presentation of the ancient and inherited wisdom of the Christian tradition, there is an intimation of sentient and dynamic faith. Fundamental to my argument here are the methodological strategy, and the content in detail, of R H Stephenson's *Goethe's Wisdom Literature. A Study in Aesthetic Transmutation*<sup>27</sup>. As Stephenson has argued, the above aphorism articulates the challenge thrown out (here by Goethe) to re-articulate known truths in a manner which gives them, not a new truth, but a newly perceived truth: a new import, then, born of a new dynamism in the way the thought speaks to the percipient. Stephenson's stated point of departure is the arresting comment made by Elizabeth M Wilkinson on André Gide's remark on the *banalité supérieure* which characterizes Goethe's life and work:

What makes it 'superior' is that the thought has been felt and lived and that *the formulation betrays this*.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> HA XII 415.

<sup>25</sup> Max Hecker (ed.), 'Goethes *Maximen und Reflexionen*'. Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft, Vol. 21, (1907). See note to §441.

<sup>26</sup> The translation is Elizabeth M Wilkinson's, in 'Goethe's Conception of Form', reprinted in Elizabeth M Wilkinson and L A Willoughby, *Goethe Poet and Thinker. Essays*, 2nd ed., London, 1970, pp.167-184 (p.168).

<sup>27</sup> Bern, Frankfurt am Main, New York, 1983. Stephenson's study provides a comprehensive analysis of Goethe's 'Wisdom Literature' (a term itself borrowed, not without literary precedent, from the ecclesiastical tradition), and refers to the anthology of received wisdom in Goethe's *Maximen und Reflexionen*, the *Sprüche in Reimen*, and the late philosophical poetry. See p.13 for Stephenson's justification of his focus, and p.9 for his account of its significance for current study: 'In an age like our own, one that is in fact losing touch with that heritage Goethe took such pains to preserve and bring to life, this challenge thrown out by his wisdom literature is surely the most important of all its conceivable significances'.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19 (Stephenson's italics). Wilkinson's comment is made in her article on Goethe in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1974, Vol. 8 (p.230). Gide's remark is from his *Journal*, 1889-1939, (Paris, 1951), pp.42f.

What is especially problematic in the context of this present study is that we are dealing with a very special kind of inherited cultural formulation, one which has a material form - in terms of rite and ritual, the textual basis of the Bible, hymnal, liturgy and catechism, and the whole tradition of theological and eschatological analysis and speculation - but which finds its meaning in a particular form of feeling we call 'faith'; that is the hardening, or crystallization, of feeling into those settled convictions the eighteenth century called *Gesinnungen*<sup>29</sup>. I shall argue that it is the perpetuation, not just of his religious heritage, but of a sense of the feeling of faith, that gives Goethe's concern with his religious tradition its recognized personal stamp and its over-riding significance. With specific reference to the tradition of religion, then, the use of sacral material in a secular context involves a reformulation of traditional religious material in a manner which somehow inspires in the perceiving subject a sense of that deep-seated feeling of faith. This is what I mean by 'Goethe's mode of secularization' in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*: the representation in the secular, material world of what is essentially spiritual, non-material, and which instigates a singular kind of response by hardening inchoate religious feeling into the affirmative conviction of faith.

A detailed etymological and historical overview of the notion of secularization reveals just how inadequate the common conception of an antagonistic opposition of the realms of the sacral and the secular still is. This misconception is still apparently at work in much of the scholarship on Goethe. According to Elizabeth M Wilkinson, current misunderstandings and misuses of the concept:

have to be traced back to nineteenth-century misunderstandings of eighteenth-century 'secularisation'. Misunderstandings which still bedevil our scholarly understanding of that 'two-faced century'.<sup>30</sup>

Wilkinson's reference to the 'two-faced' nature of the eighteenth century, particularly in the context of secularization, provided the spur to my application of the notion of a 'binary-type synthesis', established with analytic clarity and precision by Wilkinson and L A Willoughby in their seminal edition of Schiller's *Ästhetische Briefe*<sup>31</sup> as a

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<sup>29</sup> See Stephenson, *ibid.*, p.157.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth M Wilkinson, 'Goethe's *Faust*: Tragedy in the Diachronic Mode', *PEGS*, NS 42 (1971-72), pp.116-174 (p.138, fn.).

<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*. Edited and Translated, with an Introduction, Commentary and Glossary of Terms, by Elizabeth M Wilkinson and L A Willoughby, Oxford, 1967, reprinted 1982 (henceforth abbreviated to WW). See pp.lxxxvff. and Appendix III (II), pp.349f.

crucial aspect of Schiller's (and Goethe's) thought. In binary synthesis, an alternation of existing polarities in the world is resolved into a new synthesis which maintains and expresses the individual properties of its component parts. According to the conceptual analysis of Wilkinson and Willoughby, the entity which ensues from the tension of polarized opposites in this type of synthesis is one or both of the primary polarities 'raised to a higher power' through reciprocal interaction with the initial opposite. Wilkinson and Willoughby convey this diagrammatically in their depiction of the triangulation of two poles, synthesized into another entity at the apex, another entity which contains, indeed is, one or both of the entities at the foot of the triangle enhanced. It is characteristic of this type of synthesis that the enhanced entity at the apex itself projects an antithesis; two new polarities which are in turn synthesized in a process of intensification and constant refinement.

The notion of a process of constant refinement through interacting polarities is not, of course, peculiar to Schiller (indeed, Wilkinson and Willoughby note their discovery of something structurally very similar in an account of Zen Buddhism<sup>32</sup>). And as they point out, it is, of course, central to Goethe's own thought that the world consists of polarities and turns progressively on their mutual enhancement through interaction ('die Anschauung der zwei großen Triebräder aller Natur: der Begriff von *Polarität* und von *Steigerung*'<sup>33</sup>). The famous passage from *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* on the relative merits of thinking and doing (reason and action, cognitive reflection and practical activity) makes this clear: the one has no force and little sense without the other, but together both may function to their full potential:

Denken und Tun, Tun und Denken, das ist die Summe aller Weisheit, von jeher anerkannt, von jeher geübt, nicht eingesehen von einem jeden. Beides muß wie Aus- und Einatmen sich im Leben ewig fort hin- und wider bewegen: wie Frage und Antwort sollte eins ohne das andere nicht stattfinden.<sup>34</sup>

Thinking and doing, breathing in and breathing out, moving backwards and moving forwards, question and answer: pairs of opposites which make sense only in relation to one another, which function fully only in coordination. Goethe's passage illustrates in a novelistic context that in the coexistence in tension of opposing polarities are to be

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.lxxxvi, fn.1.

<sup>33</sup> Contained in a letter to Kanzler von Müller of 24 v 1828. The letter is curiously missing from both the Gedenk and Hamburg editions of Goethe's letters, and finds its place in editions of Goethe's *Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*. See *Goethes Sämtliche Werke, Jubiläums-Ausgabe*, ed. Eduard von der Hellen, Stuttgart und Berlin, 1902-1907, Vol. XXXIX, pp.349f.

<sup>34</sup> HA VIII 263.

perceived and dynamically experienced the rhythms of life itself.

Lichtenberg surely had something similar in mind in his consideration in terms of eighteenth-century physics of the properties of inertia and resistance:

Die absondernde Philosophie trennt Trägheit und Widerstand in der Lehre vom Körper, so wie sie in der Anthropologie den bloß tierischen Menschen vom bloß vernünftigen trennt, aber beide vereinigt sind nur allein wirklich da.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, with binary synthesis, we are not dealing with a fusion by which the polarized entities lose their distinct properties. Inertia and resistance can be thought of as existing separately; but they function fully only together, like cognition and action, instinct and reason. The danger in any type of postulated synthesis is that the distinction of the antithetical polarities may be blurred: the inherent, peculiar properties of one specific entity may seem lost in its ‘con-fusion’ with its polar opposite. Binary synthesis precludes such a blurring of distinction: Question exists, for example, but subordinates itself to Answer; Answer exists, but subordinated to Question; and only in working together do both produce an improved understanding of the world. The most arresting and stimulating aspect of the concept of binary synthesis is perhaps that it is not logical (in the sense that logic is a mode of thought based on conceptual implication): binary synthesis is *descriptive* of the process of existence rather than *prescriptive* of the process of thought. The oppositions in a binary synthesis function truly only together, but they remain distinct: either or both of the fundamental polarities may appear enhanced through reciprocal, subordinating interaction with the other. Binary synthesis, then, is not a dialectic in any Hegelian sense, but a heuristic: a means of explaining and rendering perceptible a process at work in the world. One pole attains real existence in terms of and through synthesis with its opposite, by which the distinction is maintained throughout the very process of mutual subordination.

One of the major contributions to the binary synthesis debate is the recent analysis of the mutual subordination of conceptual meaning and rhetorical form in Goethe’s wisdom literature, and the application of the Schillerian notion of ‘schöner Vortrag’, or aesthetic discourse, whereby logical, conceptual relations and poetic

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<sup>35</sup> I am grateful to R H Stephenson for pointing out the relevance of Lichtenberg’s formulation to a clarification of the concept of binary synthesis. Stephenson cites this passage in *Goethe’s Wisdom Literature*, op. cit., p.246. See Leitzmann’s edition of Lichtenberg’s *Aphorismen, Deutsche Litteraturdenkmale des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1902-1908, Vol. 141, p.21.

structures in a text may be perceived as either coordinate with one another, or mutually subordinated to one another:

The mode of linguistic organization Goethe employs, in all probability borrowed from Schiller and called by him schöner Vortrag, has a double structure. There is a conceptual structure, in which other features such as rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration are subordinated to the logical, conceptual relations; and there is, too, the poetic - as analysed by Herder - in which conceptual relations are coordinate with all others. These two modes - the logical and the aesthetic - themselves coexist in a relation of reciprocal subordination, so that the reader may take the piece of discourse as either communicative or poetic depending on his needs and capacities. It is this reciprocal subordinative relation of logical and aesthetic that constitutes 'aesthetic discourse' proper (schöner Vortrag) for Schiller, and that firmly distinguishes it from the complete fusion which takes place in poetry proper where a 'merely' coordinative relation is at work.<sup>36</sup>

My concern is with the particular function of logical and poetic relations in Goethe's reformulation of religious material in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, seeking to examine the relationship between 'poetry' and 'truth', between 'form' and 'meaning', in terms of a potential binary synthesis of the sacral realm of religious speculation and the secular context of the written word. The notion of a potential interpenetration in the ostensible polarity presented by 'sacral' and 'secular' is central to my consideration of Goethe's mode of secularization, in terms of which his particular deployment of religious material in the secular context of the written text may be seen, not as an exploitative utilization of religious material to the unequivocal detriment of the realm of the sacral, but as a positive affirmation of the sacral, enhanced as it is by a particular kind of inclusion in the secular context.

Scholarly consideration of Goethe's 'secularization', in terms of his 'private use of Christianity', tends to concentrate on Goethe's employment of religious material, significantly that of the Christian tradition, in the secular context of his works. The adjective 'secular' and its corresponding noun 'secularization' appear with alarming frequency in the secondary literature on the theme of Goethe's religion: alarming not only because the terms are notably absent from Goethe's explicit utterances on the subject of his 'religion', but more particularly in that frequent use

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<sup>36</sup> Goethe's "Maximen und Reflexionen". A Selection. Edited and Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by R H Stephenson. *Scottish Papers in Germanic Studies* 6, Glasgow, 1986, (p.6).

has led to a reified critical conception of secularization; used as an absolute term requiring in itself no further definition or justification to describe Goethe's attitude to religion. Erich Franz, for example, in a chapter of *Goethe als religiöser Denker* entitled 'Säkularisierung des Christentums', asserts the following:

Im übrigen begegnet man auf Schritt und Tritt christlichen Begriffen und Vorstellungen, die von Goethe ins Weltliche, Menschliche, Natürliche übertragen und säkularisiert worden sind ... überall ist das Metaphysische, Dogmatische beseitigt, das Menschliche geblieben; alle christlichen Begriffe sind säkularisiert.<sup>37</sup>

Franz does not specify precisely what he understands by 'übertragen und säkularisiert', but I hope that the analysis of the process of secularization I offer in Chapter One will provide a more informed historical and conceptual context in which Goethe's attitude to religion, and the secularization thereof, lies. For Franz's major contribution to the question of Goethe's secularization consists, in my view, not in any detailed and conclusive analysis of the nature and implications of the process, but in his recognition of the contextual significance of Goethe's attitude to religion as a response to a general phenomenon of the eighteenth century, and most particularly as an attitude prevalent in the Germany of the Enlightenment.

Franz's acknowledgement of the cultural conditioning operative in what he called Goethe's 'Säkularisierung des Christentums'<sup>38</sup> did much to clarify the focus of Goethe's 'religion' in terms of a re-objectification of traditional religion conditioned by the prevailing philosophical temper of his world. Subsequent studies have not, however, considered the nature of Goethe's secularization in terms of this contribution, but seem to limit themselves consistently to considerations of the ethical validity or invalidity of the utilitarian approach to religion which emerged as a corollary to the philosophical movement of 'The Enlightenment'. More recent scholarship recognizes that this attitude inheres in Goethe's own 'enlightened' cultural milieu, but seems to tend toward general assumptions which are not corroborated by particular analyses. For example, Ronald Peacock's investigation of 'The Ethics of Goethe's *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*' mentions the 'sensibility and secularized philosophy of Goethe's *Humanität*' which is attributed by the author to Goethe's philosophical milieu:

Goethe's position is logical, vital, and affirmative, and should be seen as a

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<sup>37</sup> Tübingen, 1932, pp.198f.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.193.

positive achievement in relation to the problem of cynicism created by eighteenth-century atheism, and it shows Goethe in a progressive development towards modernity.<sup>39</sup>

Peacock's conclusion, that Goethe 'has made a story that is in harmony with his secular piety'<sup>40</sup>, utilizes what in my view is an inadequate and unsubstantiated juxtaposition which does not elucidate the significance of the convenient oxymoron 'secular piety', and which fails to take into consideration the potential interpenetration of sacral and secular realms in the postulation of a religious world-view peculiar to Goethe. Secularization is surely no glib one-word answer to the problem of Goethe's attitude to religion, but requires careful appraisal in terms of its etymological implications, its evolved meaning, and its significance, for Goethe, as a topos of his world. Similarly, T J Reed's slim popular introduction to Goethe skirts the essence of the issues at hand (Reed may be excused a lack of in-depth analysis on the grounds of necessary concision) in the following synopsis:

The first half of Goethe's life coincided with the later Enlightenment. Though he is not usually thought of as part of it, its principles are present in his work as an unspoken foundation: empiricism, attachment to the sensuous world, intellectual independence and secularism, confidence in man's nature and particularly in his own, a forthright clarity of thought. If he said little about these things as principles, it was because he was busy living them and charging them with the vitality of his personal mode of vision and experience.<sup>41</sup>

Again, what we meet here is the assertion of a 'personal mode of vision and experience' on Goethe's part: clearly, the nature and implications of this 'personal mode' require further examination and elucidation. Since the general implication of scholarly consideration of Goethe's understanding of secularization is that this notion is somehow held to inhere in the intellectual climate of eighteenth-century Germany, a consideration of secularization in terms of the intellectual and philosophical temper of Goethe's age in its bearing on religion is evidently required. Chapter Two of this study, consulting major works of scholarship on the 'Age of Enlightenment', examines the phenomenon of secularization in the eighteenth century, in order to clarify the focus of Goethe's particular use of, and contribution to, his religious heritage. In this respect, acknowledgement of a specific debt on my part is due to

<sup>39</sup> *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 71 (1976), pp.330-343, (p.339).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.342.

<sup>41</sup> T J Reed, *Goethe*, Oxford, New York, 1984, p.6.

Peter Gay's *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*<sup>42</sup> which furnished me with much invaluable information on the major movements of thought and the individual personalities involved in the Enlightenment throughout Europe and North America; and to Ernst Cassirer's *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*<sup>43</sup> for a less general, and hence for my purposes even more pertinent, account of the significance of European enlightened philosophy in the German context. Gay's language, and Cassirer's terminology, pervade my account: acknowledgement is made where explicitly due, but the overall impact of these works is assimilated into my own understanding and appreciation of the Enlightenment. For the purposes of orientation, the Enlightenment is considered primarily as a European phenomenon, with a subsequent concentration on the German *Aufklärung*. The former provides the backdrop for the latter, which emerged therefrom, and although implicitly linked with the general aims and ideals of the international Enlightenment, the *Aufklärung* reveals some distinct features with specific implications for a consideration of religion in eighteenth-century Germany.

It is an established commonplace of scholarship that the Enlightenment is to be considered an age of radical antipathy towards religion, as an era when the 'secular' world of manifestation and phenomenon takes precedence over the 'sacral' premise of the numinous. The subtitle of Peter Gay's major work makes this plain: his preface explains his description of the men he calls the *philosophes* as 'modern pagans' in terms of their recourse to Classical models, and their abrogation of the established Christian interpretation of the world in favour of an anthropomorphic concentration on the well-being of humanity in the material world. However, an analysis of the origins and the nature of the antipathy to religion ascribed to the Age of Enlightenment reveals some interesting inner contradictions which have a particular relevance to a study of the process of secularization in the eighteenth century. Erich Franz's allusion to a 'crisis of Christianity' offers a different perspective on the religious antipathy of the age: etymologically, the term 'crisis' implies not just a problematic situation, but one which demands an outcome; a situation in which a decision is to be made in favour of

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<sup>42</sup> Subtitled 'The Rise of Modern Paganism', London, 1966.

<sup>43</sup> Tübingen, 1932.

a particular course of action<sup>44</sup>. It is apparent in the more astute works of scholarship on the eighteenth century that the term 'secularization', when applied to the philosophy of the Enlightenment, does not signify the negation of religion, but a critical re-appraisal by which the significance of religion in the world is called into question and then either rejected or re-validated<sup>45</sup>. In this respect, an analysis of the specific context of the German *Aufklärung* provides the focus for an appreciation of the very particular relationship between the established polarities of reason and religion, Church and State, God-centred and human-centred world-views which is to be understood as the process of secularization. Evidently, if Goethe evolved a personal concept of secularization, then the historical and philosophical context in which he worked is vital for an appraisal of its significance: I shall argue for the relevance of the historical basis of the secularization process in eighteenth-century Germany, upon which Goethe's understanding of the process, and more particularly, his attitude to and treatment of the sacral tradition in the secular context, are to be viewed.

Chapter Three goes on to discuss Goethe's personal account of his own historical context in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, with particular reference to his understanding and appreciation of his religious culture. Any informed analysis of Goethe's depiction of the principal exponents and tenets of European Enlightenment, of the religious and anti-religious movements, controversies and debates of the late eighteenth century in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, of course, takes account of that paramount paradox of autobiographical writing as a whole, which is the temporal and experiential gulf between the mature author and the protagonist. It is with this in mind that Goethe's explicit attitude to his religious milieu must be approached, and in this respect that the significance of the concept of binary synthesis, culled as it was from

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<sup>44</sup> Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* defines 'Krise' as: 'Die Entscheidung in einem Zustand, in dem altes und neues, Krankheit und Gesundheit u.a. mit einander streiten'. *Duden Etymologie* adds the following pertinent point: 'Das seit dem 16.Jh. bezeugte, aus gr. krisis > lat. crisis "Entscheidung, entscheidende Wendung" ... Im 18.Jh. beginnt unter dem Einfluß von frz. crise der übertragene allgemeine Gebrauch des Wortes im Sinne von "entscheidende, schwierige Situation; Klemme"'. Contemporary etymologists consider the word 'crisis' to derive ultimately from the Proto-Germanic postulate *hrif*, meaning 'sieve'. A crisis, and in particular the 'crisis of Christianity' in the 18th century, is a positive phenomenon from which emerges what is actively worth retaining.

<sup>45</sup> The introduction to Owen Chadwick's *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century* (Cambridge, 1975) summarizes the problem of secularization in relation to the problem of the Enlightenment, rooting the observation that the process of secularization cannot imply a simple degeneration from a faithful idyll to an age without faith in the philosophical movements which began in the 18th century. See esp. pp.9f.

Goethe's later scientific experimentation, becomes most apparent for an understanding of Goethe's representation of theological and philosophical movements. For Goethe's account of his religious world in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* hinges on his awareness of historical and cultural progression through oscillations from one extreme to another, from controversy to antithetical controversy, from heresy to orthodoxy and back again. Furthermore, it is from his affirmed awareness that the history of Christian theology is characterized by a process of dogma and counter-dogma which has lost sight of its original precepts that Goethe explicitly evolves his 'Christentum zu meinem Privatgebrauch'. There are clear implications here for an understanding of Goethe's mode of secularization in a temporal sense: the significance of Goethe's affirmed predisposition towards the 'original Christianity' of Christ himself and the early Church must be carefully adduced. What emerges is the broad and, at first sight, obvious conclusion that Goethe's material - the thoughts, philosophies and theologies - is not original, but is drawn from his world and derived from his tradition. This must, however, be juxtaposed with the notion that Goethe is held somehow to achieve originality in his treatment of derived material. It is here that the crux of my argument for a particular mode of secularization on Goethe's part emerges: since scholarship on Goethe's religion has not adduced a definitive stance, and since this appears to be due at least in part to inadequate appraisals of what Goethe did with the religious tradition he inherited, it is here that the attitude to tradition and concern with its perpetuation perceived by late twentieth-century Goethe scholarship reveals its particular relevance to my argument. There are factors in the philosophy of the eighteenth century, and Goethe's account of his reception thereof, which point to the significance of polarities and their synthesis in attempting to reconcile reason and religion, God and man, the secular and the sacral. Is there, then, a peculiarly Goethean attitude to the religious tradition in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, and what is the nature and function of Goethe's application of binary synthesis in the very fabric of his autobiography to overcome the intransigence of polarized opposition and to present the sentient vitality of lived faith?

Several critics have referred to the potential fruitfulness of a stylistic analysis of Goethe's accounts of the religious tradition in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Trunz noted with regard to Goethe's depiction of Catholic sacramentalism in the 7th Book:

Es wäre einer besonderen Betrachtung wert, wie weit Goethe aus seiner Art heraus, das Göttliche im Irdischen zu suchen und nicht vom Wort her,

sondern vom Symbol her religiös zu erleben, Sinn für das Sakramentale hat und in seiner Darstellung ... das Gegebene versteht, es aber auch umwandelt und eigener Anschauung annähert.<sup>46</sup>

Derek Bowman's article 'Goethe's Attitude to Religion in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*' ends with the suggestion that some 'close stylistic analysis' of Goethe's attitude to religion might prove rewarding<sup>47</sup>. Caroline Cooper perceives this suggestion as Bowman's most significant contribution to the debate on Goethe's 'religion' as presented in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*<sup>48</sup>. To my knowledge, no critic has yet embarked on such an analysis in depth: I propose to do this in Chapter Four with reference to passages of particular relevance to Goethe's representation of his religious tradition. Here, the significance of the concept of binary synthesis for an understanding and appreciation of what Goethe was concerned to achieve in re-presenting his religious tradition for re-appraisal and re-assimilation is made clear. Key passages from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* are analysed in terms of their conceptual message and rhetorical form, with a view to corroborating the postulation that the particular kind of discourse which Goethe offers in his philosophical maxims is also present in his autobiography, and has a specific function within his textual accounts of his religious heritage. In order to exemplify what I intend to indicate as the type of discourse operating in the religious passages in Goethe's autobiography, I present in the first instance an analysis of one of Goethe's philosophical maxims in terms of its coordination, and mutual subordination, of rhetorical form and conceptual meaning, containing and expressing thereby, I shall argue, a particular intimation of religious feeling.

The premise of Chapter Four's title, 'Goethe's Mode of Secularization: the Recreation of Religious Faith' perhaps requires some preliminary justification and elucidation here. I shall present analyses of pertinent passages from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* where, I shall argue, the mode of discourse employed by Goethe mutually subordinates the conceptual meaning of his discussions of religion and the rhetorical form of the words, phrases and linguistic patterns he uses. This mode of discourse in treating aspects of the religious tradition operates on the perceiving reader in many ways. The conceptual meaning may be appreciated, and augmented knowledge about

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<sup>46</sup> HA IX 732.

<sup>47</sup> Loc. cit., p.323.

<sup>48</sup> Op. cit., pp.171f.

Goethe's attitude to his religious tradition will result. The poetic relations are there to be felt, by the reader who perceives them, in the fabric of the text. And the two together - operating in that process of binary synthesis of form and meaning, of poetic and conceptual relations discussed above - offer a novel and telling insight into the religious tradition with which Goethe is dealing, and which he is concerned to perpetuate. Furthermore, this perpetuation takes account of that aspect of binary synthesis which involves an acknowledgement of regression as the necessary precursor of forward movement<sup>49</sup>: Goethe's attitude to the religious tradition necessarily involves recourse to the past in order to project anew and invigorated into the future. And the accounts he presents involve the reader in an activity that is *recreational* in its recourse to original cultural models, and *recreational* in its playful exploitation of the plasticity of the medium. For the aesthetic significance and function of the quality of play which, as Schiller argued, is the 'distinguishing mark' of art, is, I shall argue, as relevant to Goethe's depiction of his religious tradition in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as it is central, for example, to the import and communication of the message of *Faust*. For Wilkinson, it is the playful irony of affected impersonality in Goethe's authorial manipulation of medium and genre in his drama which constitutes the essential 'self-reflectiveness' of the account, and thereby:

'distances' the weight and seriousness of the heterogenous cultural material he had used in the making of his form in an attempt ... to ensure that we shall respond to his tragedy as art, as theatre: as 'Scherze' which may be, and indeed are, 'sehr ernst', but nevertheless partake of that quality of 'play' which, according to the aesthetic theory evolved in collaboration with Schiller, is the distinguishing mark of all true art.<sup>50</sup>

I hope to show, then, that within the reformulation and representation of the religious tradition in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, there exists an intimation of faith that is real and active, if the reader is open to its perception. What emerges is, I hope, a demonstration of the significance of Goethe's mode of secularization for an informed and enlightening understanding of Goethe's attitude to the religious tradition, with possible implications for his oeuvre as a whole.

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<sup>49</sup> See WW, p.lxxxix: 'The paradox that in order to go forward it may well be necessary to take a step backwards is, after all, enshrined in the French proverb not infrequently quoted by C G Jung to express the creative significance of regression: *reculer pour mieux sauter*'.

<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth M Wilkinson, 'Goethe's *Faust*: Tragedy in the Diachronic Mode', loc. cit., p.155.

## CHAPTER I

### PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

Any attempt to treat of religion as a general cultural phenomenon touches upon the paradox of the numinous lying at the very centre of all theological speculation, which is that the concept called 'God' cannot be logically defined; the  $\theta\epsilon\omicron\sigma$  defies the  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$ ; that which is 'ineffable' cannot be expressed in terms of human comprehension, given verbal and substantial form, and rationally apprehended. A recently republished work of theological scholarship asserts that religion 'cannot be defined, it can only be explored'<sup>1</sup>, and indeed the whole tradition of Christian and pre-Christian theological argument is this exploration, which begins and ends with the premise that absolute and irrefutable intellectual certainty about matters religious, about the nature and meaning of God, about the place and function of humankind in the universe, is ultimately unattainable. An investigation into the nature and significance of Goethe's attitude to religion, therefore, partakes of the principal and primary problem of any study of religion itself: the object of religious worship cannot be defined, but approaches to this object, which the Western tradition calls God, do invite exploration. In an essay which brings theological considerations directly to bear on a facet of Goethe's literary achievements, Elizabeth M Wilkinson, while noting 'the ultimate impotence of names to name the Eternally Nameless'<sup>2</sup>, reminds us of the charge enjoined by Origen, Goethe's acknowledged favourite Church Father, that man must attempt the impossible task of defining and apprehending God in logical, verbal form, in full awareness that he cannot wholly succeed. Elsewhere, Wilkinson and L A Willoughby remark:

And had not that same Origen, of all the Church Fathers the one most congenial to the eighteenth century, made it unambiguously clear in a famous passage that the paradox of theology was rooted in the paradox of language itself? That the powerlessness of words to represent the attributes of God was but one aspect of the powerlessness of words to convey the individual

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick J Streng, *Understanding Religious Life*, California, 1969, 1976. (Preface to the First Edition.)

<sup>2</sup> E M Wilkinson, 'The Theological Basis of Faust's *Credo*', *German Life and Letters*, Vol. X, 1956-7, p.230. The passage referred to is Origen's *Contra Celsum*, VI, 65.

qualities of things in general? And had he not also, and in the same *locus classicus*, gone on to make it equally clear that this was no reason for not trying?<sup>3</sup>

The allusion here to the paradoxical futility and necessity of attempting to encapsulate the essence of religion in conceptual, linguistic form is a crucial starting-point for this present analysis. I hope to demonstrate that it is in a peculiar synthesis of linguistic form and conceptual meaning that the key to an understanding of Goethe's attitude to religion in general and Christianity in particular lies. Before investigating this proposition in detail, however, I shall examine the scholarly debate on Goethe's attitude to religion, in order to clarify the focus of my own analysis. The following, therefore, is an attempt to summarize scholarship's reception and analysis of Goethe's expressions of his views and opinions on matters religious.

Goethe's letters and conversations, the most accurate barometer of his assimilation of and contribution to his immediate cultural environment, are full of references to religion and faith, and resound with biblical, canonical, and extra-Christian religious echoes and allusions. Indeed, any attempt to posit a definition of Goethe's own faith is dogged by his countless refractory and contradictory statements on the nature of God and the workings of the universe. Goethe's explicit utterances on religion and the concept of the divinity (in his autobiographical writings, his diaries and correspondence, his scientific treatises and his literary works) are as disparate as they are profuse, and as apparently contradictory as they are manifestly eclectic. They include his rejection of some of the fundamental tenets of the established Christian Church - notably the Three-in-One Godhead of the Christian Trinity<sup>4</sup>, and the notion of 'original sin' which is the corner-stone of Protestant asceticism in its assertion of man's inherent sinfulness. Heinrich Hoffmann notes that Goethe adumbrates in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* his dissatisfaction with the orthodox notion of 'original sin' which does not allow of a complementary, antithetical 'original virtue'<sup>5</sup>. H A Korff's late nineteenth-century overview of the Goethean Age stresses Goethe's 'paganism',

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<sup>3</sup> WW, pp. cxxiiif.

<sup>4</sup> Loewen (op. cit., p.160) cites Goethe's conversation with Eckermann of 4 i 1824: 'Ich glaube an Gott und die Natur, und an den Sieg des Edlen über das Schlechte; aber das war den frommen Seelen nicht genug, ich sollte auch glauben, dass drei eins sei und eins drei; das aber widerstrebte dem Wahrheitsgefühl meiner Seele; auch sah ich nicht ein, dass mir damit auch nur im mindesten wäre geholfen gewesen' (GA XXIV 548).

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., pp.6f. See, too, Trunz's commentary on Goethe's account of the Pelagian heresy in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*: 'Unter den religiösen Motiven in *DuW* ist der Gegensatz zur protestantischen Sündenlehre eins der wesentlichsten' (HA X 591).

which Korff holds to stem directly from Goethe's negation of fundamental Christian dogma<sup>6</sup>; and it has become something of a commonplace among scholars of Goethe's religion to attribute his evidently uneasy relationship with the established Church of his day to his inability or unwillingness wholly to accept the letter of certain crucial Christian dogmas. This has led some scholars to seek to define Goethe's attitude to religion in terms of an adherence to specifically non-Christian theologies. Katharina Mommsen, in her study 'Der unbequeme Goethe', which concentrates on what Mommsen perceives as Goethe's Spinozistic pantheism, notes that:

auf religiösem Gebiet kam er mit dem Christentum in Konflikt durch seinen Pantheismus und die Ablehnung bestimmter Dogmen wie der Dreieinigkeitslehre.<sup>7</sup>

Gustav Krüger in *Die Religion der Goethezeit* notes that some scholars have attributed a pantheistic stamp to Goethe's personal 'religion'<sup>8</sup>, and Hans Joachim Schrimpf's 1956 study *Das Weltbild des späten Goethe* extends this implied notion of a striving towards the primeval sources of nature to argue for Goethe's Koran-oriented concern with Eastern mysticism<sup>9</sup>.

Antipathy towards the dogmatic teachings of the orthodox Church is evidenced by explicit statements by Goethe documenting a personal rejection of Christianity as a way of life for him. Goethe's much-quoted remark of 1782 to Lavater: 'Da ich kein Widerchrist, kein Unchrist, aber doch ein dezidirter Nichtchrist bin'<sup>10</sup>, has been read as a denial of the doctrines of orthodox Christianity quite consonant with the thinking of one so antipathetic towards the established Church. Yet much later, in 1830, Goethe declares himself a Christian in the truest and purest sense of the word:

Wer ist denn heutzutage ein Christ, wie Christus ihn haben wollte? Ich allein vielleicht, ob ihr mich gleich für einen Heiden hältet.<sup>11</sup>

Goethe's own particular understanding of Christianity may have little in common with the doctrines of the established religion of his day, but it does seem, in his professed

<sup>6</sup> See *Geist der Goethezeit. Versuch einer ideellen Entwicklung der Klassisch-Romantischen Literaturgeschichte*, Leipzig, 1923, Vol. I, pp.273ff.: 'Ist nach der Vorstellung der christlichen Kirche jeder, der den Glauben an das christliche Dogma verweigert, ein Heide, so ist Goethe ein vollkommener Heide. Und die deutsche Geistesgeschichte tritt mit Lessing und Goethe in die Periode ihres Heidentums! Daran kann, darf und soll nicht gerüttelt werden' (p.276).

<sup>7</sup> Katharina Mommsen, 'Der Unbequeme Goethe', *PEGS*, N S 38 (1967-68), pp.12-42 (p.14).

<sup>8</sup> Tübingen, 1931, p.93.

<sup>9</sup> *Das Weltbild des späten Goethe. Überlieferung und Bewahrung in Goethes Alterswerk*, Stuttgart, 1956, pp.70ff.

<sup>10</sup> To Lavater, 29 vii 1782, GA XVIII 680.

<sup>11</sup> To F von Müller, 7 iv 1830, GA XXIII 686.

view, to relate directly to the original Christianity of Christ himself. Of course, one must be careful to take the irony of Goethe's remarks into account, perhaps born of an exasperation with those who would attempt to characterize his personal faith, as in his observation that the execution of Gretchen and death by starvation of Otilie should be evidence enough of his Christianity<sup>12</sup>. David Luke has recently referred to Goethe's famous obfuscatory profession of non-Christianity to Lavater as a 'kind of verbal juggling' which furnishes more 'protective' critics with reason for maintaining that Goethe rejected, not Christianity itself, but the Christianity of the established Church, 'das *Kirchenchristentum*'<sup>13</sup>. Luke cites Goethe's unequivocal reference, in a letter to Herder of May 1775, to Christian doctrine as 'ein Scheißding'<sup>14</sup>, and his observation to Charlotte von Stein in 1782 that his satiety with the doctrines of Christianity is such that he would be prepared to hear more only from Christ Himself. Luke is careful to place these anti-Christian comments in their correct contexts; nevertheless, Goethe does seem to assert his own Christianity in his own terms and in a way which is unorthodox in its peculiar deployment of the dogmatic precepts of orthodoxy: "Ich bin ein Christ", sagte er, "das dank mir der Teufel ..."<sup>15</sup>.

Critical reaction to the welter of information, declarations, statements and implications by Goethe about religion in general, and his particular attitude to it, has been, perhaps understandably, confused. Indeed, the failure of scholarship to derive a coherent picture of Goethe's religious views and their expression is aptly summed up by Ernst Cassirer's judgement of the critical debate on Goethe's religion as 'ein Chaos unvereinbarer Äußerungen'<sup>16</sup>: a pertinent description of a century of scholarly confusion. This is corroborated by Gustav Krüger's later advocacy of extreme caution in the face of the profusion of contradictory religious testimonies offered by Goethe<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Noted by Enright, loc. cit., p.9.

<sup>13</sup> David Luke, "Vor Deinem Jammerkreuz": Goethe's Attitude to Christian Belief', loc. cit., pp.36f.

<sup>14</sup> A source of evident embarrassment to later editors, as Luke notes: 'The [Weimarer Ausgabe] (iv, II, 261f.) had prudishly altered this to \*Scheinding\*', while reporting in the *Lesarten* (II, 333) that the *n* is "undeutlich, vielleicht s" - thus saving decorum, if not also scholarship. The GA simply omits this letter altogether' (ibid., p.37). See, however, *Der Junge Goethe. Neue Ausgabe in Sechs Bänden*, ed. Max Morris, Leipzig, 1909-12, Vol. V, p.30.

<sup>15</sup> Conversation reported by F Schubart, 1811-2 (GA XXII 757).

<sup>16</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Freiheit und Form. Studien zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte*, Berlin, 1916, p.394.

<sup>17</sup> *Die Religion der Goethezeit*, op. cit.: 'auf diesem Wege stoßen wir nun ja überhaupt auf eine solche verwirrende Fülle von sich kreuzenden Zeugnissen, daß wir nicht vorsichtig genug Fuß zu Fuß setzen können' (p.96).

Indeed, Krüger notes that some scholars play the apparent contradictions in Goethe's religious utterances off against one another in order deliberately to give the impression that a unified image of Goethe's attitude towards religion in general and Christianity in particular is simply not possible. It is perhaps due to a collective version of what E D Hirsch has referred to as the 'fallacy of imitative form'<sup>18</sup> - the tendency amongst commentators to imitate the general style of a text or texts in their critical consideration thereof - that scholarly research into Goethe's attitude to faith and religious belief has produced such an array of opposed, contradictory and overlapping conclusions - and non-conclusions.

An attempt at a critical overview of the debate on Goethe's religion is dogged, moreover, by the more general problem of the concentration by individual commentators on specific aspects of Goethe's utterances on religion to the exclusion of other, perhaps potentially contradictory, statements and stated views. This allows the scholar to attribute to Goethe a religious view which concurs with the scholar's own religious or non-religious standpoint. Clearly, the nature and profusion of Goethe's accounts of religion as a cultural phenomenon on the one hand, and his testimonies of a personal religious standpoint on the other, are such that many critics are able to content themselves with a one-sided approach which confirms their own convictions, applying a specious and spurious general interpretation to carefully selected pronouncements by Goethe, pronouncements which span a lifetime of evolving experience and which are couched in literary, poetic, conversational or epistolary contexts all too carelessly ignored on occasion.

One of the fundamental problems posed by a consideration of Goethe's 'religion' is pinpointed by Gustav Krüger in his awareness of the tendency, here specifically within the German literary tradition and its criticism, to endow a nation's great figures with virtues which an entire nation is called upon to embrace and promote. If Germany is to consider herself a Christian nation - and it seems to be the unspecified and unsubstantiated claim of many researchers that she should - it follows that the 'greatest son', in his acquired role as national figurehead, should wholeheartedly embrace the tenets of Christianity. It is therefore the assumed duty of the obliging critic to accord the public an understanding of Goethe's life and works which is consonant with, and contributory to, the accepted precepts of the Western

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<sup>18</sup> E D Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, New Haven and London, 1967, p.ix.

Christian tradition in which he operated. In this respect, any calling into question of Goethe's 'true faith' is met by the reading public with disapproval of the scholar and his or her standpoint. Krüger notes:

daß man uns als 'unreine Geister' in Anspruch nimmt, die geneigt sein sollen, unseren größten Dichter immer wieder zum Christen zu machen.<sup>19</sup>

Such a concern to promote the image of Goethe as an acceptable representative of national, cultural values is apparent in Karl Bornhausen's exhortation to his compatriots, almost a century after Goethe's death, to re-affirm their faith in the values of Classicism and Romanticism - values which Bornhausen perceives as positively and unilaterally religious - leading him into an effusive, congratulatory classification of Germany's greatest national figures which culminates in his appreciation of Goethe 'als Symbol für die Gegenwartsgestalt deutscher Religion'<sup>20</sup>. It is apparent from the provocative, excitatory tone of Bornhausen's advocacy of adhesion to these historical and cultural precepts that he considers Goethe in this light an entirely positive and valid figurehead for contemporary German religion.

This popular idealization of Goethe as a religious model persists, and has led to a general unwillingness objectively to question the very existence of his faith, let alone its status as the determinative impulse of his life. The American scholar H W Kelling has noted the overwhelmingly antagonistic response in the German press and scholarly journals in the early 1960s to Richard Friedenthal's Goethe biography<sup>21</sup>. Friedenthal's affirmed intention was to depict the 'man' rather than the 'myth', to probe beneath the layers of reverential adulation and present, as far as possible, the objective reality of Goethe's life and of the values he explicitly and implicitly embraced or rejected. Of course, it may be that in the laudable pursuit of objectivity and realistic appraisal, the finished biography may be considered to have gone beyond the avowed intention of the author and to have presented a gratuitously irreverent, scandal-mongering account of Goethe's life. What is significant here is not that Friedenthal offers a 'baser' image of Goethe than is normally the case within the history of German literary criticism, but that a great many of Goethe's compatriots seem to have balked at what they considered an iconoclastic attitude to an immutably legendary and symbolic figure:

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<sup>19</sup> Krüger, op. cit., pp.87f.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Bornhausen, *Wir heissen's fromm sein. Ein Beitrag zur Religion der Goethezeit und ihrer gegenwärtigen Bedeutung*, Gotha, 1926, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Friedenthal, *Goethe. Sein Leben und seine Zeit*, München, 1963.

A secondary school teacher contended that the destruction of the 'Goethe myth' was tantamount to the negation of an essential aspect of Germany's spiritual and intellectual life. Friedenthal is accused of stressing trifling and degrading incidents, of catering to the low taste of those demanding the sensational, of one-sided concentration on trite occurrences in Goethe's life, of wallowing in the dirt, and of daring to make cheap insinuations and, above all, of destroying the ideals of youth.<sup>22</sup>

The tone and tenor of Friedenthal's biography is symptomatic of a late twentieth-century concern to weed out the 'truths' of Goethe's life from the thicket of haphazardly imaginative, apocryphal and subjective 'Goethe mythology' propagated by preceding generations and trends. On the one hand, then, we are dealing with attempts to 'debunk' Goethe from his acquired status as a paragon of culturally acceptable religious virtues, and reveal his human failings. On the other hand, attempts to discern what Goethe revered have also been dogged by indiscriminate reverence towards Goethe himself, as is aptly encapsulated in the title of a recent collection of essays, *Mein Gott Goethe*<sup>23</sup>. Indiscriminate iconoclasm is of course as meretricious and unthinking an approach as ill-considered idolatry. Nevertheless, the notion of Goethe as a religious example to be emulated - either as the historical incarnation of all positive religious principles or in the more dangerous 'deification' of him as a religious figurehead - remains an obstacle to objective scholarship on Goethe's 'religion', since it seems to put him beyond critical scrutiny and colour both the scholarly approach and the presentation of the research findings.

Scholarship is also confronted with the yet more daunting problem of the apparent lack of clarity and cohesion in Goethe's own treatment of religion. Friedrich Jodl's late nineteenth-century lamentation about his age's obfuscation of the ideas and ideals of German Classicism differs from Bornhausen's exaltation of Goethe as a religious example in its candid statement of the task facing the critic considering Goethe's religion. Jodl posits two potential approaches to the problem of Goethe's religion - a biographical overview of sources and influences, and a systematic analysis of their progressive evolution - which both seem at first sight impossible because:

Aus allen Perioden seines Lebens haben wir von ihm zahlreiche Äußerungen über religiöse Dinge, in prosaischer wie poetischer Form, welche Zeugnis

<sup>22</sup> H W Kelling, 'Goethe the "Dichterprophet"'. Thoughts on Interpreting Goethe's Religion', *German Life and Letters*, Vol. XXVI, 1972-3, pp.112-9 (p.112).

<sup>23</sup> Leo Kreutzer, *Mein Gott Goethe. Essays*, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1980.

davon geben, wie zahlreich und mannigfaltig die Gesichtspunkte waren, unter welchen Goethe die Religion betrachtete.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, Jodl notes in 1898 what many scholars have since found to be typical of Goethe's attitude to religion: that it is 'unsystematic'. Since Goethe was no systematic theoretician of religion as an objective phenomenon in the mould of some of his philosophical forefathers such as Thomasius, Wolff or Leibniz, and since his subjective standpoint evolved gradually from ever-growing experience, from social and educational sources, from the developing philosophical and cultural climate of his day, any attempt to define a rigid systematization in his attitude to religion is surely quite misplaced. For Jodl, the manifold influences upon Goethe and the variety of his treatment thereof combine to form an indefinable and discordant ensemble:

Goethe war ja kein Theoretiker der Religion. Nirgends hat er sich in systematischer Weise über religiöse Probleme ausgesprochen. Alles, was wir von ihm besitzen, sind gelegentliche Äußerungen im Zusammenhang einer bestimmten Situation, aus einer gegebenen Stimmung heraus entstanden und darum keineswegs unter sich in Einklang.<sup>25</sup>

This assertion of the inherently unsystematic nature of Goethe's religious views leads some commentators to deny the validity of any systematic approach to the problem. For Walter Naumann:

Goethe's theology is not strictly defined, and it is fluctuating. The reason for this is that Goethe was not interested in any such speculations.<sup>26</sup>

Whether Goethe was 'interested' in theological speculation or not is of course contentious. Naumann's categorical statement would imply that the manifestly unsystematic nature of Goethe's explicit attitude to religion denies the validity of any systematic scholarly approach to it. Illogically, lack of system in the object of analysis is seen to justify a lack of system in the analytical procedure. Eduard Spranger even asserts the curious thesis that it is quite erroneous to expect any sort of religious system to inhere in the works of a poet (it is contextually obvious that Goethe is the poet he has in mind):

Wenn wir von der Weltanschauung eines Dichters sprechen, so wissen wir im

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Jodl, 'Goethes Stellung zum religiösen Problem' (1898). In Jodl, *Vom Lebenswege*, Stuttgart, Berlin, 1916, pp.54-81 (p.57).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>26</sup> Naumann, 'Goethe's Religion'. loc. cit., p.189.

voraus, daß wir kein System erwarten dürfen.<sup>27</sup>

However, despite the contention that any attempt to posit a logical systematization within Goethe's religious utterances and views is untenable and mistaken, many scholars are concerned nonetheless to attempt the definition of a systematically coherent 'religion' attributable to Goethe, basing their judgement of the disparate views he explicitly stated, and their implicit sources, on a biographical compartmentalization of his life into definable temporal periods of influence and expression. Spranger's concern to disprove his own thesis of a poet's lack of interest in metaphysical speculation leads him to consider the disparity of Goethe's professed views in terms of a schematic synthesis of early mysticism, of Pietistic and neo-Platonist influences, and of alchemistic experimentation, with the neo-Classical formalism of Goethe's middle years; issuing in the all-embracing, all-subsuming religious world-view of his maturity<sup>28</sup>. Heinrich Hoffmann, while also professing the view that a systematizing approach to the problem of Goethe's religion is ill-advised - 'Wenn man von Goethes Religion redet, muß man sich hüten, sie in ein System bringen zu wollen'<sup>29</sup> - asserts notwithstanding that a strong, unifying thread pervades all Goethe's positive religious influences and utterances, and provides the outline of a potentially harmonious and hence systematically viable whole. For Hoffmann, this putative religious harmony on the part of Goethe is positively and unifyingly Christian: it is the formal and catechetical religious influences of Goethe's youth which combine with the education of life and experience to provide what for Hoffmann is Goethe's 'freie Stellung innerhalb des Christentums'<sup>30</sup>. More recently, Gerhard Möbus has asserted Goethe's overwhelming and persistent tenacity in respect of the Christian religious ideals of his youth, and has criticised:

jene Biographen Goethes, die bis zur Stunde das Verhältnis Goethes zum Christentum reduzieren zur infantilen Reminiszenz, weil sie überzeugt sind, daß Goethe mit dem Abschied von Frankfurt und seit dem Aufenthalt in Leipzig weit über das Christentum als Kirche und als Religiosität

<sup>27</sup> Eduard Spranger, *Goethes Weltanschauung*, Leipzig, 1932, p.19. I am grateful to my supervisor for pointing out that, for example, Dante was indubitably a poet who presented an evident and coherently systematic religious world-view! A concise account of the religious system of Dante and its poetical expression is to be found in Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Second Edition, London, 1961. (See esp. p.216). See also David Daiches, *God and the Poets*. The Gifford Lectures, 1983, Oxford, 1984, pp.79ff. and passim.

<sup>28</sup> See Spranger, *ibid.*, pp.25f.

<sup>29</sup> Hoffmann, *op. cit.*, p.3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

hinausgewachsen ist.<sup>31</sup>

Möbus evidently belongs to the school of thought among Goethe critics which maintains that the determining impulse of Goethe's life was indeed provided by his childhood experiences. However, as David Luke's essay points out, there is little direct evidence to corroborate the contention of the residual effect upon Goethe of an early Christian sensibility<sup>32</sup>. Möbus's implied disagreement with Hoffmann lies in the former's concern to view this formal religious education as a non-mutating, non-evolving absolute throughout Goethe's life. Clearly, no coherent critical consensus on the nature of Goethe's personal faith and its implications for scholarly reception of his works emerges from this phase of the debate. Nor is there any agreement on how Goethe's attitude to religion is to be perceived and evaluated: in terms of the evolving and developing experiences of his life; the residual influence of his early education; or the manifold and discrete contexts of his expression.

A different approach to the problem of systematic analysis of Goethe's attitude to religion was postulated by H W Kelling in the early 1970s with his recognition that the inability of scholarship to posit a clear picture of the nature and significance of Goethe's religious views rests not in any confusion and unclarity in the attitude to religion itself, but in the picture that Goethe painted of it. Kelling asserts:

An evaluation of Goethe's religious feelings and convictions is difficult and perhaps not very interesting to an objective analyst, and in the past has certainly led to a great diversity of thought and contradictory results... While Goethe generally appears to be quite eager to make confessions, to reveal his ideas and to preserve for posterity a detailed account of his personal life and philosophy, he is extremely hesitant to state his religious convictions clearly.<sup>33</sup>

In an essay entitled 'The Coherence of Goethe's Political Outlook', R H Stephenson makes the point that Goethe stated quite unequivocally, in the course of a conversation with Eckermann, that he had in fact been consistently concerned to express religious, scientific and political views with unqualified sincerity. Stephenson notes, with specific reference to Goethe's expressed political outlook, 'the curious fact' that

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<sup>31</sup> Gerhard Möbus, *Die Christus-Frage in Goethes Leben und Werk*, Osnabrück, 1964, p.25.

<sup>32</sup> Luke, 'Goethe's Attitude to Christian Belief', loc. cit., p.39.

<sup>33</sup> Kelling, op. cit., pp.114f.

'successive scholars have apparently not believed him'<sup>34</sup>. It seems that Kelling is here unwilling to perceive any coherence in Goethe's explicit accounts of his *religious* views. He attributes the putative reluctance on Goethe's part to give clear expression to these to an accommodation of the philosophical trends and expectations of Goethe's contemporary milieu:

The religious sphere was no longer felt to be an objective reality which could be shared and experienced by all people and the details of which could be discussed and explained almost as easily as those of the empirical sphere. During the eighteenth century religious feelings and thoughts came to be considered more subjectively and privately, and were not readily shared with others.<sup>35</sup>

Given that the eighteenth century is generally regarded as an age of experimental philosophical innovation, of constant questioning, of human assertion of - albeit limited - autonomy with regard to life and destiny, it seems odd that Kelling considers the apparent inconsistency of Goethe's stated convictions as evidence of a mere unwillingness to proclaim his own faith, rather than as symptomatic of a general philosophical trend towards enquiry and investigation. Kelling would hold that Goethe maintained a religious faith which persisted, constant and immutable, but in an internalized form defying expression and proclamation. Kelling seems to imply that Goethe's faith survived the objective rationalization of the Enlightenment by turning itself inward into a private religion which did not compromise itself through externalization and explicit investigation. For Kelling, Goethe's religion was an inner belief which persisted untarnished and unchanged by an enlightened philosophical age which caused its internalization.

Indeed, there is considerable scholarly agreement that the apparent lack of cohesion in Goethe's explicit religious views is directly attributable to the investigative philosophical temper of his immediate 'enlightened' cultural milieu, given the growing reluctance at the time to accept the absolute authority of the established Church, and the corresponding concern to investigate the true nature of original Christian faith in its

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<sup>34</sup> R H Stephenson, 'The Coherence of Goethe's Political Outlook', in *Tradition and Creation. Essays in Honour of Elizabeth Mary Wilkinson*, ed. C P Magill et al., Leeds, 1978, pp.77-88, (p.79). The pertinent point is made to Eckermann, 4 i 1824: 'In religiösen Dingen, in wissenschaftlichen und politischen, überall machte es mir zu schaffen, daß ich nicht heuchelte, und daß ich den Mut hatte, mich auszusprechen, wie ich empfand' (GA XXIV 547f).

<sup>35</sup> Kelling, op. cit., p.115.

purest perceptible manifestation, untarnished by dogmatic apocrypha and formal religious procedure. Friedrich Jodl posits the view that the eclecticism of Goethe's religious utterances is a direct reflection of the disparate religious movements, creeds and beliefs of his age; and that he displayed courageous individuality in arriving at his own particular religious standpoint - which Jodl does not specify - in the face of this welter of influences and sources:

Es gibt wenig Menschen, die mit so feinfühligter Empfindsamkeit diese Schwingungen des religiösen Äthers, der sie umgab, aufgenommen und dargestellt hätten, ohne doch ihrer Individualität dadurch untreu zu werden und sie an fremde Einflüsse dauernd zu verlieren.<sup>36</sup>

It is the Enlightenment, in the role of a general European cultural phenomenon, which provided, for Jodl, a significant vehicle for reforming orthodox and dogmatic religion into a valid, positive concern with the active improvement of the human condition. However, Jodl's conception of Goethe's appreciation of the unadulterated, undogmatic purity of original Christian life hinges on the quite contradictory assertion that Goethe's religious outlook remained wholly unaffected by historical and cultural religious form. Of Goethe, Jodl notes:

seine tiefe Verehrung für den Gedankengehalt der Religion und ihre menschlich bildende Kraft; und zugleich die volle Unabhängigkeit des großen Mannes von allen überlieferten Formen der Religion.<sup>37</sup>

This formulation by Jodl of Goethe's attitude to religious tradition - his rejection of doctrine in favour of the purity of 'original' Christianity - implies an absolute independence which is, surely, historically and culturally untenable (even to reject a tradition is still, surely, to work within that tradition). Jodl differentiates two apparently irreconcilable realms of religious experience: the external formality of established religious practice and the inner motivation of thought and action accorded by personal appreciation of the fundamental precepts of religion. By this analysis, Goethe's appreciation of religion in general would be founded uniquely on his personal awareness of, and respect for, the individually fortifying power of original religious thought: the 'Überlieferung', from which Jodl maintains Goethe remained independent, would imply only the contemporary tradition of external formality in worship, which eschews the wider implications of any developing consciousness of the intrinsic value of religion for the self. Jodl's criticism of any chronological

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<sup>36</sup> Jodl, op. cit., p.56.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp.73f.

compartmentalization of Goethe's religious views involves an insistence that Goethe appreciated and understood historical Christianity in terms of its moral and psychological fundamentals, which in turn allowed him to posit a personal image of true Christianity; an image which is dynamic in its constant personal evolution, and one which promotes the active perpetuation of the fundamental religion it re-enacts:

Niemals ... hat Goethe aufgehört, die historische Religion und ihre Urkunde aus der Tiefe ihrer psychologischen Grundlagen heraus zu verstehen; und niemals ... hat er sich den Gebilden des historischen Glaubens und den Satzungen jedweden Kirchentums gegenüber die volle Freiheit des persönlichen Gestaltens und Anneigens rauben lassen.<sup>38</sup>

In a similar vein, Kelling recognized what he claimed was Goethe's 'unique contribution' - it is unclear from Kelling's context to whom or what or in which form this contribution is to occur - which is:

his attempt to overcome the crisis of Christianity and yet preserve its ideals by a new way of thinking and feeling, since the existing forms have become suspect to him.<sup>39</sup>

Kelling is here echoing a recurrent scholarly view of Goethe's religion in its historical context: Erich Franz also perceived Goethe's religious views and intentions against the background of the 'crisis of Christianity' brought about by the intellectual movement towards Enlightenment:

Man muß sich um Goethes Stellungnahme richtig einzuschätzen, die geistige Gesamtlage und die große Krisis des Christentums in der Aufklärungszeit vergegenwärtigen.<sup>40</sup>

For Franz, the insistence of the philosophers of the Enlightenment on a proclamation of humanity and the individual's control over his or her own destiny is analogous to the spiritual notion of the recognition of inherent human sinfulness. Religious tradition holds knowledge as the corollary to sin: rational investigation into the workings of the universe and the supremacy of the human being therein can only lead, according to Franz, to a realization of the original loss of human purity which the Judaeo-Christian tradition attributes to the 'Fall' of primal man and woman:

Der Schritt vom naiven Glauben zum anerkennenden Verstehen ist eigentlich der geistige Sündenfall, die Vertreibung aus dem Paradies.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp.58f.

<sup>39</sup> Kelling, op. cit., p.116.

<sup>40</sup> Franz, op. cit., p.193.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.67.

A reconciliation of these two potential approaches to the problem of Goethe's 'religion' in its historical context - the individual's assertion of control over his or her own destiny, and the recourse to the precepts of original Christianity - would imply that Goethe side-stepped the investigative philosophical temper of his age by concentrating, in his own mind and for his own benefit, on the purity of original worship. As a scholarly viewpoint, this is, as we shall see, untenable, and must be tempered by an awareness of the conscious attitude to religion in the Enlightenment. Arnold Bergsträsser attributes to Franz's contribution to the debate on Goethe's religion a recognition that Korff's proclamation of Goethe's anti-establishment 'paganism' misunderstands Goethe's appreciation of the spiritual values of original Christianity, devoid of the obscurantist precepts of contemporary orthodoxy, and functioning dynamically for the individual in the present moment of experience:

Franz greatly clarified the controversy about Goethe's relation to Christianity by stating that Korff's sharp formulation can be accepted as referring to 'the Christian dogmatics, the system of ecclesiastical metaphysics only, whereas Goethe, on the other hand, not only faced without prejudice the spiritual values of Christianity but was deeply influenced by them in essential points of his whole work'.<sup>42</sup>

Bergsträsser's argument, too, rests on the appreciation of opposing tendencies in Goethe's religious thought. He maintains that Goethe resolved for himself the tension between orthodoxy and Enlightenment, between established religious practice and man's assertion of his rational autonomy, by extending the domain of religious inspiration far beyond the traditional interpretation of the Bible and the primary Christian witnesses<sup>43</sup>. This is, indeed, the conventionally-held understanding of Goethe's explicit statement in a letter to his friend and religious adversary Johann Kaspar Lavater of his, Goethe's, appreciation of manifold sources of religious inspiration:

Du findest nichts schöner als das Evangelium, ich finde Tausend geschriebene Blätter alter und neuer von Gott begnadigter Menschen eben so schön, und der Menschheit ebenso nützlich und unentbehrlich.<sup>44</sup>

The tendency towards 'original Christianity' which is perceived by scholars to inhere in Goethe's apparent dissatisfaction with the precepts and doctrines of the established

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<sup>42</sup> Bergsträsser, 'Goethe's View of Christ', *Modern Philology*, Vol. 46 (1948-49), pp.172-202, (p.186). See Franz, op.cit., p.268.

<sup>43</sup> Bergsträsser, op. cit., p.175.

<sup>44</sup> To Lavater, 9 viii 1782 (GA XIX 686).

Church of his day is therefore quite evidently consonant with a denial of the absolute and immutable veracity of orthodox religious sources, and leads to a novel appreciation of religious inspiration in general. As I shall argue, it is surely this reappraisal of religion, rather than the coy, self-effacing, religious timidity postulated by Kelling, which is the significant effect of the philosophical temper of the Enlightenment on Goethe's attitude to religion. Bergsträsser notes that Ernst Troeltsch's study *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*<sup>45</sup> posits an understanding of the Pietist faith (which Goethe acknowledges he actively embraced in his youth and of which the influence throughout his life is both demonstrable and well-documented) that involves a tendency towards the precepts of the original Christian church in its purity of thought and simplicity of action. The internalization of faith and recourse to simple religious practices are evident responses to the problem of religion in the eighteenth century, and in this sense may be seen as conditioning Goethe's assimilation of both the philosophical temper of his age and its religious upheaval.

Recognition of all these factors - dissatisfaction with doctrinaire orthodoxy; refusal to acknowledge the Bible as the absolute and unique source of religious inspiration; the personalization of religious thought through rational analysis or its internalization in the face of rational attack - combine in different ways in different accounts of Goethe's religious views and their expression to produce the nebulous critical concept of *Privatchristentum*. For instance, critics seeking to discern a coherent metaphysical world-view in Goethe's attitude to Christianity have seized eagerly upon his documentation in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* of his antipathetic response to some of the more stringent Pietist doctrines, an antipathy which eventually led Goethe to evolve what he describes as 'ein Christentum zu meinem Privatgebrauch'<sup>46</sup>. This cryptic phrase clearly demands careful unpacking in order that Goethe's precise meaning may be discerned. As it is, it has been adapted by successive commentators to concur with their differing accounts of the nature and significance of Goethe's religiosity. Heinrich Hoffmann, noting that Goethe inherited from Gottfried Arnold the notion 'daß jeder seine eigene Religion haben dürfe'<sup>47</sup>, proclaims Goethe's 'freie

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<sup>45</sup> Tübingen, 1912; see Bergsträsser, op. cit., p.177.

<sup>46</sup> HA X 45.

<sup>47</sup> Hoffmann, op. cit., p.7.

Stellung innerhalb des Christentums'<sup>48</sup> as a personal and personalized creed which broadly conforms with conventional Christian dogma, in accordance with the critic's avowal of Goethe's deep-seated personal faith which promoted, in Hoffmann's view, a persistent and all-embracing Christianity throughout Goethe's life and works. By contrast, Bergsträsser's account of 'Goethe's view of Christ'<sup>49</sup> declares a selective approval of Christianity by which Goethe allows himself to reject what he considers untenable, thereby effecting a reconciliation between his acknowledged dislike and mistrust of the established Church of his day and his profound respect, as Bergsträsser sees it, for the figure of Christ and the purity of the early Christian church. Derek Bowman's disapproval of what he terms Goethe's 'Hypsistarian eclecticism'<sup>50</sup> delineates an exploitative approach to the Christian tradition by which Goethe is able to appropriate certain selected elements from this tradition, in conjunction with elements from other religions and religious traditions, for personal satisfaction and for personal ends. Similarly, Katharina Mommsen's account of Goethe's pantheistically-orientated religiosity<sup>51</sup> seeks to indicate that Goethe's is a mystical, individual and entirely personal faith in a hidden benevolent Godhead which defies definition. Mommsen emphasizes that it was the study of Spinoza, documented in the sixteenth book of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and therefore contextually close to Goethe's account of his evolution of 'ein Christentum zu meinem Privatgebrauch', which provided Goethe with 'die Grundlage für seine eigene Religiosität'. She insists that this personalized 'religiosity' led Goethe into ever-more entrenched controversy with the religious establishment, and prevented his ever achieving, in orthodox circles, what Mommsen describes as 'true religiosity':

Fortan wurde auch Goethe immer wieder die echte Religiosität abgestritten. Dieser Vorwurf traf den Dichter von allen am tiefsten, er ist aber aufrecht erhalten worden bis in neueste Zeit.<sup>52</sup>

Mommsen's differentiation between Goethe's 'eigene Religiosität' and 'echte

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>49</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>50</sup> Derek Bowman, 'Goethe and the Christian Autobiographical Tradition', loc cit., p.22. Cf. Bowman, *Life into Autobiography*, op. cit., p.60, where the author justifies his account of Goethe's discriminatory eclecticism by citing his letter to Sulpiz Boisserée of 22 iii 1831: 'Nun erfähr ich aber in meinen alten Tagen von einer Sekte der Hypsistarien, welche, zwischen Heiden, Juden und Christen geklemmt, sich erklärten, das Beste, Vollkommenste, was zu ihrer Kenntnis käme, zu schätzen, zu bewundern, zu verehren und, insofern es also mit der Gottheit im nahen Verhältnis stehen müsse, anzubeten' (GA XXI 976).

<sup>51</sup> Mommsen, op. cit., pp.14ff.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.15.

Religiosität' is unclear and unspecified, but seems to be based on Goethe's putative disagreement with and dislike of the orthodox Church. The right of the latter to claim 'echte Religiosität' is not questioned; nor is the veracity of the reproachful attitude which, Mommsen maintains, is still addressed to Goethe's religious reputation. However, Mommsen subsequently specifies Goethe's conception of 'echte Religiosität' as pertaining to Christianity in action; the activist objectification of faith as it works in the world. This is, for Mommsen, the node of Goethe's disagreement with the vague internalization of religion which was encouraged by the Romantic movement in its alleged insistence on inward-seeking feeling rather than on activity and operative function:

Wenn Goethe die Religiosität der Romantiker in dieser Weise bezweifelte, so darum, weil nach seiner Überzeugung Christentum sich beweisen mußte durch die Tat, durch ein im Sinne Christi geführtes Leben. Daran fehlte es den Romantikern. Sie brachten in Literatur und bildende Kunst ein vages Schwärmen für die christliche Religion, dem kein Ton folgte, das sich im Leben nicht bestätigte.<sup>53</sup>

Conversely, Bergsträsser, for example, asserts that 'true religion remains something inward and even personal'<sup>54</sup> and maintains that Goethe evolved for himself a personalized religion quite valid in its own terms and consonant with the fundamental precepts of Christianity:

Not merely tolerant but, in his own way, believing, Goethe kept separated from the doctrines and practices of churches and sects the pure gospel and the pure image of Christ.<sup>55</sup>

It is hardly surprising, given the aforementioned difficulties of objective religious analysis, that critics should disagree so glaringly on the nature and definition of 'true religion', and this has a necessary bearing on scholarly understanding and appreciation of Goethe's relation to religion, 'true' or otherwise. Mommsen mentions Goethe's 'besondere Art des Christentums'<sup>56</sup> which, according to her analysis, is Spinozistic, pantheistic and fatalistic; and hence diametrically opposed to Hoffmann's postulation of an analogous 'freie Stellung innerhalb des Christentums'; which, in its affirmation of Goethe's lasting orthodoxy, is itself quite incompatible with the 'überkonfessionelles Christentum' of Herbert Biesel's more recent analysis of

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<sup>53</sup> Mommsen, op. cit., p.19.

<sup>54</sup> Bergsträsser, op. cit., p.172.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.158.

<sup>56</sup> Mommsen, op. cit., p.23.

Goethe's religion, which proclaims Goethe a 'naturfrommer, antik-moderner Heide'<sup>57</sup>.

It seems, then, that successive scholars have adopted the notion of *Privatchristentum* as a self-sufficient explanatory concept describing an immutable world-view peculiar to Goethe, and have sought to define the term no further. Kelling, for example, speaks of 'the undenominational and undogmatic "Privatchristentum" which originated with Goethe'<sup>58</sup>, but does not substantiate his claim that Goethe explicitly initiated this particular religious unorthodoxy, any more than he (Kelling) clarifies its nature. Kelling's adoption of the term as a notional absolute does not indicate whether *Privatchristentum* is to be understood as an idiosyncratic but nonetheless objectively valid approach to traditional Christianity, or a sort of Pietist 'Verinnerlichung' and mystical communion with an entirely personal God. The title of Walter Bienert's earlier study, *Goethes pietistisch-humanistisches Privatchristentum*<sup>59</sup>, defines at least the direction of the notion's application, but only by according it a conceptual validity which does not appear to be borne out by any explicit reference on Goethe's part. Walter Naumann's assertion that Goethe postulated a 'private substitute for traditional religion'<sup>60</sup> is equally vague and non-committal, and serves more to further the confusion about Goethe's attitude to religion in general and Christianity in particular than to clarify the question of 'ein Christentum zu meinem Privatgebrauch'. Indeed, what is apparently assumed by many commentators to provide the answer to the problem of Goethe's 'religion' serves in effect only to beg more questions, about the nature of this process of 'privatization', its impact in the re-externalization of Goethe's religious views, and its relation to the religion of tradition and accepted orthodoxy it is held to replace and supersede in terms of Goethe's own 'religion'.

Even more significantly, what successive scholarly assertions of Goethe's 'Privatchristentum' have failed to acknowledge is that his account of individualism in faith, in proclamation of an idiosyncratic and personally valid religion, is an attitude not peculiar to Goethe, but in response to a commonly-held supposition of his time:

da ich oft genug hatte sagen hören, jeder Mensch habe am Ende doch seine eigene Religion, da kam mir nichts natürlicher vor, als daß ich mir auch meine

<sup>57</sup> Herbert Biesel, *Dichtung und Prophetie*, Düsseldorf, 1972, p.17.

<sup>58</sup> Kelling, op. cit., p.116.

<sup>59</sup> Halle, 1935.

<sup>60</sup> Naumann, 'Goethe's Religion', loc. cit., p.190.

eigene bilden könne.<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, Goethe displays, within the context of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, a subsequent unwillingness to concur wholeheartedly with the idea that religious expansion and tolerance in the late eighteenth century gave validity and credibility to the notion of idiosyncratic faith:

Man wiederholte so oft in jenen toleranten Zeiten, jeder Mensch habe seine eigene Religion, seine eigene Art der Gottesverehrung. *Ob ich nun gleich dies nicht geradezu behauptete*, so konnte ich doch im gegenwärtigen Fall bemerken, daß Männer und Frauen einen verschiedenen Heiland bedürfen.<sup>62</sup>

Evolution of a personal religious code depends, according to Goethe's own account, on influence, education, cultural environment, personality, and even, as Goethe's formulation makes explicit, on gender<sup>63</sup>. If this is the personal and private religious code that is to be understood as Goethe's 'Privatchristentum', it must first be acknowledged that such an approach neither originated with Goethe, since it was a commonly understood and held religious attitude; nor can it be defined simply as a private substitute for traditional religion, since it seems to have been traditionally understood, within the cultural milieu in which Goethe inhaled, that faith as an objective phenomenon demanded a personal approach by the subject. Indeed, the concept of *Privatchristentum*, as an internalization of religion defying re-externalization in the face of a hostile world, as a renunciation of the objective world as the significant matrix for religious expression, would imply a wholly internal, subjective religion embraced and advocated by Goethe, and is categorically contradicted in the first instance by his objective interest in religious phenomena in general and their expression. It seems to be evident from the very nature of Goethe's utterances on religion that this privatization of Christianity, of which he was aware as a popular trend of his age, signified for him no renunciative retreat from the world, but rather a personal religion evolved by the self for the self, partly in terms of and according to the external world of religious formality - that is to say, in terms of an individual re-assimilation of traditional, and hence in part conventional, religion. Harry Loewen's attribution of Goethe's evolution of a personal religious code to a disillusionment with Pietism implies the creative impulse to write, to objectify

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<sup>61</sup> HA IX 350.

<sup>62</sup> HA X 22. My italics.

<sup>63</sup> Although it must be noted that Goethe is here generalizing from his own experience of two particular examples: the pietistically devout Susanne von Klettenberg and the dogmatically fundamentalist Lavater.

experience, which to some extent confirms this equation of a 'Christentum zu meinem Privatgebrauch' (misquoted by Loewen) with an appropriative, externalizing conception of 'Privatchristentum':

He turned away from the world-negating view of the Pietists, decided to become an author, and embarked upon a new course - the working out of a 'Religion zu meinem Privatgebrauch' [*sic*] of which he speaks in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.<sup>64</sup>

Loewen conceives of what he calls Goethe's 'private Christianity' in terms of an idiosyncratic abrogation of the dogmas of doctrinaire religion, and the unorthodox sects with which he was familiar, born of an insistence on the individual's freedom of response to the Christian faith; an attitude which Goethe, according to Loewen, shared with his contemporary religious thinkers. This involves, for Loewen, an appreciation of the purity of the early Christian church and is the primary impulse in Goethe's conscious integration of the religious tradition in which he inherited, and the creative vocation he followed<sup>65</sup>. The concept of *Privatchristentum*, viewed in this light, has the virtue of having a direct bearing on the appreciation of Goethe's use of sacral material in the secular context of his art and his contribution to historical culture, and runs contrary to the persistent widespread conception of Goethe's *Privatchristentum* as a vague 'religion' of inward-seeking experience and subjective emotionalism in both its genesis and its direction.

The understanding of *Privatchristentum* as merely a private internalization of faith is, moreover, implicitly belied by the notion adumbrated by some scholars that Goethe's evolved religious standpoint involves a recognition of the existential validity of the objective world as the medium in and through which religious faith is to find its meaning and its expression. Hoffmann's professed awareness that Goethe's personal faith involved a striving to the infinite through the finite accords the phenomenal world the status of a significant matrix which is the only valid and conceivable means of approximating the absolute that is God<sup>66</sup>: the objective world of manifestation and phenomenon is the religious subject's frame of reference; he aspires to the abstract through the concrete. Likewise, Hans Joachim Schrimpf's assertion that Goethe

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<sup>64</sup> Loewen, op. cit., p.28.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.31: 'While clinging to what he considered early Christianity, he declared his independence from the institutionalism and orthodoxy of the church, and began consciously to integrate his faith with his chosen course as a writer'.

<sup>66</sup> See Hoffmann, op. cit., pp.9ff.

dismisses the 'other-worldly' aspect of religious belief<sup>67</sup> also accords the material world a vital referential significance for Goethe's religious experience and its expression. In a similar vein, Naumann notes that Goethe's understanding of the divine principle does not inhere in any abstract speculation or idle emotionalism, but is concerned with the active apprehension of the numinous in and through the phenomenal:

like Faust, he turns his eye inward toward the refraction of the Divine light in the universe about us. To recognise the working of this universe, to be active in it - that is our duty.<sup>68</sup>

Leaving aside for the present the obviously uncertain and potentially dangerous practice, apparently indulged in here by Naumann too, of taking literary constructs as evidence of the personal standpoint of their author, it is worth noting that it is implicit in the accounts of many commentators that Goethe approved of a religion of positive action and effect upon the manifest world. Even Mommsen's discussion of Goethe's particular individual and individualistic religion views this, not in terms of a mere emotional experience, 'ein vages Schwärmen für die christliche Religion', but as a faith which proves its worth 'durch die Tat'<sup>69</sup>: Goethe's personally-evolved religious code is not then, after all, a retreat from the world, but demands active manifestation and expression in the world. 'Privatchristentum' is not just a verbal corruption, but a misleadingly tendentious misinterpretation of 'ein Christentum zu meinem Privatgebrauch', for 'Gebrauch' implies that there is to be a use, a function, of the 'Christianity' which is appropriated. It is the nature of this function which is the concern of this study.

Significantly, Erich Franz pre-empts and anticipatorily supersedes all subsequent discussion of Goethe's 'Privatchristentum', its significance and its repercussions, in noting Goethe's 'Lieblingsgedanke, daß jeder nach seiner Weise und nach seinen Kräften das Göttliche auffassen möge'<sup>70</sup>. The 'personal' nature of Goethe's religion inheres in this respect in the appeal to the personal subject to evolve his or her own conception of the divine: the existential validity of the conception lies, for Franz, in its objectification and manifest formality in the phenomenal world itself,

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<sup>67</sup> *Das Weltbild des späten Goethe*, op. cit., p.293: 'Der religiöse Mensch muß sich nach Goethe in der Welt "zu Hause" fühlen und nicht "wie geborgt oder im Exil"'.

<sup>68</sup> Naumann, loc. cit., p.189.

<sup>69</sup> Mommsen, loc. cit., p.19.

<sup>70</sup> Franz, op. cit., p.53.

in the apprehension of the ineffable sacral in terms of and within the matrix of the secular. Franz's understanding of Goethe's 'Christentum zum Privatgebrauch' (*sic*) is firmly situated within its historical context, as a direct result of the Enlightenment in Germany, which involved and demanded what Franz describes as a 'Säkularisierung des Christentums'<sup>71</sup>. This process of secularization is thus perceived as a historical phenomenon which in turn allows of the appropriation and utilization of religious material; this being, for Goethe, also a function of his age.

What is not apparent in Franz's account, however, is a precise understanding of the concept of secularization in its relation to the problem of Goethe's 'religion'. Clearly, it is not sufficient to state, as Franz does, that Christian notions are 'übertragen und säkularisiert' in Goethe's religious utterances, without attempting to analyse the conceptual significance and application of the secularization process. A consideration of what Goethe understood and implied by 'ein Christentum zu meinem Privatgebrauch' is evidently still required, one which recognizes Goethe's particular and selective evolution of a personal code, but seeks not merely to evaluate the extent to which this code may be considered consonant with a specific orthodoxy or heresy. The diffuse problem of the ethical validity of Goethe's 'private use of Christianity' may to this end be subsumed under the particular question of the matter and manner of his use of *sacral* material - pertaining to the realm of religious worship - in the *secular* world of discourse, action, and physical manifestation.

Scholarship's recognition of the significance of Goethe's acute awareness of his cultural inheritance, including that of the Western Christian tradition, and his conscious contribution to its perpetuation, has been mentioned in the introduction to this study above. It is significant here to note that of this legacy, the single most important and meaningful item for Goethe is demonstrably the Judaeo-Christian Bible. In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* he notes the appeal of the Bible's ethical message to him, and most particularly, its *effect* upon him through life:

Ich für meine Person hatte sie lieb und wert: denn fast ihr allein war ich meine sittliche Bildung schuldig, und die Begebenheiten, die Lehren, die Symbole, die Gleichnisse, alles hatte sich tief bei mir eingedrückt und war auf eine oder die andere Weise wirksam gewesen.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> See *ibid.*, p.193.

<sup>72</sup> HA IX 274f.

Goethe's account to Eckermann in March 1832 of the ethical power and validity of Christianity maintains that it is the witness of the Christian Bible ('wie es in den Evangelien schimmert und leuchtet'<sup>73</sup>) which transcends and illuminates all scientific and cultural progress. As Elizabeth M Wilkinson, amongst many others, has emphasized, Goethe 'was and remained a grateful heir of the Christian tradition - *bibelfest*, rooted in the Bible, as his language constantly proclaims'<sup>74</sup>. It is this linguistic proclamation and manifestation of his religious inheritance which is traditionally understood in scholarship, after Franz, as Goethe's 'Säkularisierung des Christentums': his use of biblical language - and, by logical extension, the language of the hymnal, the prayer-book, the liturgy and creed, and the conceptual terminology of the theological tradition - in the ostensibly secular context of biographical account, epistolary correspondence, scientific discourse, and poetic, narrative or dramatic depiction. Such an enumeration of the areas in which the process of secularization takes place - the use of sacral material in a secular context - does not, however, further any precise and fruitful understanding of the function of the process itself, nor a coherent evaluation of the significance of such a 'Säkularisierung des Christentums' for Goethe's own 'religion'. There is general agreement that such a secularizing attitude to the Christian religion is not peculiar to Goethe, but is rooted in the intellectual climate in which he operated. That there was, however, a specifically and peculiarly Goethean understanding of secularization, unique to him and conducive to the evolution of a personal religious code, is implicit in the accounts of many commentators. The precise nature of this concept, and its bearing on Goethe's 'religion', remains, however, undefined and largely unappreciated.

Before attempting to determine the nature of Goethe's understanding of the process of secularization and his practice thereof, I propose to consider the concept of secularization itself as a cultural phenomenon with general historical and cultural repercussions and significance, since these in turn have a direct bearing on the repercussions and significance of 'secularization' for an understanding of the problem of Goethe's 'religion'. I shall, therefore, consider the etymological implications of the concept of secularization with a view to clarifying Goethe's understanding of the

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<sup>73</sup> GA XXIV 771f.

<sup>74</sup> 'Goethe', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Macropaedia, 15th edition, 1985, Vol XX, pp.181-188, (p.186).

process as a general cultural phenomenon of implicit and direct relevance to his affirmed and acknowledged use of sacral material in the particular secular context of his discourse. As we shall see, my titular reference to 'Goethe's Mode of Secularization' implies both the *manner* of his secularizing and its *re-manifestation* of historical religion on the continuum of historical culture.

The Latin noun *saeculum*, from which are derived the English adjective 'secular', its related noun 'secularism', and the corresponding process of 'secularization', is to be understood, according to the Oxford Latin Dictionary, in an exclusively and specifically temporal sense. This dictionary gives nine such definitions of *saeculum*, as an 'age', a 'period', or, by extension, a 'human generation'. Only by further extension of the evolved meaning of *saeculum* as a human lifetime does the Latin term come to imply a period of one hundred years, or century, as the putative extreme limit of such a lifetime, and it is this which gives rise to the contemporary French cognate *siècle*. It is almost as an afterthought that the OLD offers a tenth definition of *saeculum*, 'human life, the world', which seems to have evolved from one of the more extended temporal definitions, 'the course of human affairs'. Yet the notion of secularism, in the common thought and parlance of today, is almost exclusively equated with this apparently secondary meaning of its etymological forefather. Drawing principally on the etymological history of the term and the significance of this for evolving sociological and theological understandings of things secular, I shall now attempt to give an account of this shift of emphasis which underlies the modern conception of the secular as pertaining to the things of this world, and to evaluate the significance of the term for the process of secularization as a cultural phenomenon.

According to Wolfgang Binder, it was Augustine of Hippo, in his Christian Latin writings, who first explicitly equated 'the secular' with 'the world'<sup>75</sup>. A secular matter is, for Augustine, one which concentrates on the contemporary age rather than on eternity, on the goods of the present world rather than on the salvation of the soul. Thus is established the antithesis of secular and sacral realms of significance and application, in terms of the opposition of Church and State which is held to determine the course of Western civilization, underpinning both theological and sociological

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<sup>75</sup> 'Grundformen der Säkularisation: Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin', in *Aufschlüsse. Studien zur deutschen Literatur*, Zürich, München, 1976, pp.35-62: 'Man spricht von Verweltlichung, weil saeculum seit Augustin mit mundus identifiziert wird' (p.44).

thinking.

Nevertheless, these two discrete yet implicitly inter-related understandings of 'secular' - as a chronological division and as an ecclesiastical term for the non-ecclesiastical - seem to have co-existed in the Romance languages, and languages borrowing extensively from the Romance source, at least as late as the early seventeenth century. One obvious - and obviously important - exception is the German borrowing *Säkulum*, which according to Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* of the late nineteenth century is to be understood, as are its derivatives *Säkular-* and *säkularisch-*, as referring specifically to a period of one hundred years. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary provides an example of the use of the adjective 'secular' in 1599 to describe an event which 'occurs or is celebrated once in an age, century or long time', together with a 1629 definition of 'secular' as that which is non-ecclesiastical and thus 'pertaining to the common or unlearned people'. It is this latter equation of the secular with the common or lowly which has attained prominence in general usage of the term, and has given rise to the negative inflection which gradually but inexorably lends a pejorative sense in some contexts to the notions of secularism and secularization. This may best be illustrated and corroborated by a consideration of the analogous concept of 'profanity'. The Latin term *profanus* designates in the first instance a strict spatial location 'outwith the temple' (*pro* = before; *fanum* = temple). Originally, therefore, the 'profane' was synonymous with Augustine's understanding of the 'secular': civil as distinct from ecclesiastical, lay or common as opposed to spiritual. Diverse etymological overviews consistently reveal that overtones of contempt, irreverence and blasphemy were acquired in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and 'profane' assumed the wholly negative implications of misuse, abuse, violation, defilement and pollution (primarily but not exclusively of matters religious). Such a change of meaning by shift of emphasis may be explained partly in terms of the fiercely religiocentric nature of late medieval educated society which allowed of no development - economic, social or personal - which was not ecclesiastically approved and ordained<sup>76</sup>. The overwhelmingly negative inflection acquired by the notion of 'profanity' is held thereby to result from the deep suspicion with which the Church,

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<sup>76</sup> Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd edition, Oxford, 1983, notes the significance of the Bible, as the foundation of the ecclesiastical canon, in all walks of medieval life, as the basis of all formal education ('The Bible was the most studied book of the middle ages. Bible study represented the highest branch of learning', p.xxvii), and also in the wider implications of its relevance to all social and institutional bodies and concerns (see pp.xxixf).

its political power and authority threatened, viewed secular social elements. The 'profane' was no longer merely the non-ecclesiastical, but had come to signify all that was destructive and undesirable from the point of view of those social and clerical institutions determined to found and maintain a religious fabric.

Secularism has, however, remained a more specialized term than profanity and therefore less accessible to - though by no means exempt from - popular pejoration. The antithesis of secular and sacral does not seem to imply the dogmatic opposition of good and evil of the more common antithesis of sacred and profane. Moreover, in the specialist terminology of scientific discourse, certain uses of 'secular' show some perpetuation of the primary Latin understanding of *saeculum*. In the realms of astronomical observation or geophysical time, a secular process of change is one of enormous temporal length, one which continues through long ages. The 'secular trend', used in this sense of a long and gradual change, is in fact a commonplace in the terminology of economic science. Fernand Braudel's discussion, within the fabric of his consideration of the history of world economy, includes the following definition of what he calls the 'trend séculaire':

Barely visible in everyday life, but plodding inexorably on, always in the same direction, the trend is a cumulative process, building on its own achievements ... until some turning point when, with equal obstinacy, it begins to work to bring them down again, slowly and imperceptibly but over a long period.<sup>77</sup>

Of particular significance in this respect is the translator's repeated rendering of Braudel's 'siècle' ('aurions-nous le privilège ... de voir de nos yeux le siècle basculer vers le bas') as 'century' ('the unenviable privilege of seeing with our own eyes the century begin its downward turn')<sup>78</sup>. Evidently, the French *siècle* retains a sense of the original meaning of *saeculum* as an age, or long period of time, which renders the specifically temporally defined English 'century' somewhat inappropriate in this context. It is, nonetheless, apparent from those applications of the 'secular' in the realms of natural and economic science that the usual understanding of the term as all

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<sup>77</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Perspective of the World*. Vol. III of *Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century*. Translated from the French by Siân Reynolds, London, 1984, p.77. Originally published under the title *Le Temps du Monde. Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme XVe-XVIIIe siècle*, Tome 3, Paris, 1979: 'Peu perceptible dans l'instant mais allant son bonhomme de chemin, toujours dans une même direction, le *trend* est un processus *cumulatif*. Il s'ajoute à lui-même ... jusqu'au moment où, dans le sens inverse, avec la même obstination, il se met à travailler à leur baisse générale, imperceptible, lente, mais prolongée' (p.61).

<sup>78</sup> *Le Temps du Monde*, ed. cit., p.63; *The Perspective of the World*, ed. cit., p.80.

that is not ecclesiastically or religiously orientated is not the only - nor even the semantically primary - meaning of the term. But the related process of secularization, by which an entity is rendered secular, is generally defined and understood in terms of the equation of secularism and worldliness, and the opposition of the secular and the sacral. Within a sociological framework, 'secularization' is the term applied to describe the trend away from a religio-centric society; the decreasing significance of the Church as a social power and the corresponding increase in the authority of the secular body of the State. As a theological phenomenon, secularization is held to denote 'the historical process by which the world is de-divinized'<sup>79</sup>, implying not so much the notion of a *deus absconditus* - a God who created the world and then withdrew to leave it spinning eternally *in vacuo* - but rather the Nietzschean idea of a God whose 'death' is caused by his falling significance in human consciousness. What both the theological and sociological uses of 'secularization' have in common is an understanding of the term as a historical process involving a loss on the sacral side and a corresponding gain on the secular. The first recorded use of the German *Säkularisation* is in the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 to denote the dissolution of ecclesiastical orders and the transfer of their property to State control<sup>80</sup>. In this sense, secularization refers to a process of material transfer by which the secular world's gains are directly proportional to the losses incurred by the ecclesiastical body. But as has been indicated above, 'secular' carries within it implications of common-ness, of vulgarity and impurity; and the sense of irredeemable loss on the side of the sacred is compounded by the notion that the world perverts its gains, giving rise to a predominantly negative understanding of the process of secularization in culture. However, such a consideration of secularization as a simple transfer from one realm of application to another occurring along a strict chronological continuum is clearly an inadequate appreciation of the nature and implications of the concept as a cultural process. For the transfer of property from an ecclesiastical to a secular body means that the material entity remains intact and unchanged, but loses all spiritual implication in order to belong entirely to the worldly realm. Secularization as a process of cultural transition, certainly as far as the principal scholars within the German literary tradition who have treated of the term and its implications are concerned, is not materially finite

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<sup>79</sup> See Arnold E Loen, *Secularization. Science without God?*, London, 1967, p.7.

<sup>80</sup> See Albrecht Schöne, 'Säkularisation als sprachbildende Kraft. Studien zur Dichtung deutscher Pfarrersöhne', *Palaestra*, Vol. 226, Göttingen, 1958, p.22.

in this sense: words and phrases, images and idioms, once appropriated from their spiritual origins, are not stolen forever, but are copied, imitated, and hence perpetuated. The process of secularization in culture is in this respect no unilateral theft, but a borrowing which is subsequently to be paid back with interest. The secularization of cultural entities has positive, not negative, implications for the sacral realm, and the overtones of perversion and distortion, which secularization traditionally seems to imply, inhere not in the secularized entity itself, which remains intact, but in perception of it in a new context which is seen to reflect unfavourably upon it and, by association, on its original context. Hence the implications of secularization in the cultural tradition depend on how the 'sacral' notion is perceived in the novel, 'secular' context, for once an idea has been transferred it does not cease to function in its original context, but may continue in its primary function and, indeed, engage in a limitless cycle of borrowing and appropriation to an infinite variety of secular applications. Secularization in the historico-sociological sense is finite: secularization as a cultural process is, to borrow a telling phrase from Albrecht Schöne, 'unerschöpflich fruchtbar'<sup>81</sup>. Schöne's analogy of a slab of marble from a ruined temple used as part of the foundation of a block of modern flats graphically illustrates his consideration of the sustained and sustaining influence and implication of a spiritual entity in a secular context:

Jene geformten Steine aber, die aus dem Sakralbau der religiösen Sprache gebrochen und in das dichterische Kunstwerk eingefügt werden, sind kein neutrales Material, sie bringen, auch wenn sie nicht obenhin sichtbar sind, *mehr als sich selber* aus dem alten in den neuen Bau. Auf diesem 'mehr' beruht die Bedeutung des Säkularisations-prozesses für die Auslegung des dichterischen Werkes.<sup>82</sup>

So, for Schöne, secularization is a redeeming process, by which the secular world gains by the appropriation of a spiritual entity, and gains far more than the sacral world's apparent corresponding loss. Schöne's understanding of secularization involves a process of transformation by which that which is brought to bear in the secular world transcends itself and its original implication to signify something greater, something above and beyond itself. Schöne's study is specifically orientated

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.25. My italics.

towards the significant literary contribution of the offspring of the German clergy<sup>83</sup>: his concern is with the role of sacral discourse in the secular writings of the sons of the 'Pfarrhaus'. This integrated world of discourse, inhering in the religious education and milieu of the writers and their concern to express themselves in the world, which is described by Schöne as 'pastorale weltlich-schöngestige Literatur'<sup>84</sup>, is said by Herbert Schöffler (whom Schöne explicitly acknowledges as his predecessor and inspiration in the secularization debate), to have arisen directly from the freedom of ideas and flexibility of thought characteristic of the period of the Enlightenment, which led to the relaxation of the formerly rigid boundaries between religious and secular life and experience and, by facilitating access to both spiritual and secular texts, pointed towards the fruitful co-existence of these two previously independent, even diametrically opposed, realms of discourse<sup>85</sup>. For Schöne's elaboration of Schöffler's account of the Enlightenment as the liberation of thought in general from the constraints of traditional Protestant asceticism involves a perception of the mutual integration of sacral and secular modes of expression in the process of rationalization. Schöne's 'pastorale weltlich-schöngestige Literatur' describes not only the use of sacral material in secular discourse, but the influence of secular forms of thought and expression on the tradition of spirituality. Moreover, this is, for Schöne, something indigenous to the Protestant tradition in Germany as a whole. Calvin's religious society was, according to Schöne's analysis, founded on an appreciation of the political state advocated by Plato; Luther's views on the nature of religious worship are held to have been formed in part by an appreciation of Aristotelian aesthetics. Although these judgements are implicitly negated by their absence from Ernst Troeltsch's extensive study, considered definitive, of *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*<sup>86</sup>, Schöne's thesis that secular culture was integrated into the German religious mind long before the *Aufklärung* and the rise in

<sup>83</sup> This particular milieu is generally recognized for its contribution to German culture: see for example Victor Lange, *The Classical Age of German Literature 1740-1815*, London, 1982: 'Far more than the English vicarage, the German "Pfarrhaus" was for most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the focus of spiritual and imaginative life; its history offers an impressive record of intellectual and moral discipline; the number of German writers and artists, scholars and public figures who were the sons of Protestant pastors is astonishing' (pp.47f).

<sup>84</sup> Schöne, op. cit., p.9.

<sup>85</sup> See Herbert Schöffler, *Protestantismus und Literatur. Neue Wege zur englischen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen, 1958, and Schöffler, *Deutscher Geist im 18. Jahrhundert. Essays zur Geistes- und Religionsgeschichte*, Göttingen, 1956.

<sup>86</sup> Ed. cit.

the phenomenon of 'rational religion' is nonetheless upheld by his specific focus on the Bible as the primary sacral phenomenon, and, more particularly, by the familiar point he makes about the *function* of the Bible in the secular world:

Es ist oft betont worden, daß es eine Entdeckung des 18. Jahrhunderts, eine Leistung Herders war, die Heilige Schrift als ästhetisches Phänomen zu begreifen und zu würdigen ... Aber längst vor diesem Akt bewußter Einsicht und Erkenntnisformulierung hat die Bibel ja als ästhetisches Phänomen *gewirkt*.<sup>87</sup>

Most significant - and that which has been significantly ignored by some of his scholarly successors in the secularization debate - is Schöne's insistence that the presence or absence of sacral entities in the secular context of art or discourse has no evidential bearing on the 'Religiosität des Dichters': what is alone important for Schöne is not the ethical and religious justification of this exploitation of the biblical source, but 'das dichterische Werk' itself as a functioning, artistic entity<sup>88</sup>.

Wolfgang Binder acknowledges Schöffler and Schöne as his predecessors and primary influences in the evolution of a conceptual analysis of secularization<sup>89</sup>. Binder attempts to reconcile the understanding of secularization as a straightforward historical displacement involving sacral loss with the perception, adumbrated by Schöne in particular, of a dynamic process involving mutual enhancement of sacral and secular realms; by concentrating, as Schöne advocated, on the use of sacral entities in the secular world of discourse, and by limiting his study to the nature and function of these entities in context. However, Binder's primary concern seems to be with the secularization process as one of the displacements of ideas, by which theological notions are given a worldly sense and frame of reference. But to consider, for example, the capitalist ideology which governs Western society today as but the actualized expression of early Protestant principles - dignity to labour, justification to acquisition - has since Weber become a commonplace within the sociological study of religion<sup>90</sup>. In a literary context, it is also the basis of Ludwig Kahn's short essay entitled 'Voltaire's "Candide" and the Problem of Secularization'<sup>91</sup> in which the eponymous hero of Goethe's *Faust* is caricatured as the incarnation of such capitalist principles. But as Binder is aware, such an understanding of secularization as a

<sup>87</sup> Schöne, op. cit., p.18 (Schöne's italics).

<sup>88</sup> See *ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>89</sup> Binder, op. cit., p.35.

<sup>90</sup> See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London, 1930, 1976.

<sup>91</sup> *Publications of the Modern Languages Association*, Vol. 67, 1952, pp.886-8.

historico-philosophical phenomenon defined by strict temporal contingencies is quite inadequate:

Warum und wozu und unter welchen Bedingungen ihn [i.e. the appropriated notion] ein Dichter aufgegriffen, wie er ihn verwandelt, wodurch er ihm die Intention seines Werkes dienstbar gemacht und welche Sprachgestalt er ihm gegeben oder belassen hat - all das bleibt unbeantwortet.<sup>92</sup>

Binder sets the empirical boundaries of secularization as:

Evangelium, Credo, Dogma, Kirche, Liturgie und Gesangbuch auf der einen und Dichtung, Kunst, Philosophie, Staat und Gesellschaft auf der anderen Seite.<sup>93</sup>

His concern is with the extent to which linguistic entities from the sacral realm deployed in the secular contexts he enumerates may be considered consonant with, or contradictory to, their original sense and context. To this end he defines three distinct and differentiated uses of sacral material. The deployment of 'Bibelworte in weltlichem Interesse, aber in ihrem biblischen Sinn'<sup>94</sup> is not, according to Binder's analysis, an example of secularization. Precisely what Binder means by 'worldly interest' and 'biblical sense' is not at all clear. Nor are these clarified by specific analysis of the terms in the 'worldly' and 'biblical' contexts Binder enumerates. And by citing Schöffler's interpretation of Goethe's *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* as an example of this use of biblical material in its biblical sense but in a 'worldly interest' he only adds to the obscurity. Schöffler's view of Werther as a literary incarnation of all positive Christian virtues, of his fate as analogous to that of Christ, is surely a simplification, not to say misunderstanding, of Goethe's highly conscious and highly stylized use of biblical language in his novel<sup>95</sup>. Nor do Binder's second and third definitions of secularization do anything to clarify the significance and application of the concept:

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<sup>92</sup> Binder, op. cit., p.42.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>95</sup> See Schöffler, *Deutscher Geist im 18. Jahrhundert*, op. cit., pp.115ff. Much of the confusion engendered by Binder's reference to Schöffler's interpretation has recently been clarified by Martin Swales in his critical analysis of *Werther*. Where, for Binder, this interpretation by Schöffler is not an example of secularization, for Swales, Schöffler's analysis of Werther's suffering pointed out that 'Werther bears witness to the glory and the anguish that are part of a particular stage in the emergence of modern, secular individualism'. Swales perceives the character of Werther as 'representative of a generation caught between the waning of religious faith (under the impact of the Enlightenment) and the coming of that new kind of secular (that is, historicized) spirituality that would be announced some thirty years later by the German Idealist philosophers (particularly Hegel)', (*Goethe. The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Cambridge, 1987, p.66).

Man kann, zweitens, Bibelworte in einem weltlichen Sinne verwenden, ohne mit dem biblischen Interesse in Konflikt zu geraten. Hier wird die Verweltlichung nicht als solche empfunden, so z.B. bei vielen sprichwortlichen Redensarten, die aus dem Alten und Neuen Testament stammen. *Nur wenn ein Bibelwort in antibiblischem Sinne gebraucht wird, ist der Tatbestand der Säkularisation eindeutig erfüllt.*<sup>96</sup>

What Binder means by 'antibiblical sense' is unclear. He would seem to imply that only the use of biblical language in a context which lends the appropriated idea one single significance which conflicts with its conjectured original sense can be considered a true example of secularization. However, Binder does admit that this definition of secularization is too narrow and requires extensive modification<sup>97</sup>. He alludes to a potential interchange of significance between 'sacred' and 'profane' contexts in his depiction of:

ein Weltbild, das die Welt mythisiert, also gleichsam hinter ihre christliche Entgötterung zurückgreift, sich aber der christlichen Verkündigung, da sie vorliegt, auch nicht entziehen kann, so daß ein religiöser Eklektizismus entsteht, der Bibelworte auch in einem paganen und profane Worte auch in einem sakralen Sinne gebrauchen kann.<sup>98</sup>

Here again, it is unclear precisely what Binder means by adducing the potential use of 'biblical' words in a 'pagan' sense, and 'profane' words in a 'sacral' sense: his definition rests under the general rubric of a 'religious eclecticism' which maintains, despite the acknowledgement by Albrecht Schöne of a potential symbiotic interpenetration of sacral and secular modes of discourse, two discrete, interchangeable but not interlocking, realms of application. Binder's insistence on the 'anti-biblical' sense of true secularization, according to the terms of his definition, harps back to the predominantly negative implications of secularization which undermine appreciation of it as an enhancing process of integration and mutual growth and development. This equation of the secularization process with a parodistic distortion of scriptural values is precisely that described by the sociologist David Martin, who has considered the concept of secularization in great detail, viewing it as a process of demystification and distortion, by which religious symbols and concepts are relocated within a human and temporal reference, losing thereby all spiritual and other-worldly implication to be locked forever in a prosaic perversion of their original

<sup>96</sup> Binder, op. cit., pp.36f. My italics.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.37.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.44.

value:

Secularization involves the increase of any attitude which rejects the reverential, or is indifferent to charismatic appeals, halo effects, awe, or the numinous. There is a decrease in any sense of something beyond, deeply interfused, underlying. By extension this can be seen as leading to a lack of deep seriousness, dedication, and ultimate concern and by a further extension as manipulative, cynical, even unprincipled.<sup>99</sup>

Martin's study sees the process of secularization as explicitly symptomatic of the genesis of the 'Modern Age', which he locates specifically within the temporal context of the eighteenth century<sup>100</sup>: his *General Study of Secularization* (1978) involves a determination of the precise historical significance of the concept of secularization:

The transition to 'modernity' is assisted either by Calvinism or by the Enlightenment. Calvinism is the less explicitly modern of the two, and achieves an important symbiosis with the rationalistic variant of the Enlightenment ... In short, the secularizing potentiality occurs *either* through Calvinism plus the Enlightenment *or* the Enlightenment plus its historicized variant.<sup>101</sup>

Martin's view of the secularization process as one of distortion and deletion of sacral values is, however, implicitly contradicted by M H Abrams' analysis in *Natural Supernaturalism* of the secularization of inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking in literary and artistic contexts:

It is a historical commonplace that the course of Western thought since the Renaissance has been one of progressive secularization, but it is easy to mistake the way in which that process took place ... The process - outside the exact sciences at any rate - has not been the deletion and replacement of religious ideas but rather the assimilation and reinterpretation of religious ideals, as constitutive elements in a world view founded on secular premises.<sup>102</sup>

For Abrams, the manifestly secularized nature of the ideas and values of eighteenth-century Enlightenment are not, as they evidently are for Martin, something new and peculiar to this age: instead, secularization in the eighteenth century is to be viewed as

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<sup>99</sup> *The Religious and the Secular. Studies in Secularization*, London, 1969, p.54. The introduction to Chadwick's *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century* (op. cit.) refers specifically to Martin's work in perceiving the 'doctrinaire' interpretations of secularization which have characterized the debate on the term's sociological relevance, and acknowledges Martin's salutary warning against arbitrary applications of the term as a tool for counter-religious polemics (p.2).

<sup>100</sup> *The Religious and the Secular*, op. cit., p.3.

<sup>101</sup> Oxford, 1978, p.8. (The 'historicized variant' to which Martin refers is Marxism).

<sup>102</sup> Abrams, op. cit., p.13.

symptomatic of a constant and recurrent, though perhaps more intensified, phenomenon within the course of Western civilization. Moreover, the process of secularization, according to Abrams, is no unilateral exchange of sacral for secular values, but a reformulative displacement of values from traditionally sacral to ostensibly secular realms of application, by which the original values persist as determinative categorizations of man's view of himself in the world. This is, for Abrams, a characteristic of the Romantic school of thought, philosophy and discourse. Abrams' categorization of certain writers as 'Romantic' rests upon his perception that they:

undertook, whatever their religious creed or lack of creed, to save traditional concepts, schemes and values which had been based on the relation of the Creator to his creature and creation, but [in order] to reformulate them within the prevailing two-term system of subject and object, ego and non-ego, the human mind or consciousness and its transactions within nature. Despite their displacement from a supernatural to a natural frame of reference, however, the ancient problems, terminology and ways of thinking about human nature and history survived, as the implicit distinctions and categories through which even radically secular writers saw themselves and their world, and as the presuppositions and focus of their thinking about the condition, the milieu, the essential values and aspirations, and the history and destiny of the individual and of mankind.<sup>103</sup>

Secularization in these terms demands a transfer of realm of application - from that traditionally designated as the realm of the sacral to that of the world and material function therein - which involves a retention of values: the sense of 'irredeemable loss' postulated by Martin is refuted by Abrams. These values are then presented to the world in a necessarily different form; a reformulation which, far from explicitly negating the original values, enhances and quickens them by subsuming past history and future destiny in a present form which points backwards, to the original, 'sacral', function; and forwards, to the future potentiality of the reformulated values in culture. Secularization in this sense is to be understood as both a worldly and a temporal relocation: Abrams' analysis encapsulates both principal etymological significances of the term, as the material displacement of the expression of sacral values encourages the reconsideration of these values in a new context.

Abrams' account here thus explicitly negates the consideration of secularization as a simple transfer from one realm of application to another, which

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

would result, at worst, in the ultimate deletion of all sacral values, and at best, in their distortion and perversion. However, the process of secularization seems persistently to be associated with the devaluation of religion in society and culture. 'God', being the object of religious worship, is traditionally conceived of as absolute and immutable, and the external manifestations and trappings of this worship are consequently regarded as untouchable, unchangeable entities which are but forever tarnished and devalued by human interference. It is, of course, a commonplace of thought that any translation - and the displacement of religious and biblical notions necessitates some sort of a translation of their function and application - involves a degree of interpretation, and interpretation presupposes in turn a subjective and hence implicitly dubious inflection. If the Bible, as the primary and fundamental reflection of the divine absolute, is not treated as sacrosanct and ultimately untranslatable, then the message contained therein, it is the general view, seems implicitly to be called into question<sup>104</sup>. This is surely little more than a perpetuation of medieval religious esoterism which obstructed general access to religious texts on the grounds that familiarity breeds contempt, that understanding leads to perversion<sup>105</sup>.

To this notion that the biblical text is immutable and sacrosanct may undoubtedly be traced some of the inappropriate judgements of Goethe's 'religion' discussed above. For, as Kelling has pointed out, measured against the absolute criterion of orthodox Christian dogma:

Goethe's religious convictions very likely will appear as a secularized religion in which spiritual truths are but vaguely reflected or completely distorted.<sup>106</sup>

Such an approach, says Kelling, can only result in 'a negative view of Goethe's religious attitude'<sup>107</sup>, and this in turn is inextricably bound up with the persistent conception of secularization as a process of moral loss and atrophy: Goethe's attitude to religion being viewed as one of cynical perversion furthering the dissolution of

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<sup>104</sup> The question of the immutability of the biblical text is, of course, contentious, and seems predominantly to be based on superstitious interpretations of the warning at the end of the Revelation of John: 'For my part, I give this warning to everyone who is listening to the words of prophecy in this book: should anyone add to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book; should anyone take away from the words in this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and the Holy City, described in this book' (Rev. 22:18-19).

<sup>105</sup> Smalley's judgement of the Bible as 'the most studied book of the middle ages' (op. cit., p.cxxvii) still maintains biblical study as the domain of a social and intellectual élite and not open to general public consumption in anything other than the accepted and orthodox doctrinal form.

<sup>106</sup> Kelling, op. cit., p.116.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

traditional religious values. This negative view is eminently illustrated by the studies of Derek Bowman, who considers that Goethe:

tries to get the best of both worlds, as it were, by using the trappings, the phraseology, and even the symbolism of Christianity for artistic effect in such writings as, say, *Die Geheimnisse* or *Faust. Zweiter Teil*.

Bowman apparently considers Goethe a rather muddled und unhappy schizophrenic, alternating frantically between religious conviction and artistic calling. Goethe's attempts at reconciliation of the two in a secularization of sacral entites into the fabric of his art lead, for Bowman, only to spiritual loss:

But does not the virtue, so to speak, go out of them under such conditions?<sup>108</sup>

Bowman begs the question. However, if by 'virtue' he means the original Christian sense of the divine power of Jesus which, for example, 'went out of him' when the woman with haemorrhages touched his cloak<sup>109</sup>, Bowman is himself guilty of appropriating a biblical notion for his own ends. However consciously he makes this allusion, the influence of the Christian tradition on his own thought and formulations is evident. But within the terms of Bowman's argument, Goethe's use of sacral material in the secular context of his art reflects unfavourably on his religious disposition, and heralds, if taken to its logical extreme, his ultimate spiritual dissolution. Bowman's view thus reflects the conception of secularization as a process of moral disintegration and loss: Goethe's attitude to religion being viewed as one of perversion, distortion and, most regrettably for Bowman, of irreverence in the face of the Absolute.

Bowman's citing of aesthetic products as direct evidence of the personal attitude and standpoint of their author is, in my view, deeply naïve: he accords Goethe's literary creations a definitive evidential status for the explicit views of their creator, and unfavourably judges Goethe's own religious attitude on this basis<sup>110</sup>.

<sup>108</sup> 'Goethe and the Christian Autobiographical Tradition', loc. cit., p.34.

<sup>109</sup> See Mark 5:30. *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*. The Nestle Greek Text with a Literal English Translation, Alfred Marshall, London, 1958, offers 'virtue' in the sense of inherent power as a translation of the Greek *δυναμιν*.

<sup>110</sup> See *ibid.*, pp.34f., where Bowman cites Goethe's injunction, expressed in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, to 'appreciate life' ('Gedenke zu leben!'; HA VII 540). On this basis, Bowman criticises Goethe's apparent failure to take the Christian tradition of ascetic retreat from life into account as evidence of the author's lack of true religious feeling: 'Witness the whole monastic tradition. Goethe does not seem to give the view proper consideration, but a trifle impatiently takes his stand as secular humanist ('jeder tüchtige Mensch', as he puts it), rather than otherworldly man of God'.

Moreover, his criticism of what he terms Goethe's 'moralizing ritual' of 'drawing glib biblical parallels'<sup>111</sup> reveals a failure to take into consideration any conceivable awareness of the significant function of the sacral in the secular, and of the relevance of the secular for the sacral; not as a specious spiritualization, as Bowman would have it, of the secular text by means of recognizable sacral references, but as a reciprocal relationship between sacral and secular realms by which both aspire to their full potential significance on the cultural continuum. Abrams' consideration of religious entities in the secular context of the literary text is more differentiated and hence more meaningful, certainly in respect of Goethe, based as it is on the function of these entities within the text itself and not on their reflection of, or on, the attitude of the author. Thus Abrams rightly views Goethe's appropriation of Christian mythology in terms of an assimilation and progressive perpetuation, leading not to the negation but to the enhancement of the appropriated sacral notion within the secular world of the literary text. For Abrams, it is this text which is the significant frame of reference, with a bearing not on the spiritual well-being, or dissolution, of the author, but on the continuing significance of religion in culture. Abrams' analysis of Goethe's *Faust*, for all its limitations, does not pivot on any judgement of the ethics of Goethe's use of religious phraseology, but comments on the significant role of the sacral within the secular in terms of the implications of the precepts and philosophy of religion for human life as it is lived. Goethe's secularization, which for Bowman is analogical, based on unilateral and unbreachable parallels between sacral and secular realms, and thus evidence of Goethe's lamentably irreverent attitude<sup>112</sup>, involves for Abrams the radical and all-encompassing reinterpretation of traditional sacral values in terms of their function in the secular world: not, therefore, as a parallelism between two realms which never touch, but as a close and tightly-knit unity in inter-relationship:

The two parts of *Faust* are of particular interest because, instead of assimilating the Christian supernaturalism into a naturalistic account, it adopts, but in order radically to reinterpret, the Christian supernatural itself.<sup>113</sup>

Abrams considers Goethe's secularization in terms of the relevance of the sacral for

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<sup>111</sup> Bowman, 'The Path of Life. Attitudes to the Bible in some autobiographies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *Publications of the Institute of Germanic Studies*, Vol.15, *Essays in German and Dutch Literature*, ed. W D Robson-Scott, London, 1973, pp.65-83 (p.77).

<sup>112</sup> See 'Goethe and the Christian Autobiographical Tradition', loc. cit., where Bowman notes in this connection Benjamin Constant's criticism of what he termed Goethe's 'abus de l'analogie' (see GA XXII 326), particularly in his scientific experimentation and writings.

<sup>113</sup> Abrams, op. cit., p.244.

the secular text, and the corresponding implications of this for the perpetuation of religion in culture. Bowman, on the other hand, is persistently concerned with the relationship of the secular to the sacral, which constitutes, he claims, an ethical transgression on Goethe's part. What dogs Bowman's judgement is his repeated implicit - or explicit - denigration of 'artistic effect' as something quite untenable in the discussion of religion or use of ostensibly religious entities, as being somehow on a lower plane of existence to that of the sacral and hence quite irreconcilable with it. Any use of religion 'for artistic effect' is, for Bowman, equated with the notion of a perversion and distortion of values consonant with a negative understanding of the secularization process. It seems that Bowman considers it wholly untenable and inappropriate that Goethe should treat his religious inheritance like any other culturally derived material, as *Stoff* for artistic formulation, open to perception, appropriation, manifestation and perpetuation in and through the medium of his art.

However, the handling of intellectual concepts - and, by extension, of spiritual notions and biblical concepts - as common property and therefore as material entities ripe for artistic formulation is, of course, another significant topos of eighteenth-century thought<sup>114</sup>. Goethe himself declared, in what has become a crux for scholarship on Goethe's attitude to his religious tradition, that elements from the tradition of religion are no less open to appropriation and deployment in non-sacral, artistic contexts, than any other of what he terms 'life's higher interests':

Die Religion ... steht in demselbigen Verhältnis zur Kunst wie jedes andere höhere Lebensinteresse auch. Sie ist bloß als Stoff zu betrachten, der mit allen übrigen Lebensstoffen gleiche Rechte hat.<sup>115</sup>

Which is *not* necessarily to say that for Goethe, nothing is sacred! But just as artistic originality is held by the theoreticians and practitioners of art in the eighteenth century to reside not in the thought itself but in its appropriate treatment - attitudes to intellectual property being implicitly related to contemporary understanding of the nature and matter of property in general<sup>116</sup> - so artistic acceptability is to be decided, not by the *matter* which is appropriated, but by the *manner* of its appropriation, focusing thus not on the ethical validity or invalidity of the use of a sacral entity, idea,

<sup>114</sup> See R H Stephenson, *Goethe's Wisdom Literature*, op. cit., esp. Chs. 3 & 4 passim.

<sup>115</sup> Conversation with Eckermann, 2 v 1824 (GA XXIV 115).

<sup>116</sup> See Vicky Rippere, *Schiller and 'Alienation'*, Bern, Frankfurt am Main, Las Vegas, 1981, p.73 & fn.29, p.197.

notion, phrase or symbol in an artistic context, but on the function of that entity in context. However, Goethe's claim that religion is to be considered on a par with all of 'life's higher interests', with poetry and philosophy and art, as part of a common cultural inheritance, meets with strong disapproval from Derek Bowman:

The danger of such an attitude is that religion may come to be regarded merely as material for art, its truths may be manipulated aesthetically and not lived out and worshipped 'in spirit and in truth'.<sup>117</sup>

Bowman's own consideration of the so-called 'poetic considerations' to which Goethe apparently subverts true and valid religious practice seems, despite his assertions and protestations of unity on Goethe's part, to be selective, sporadic and piecemeal. Bowman's claim that Goethe shows disrespect to the religious tradition he exploits in his works, through not living out the faith to which he alludes 'in spirit and in truth' is tempered by the critic's perception of the 'great good' which Goethe's works have done<sup>118</sup>; which, according to Bowman's analysis, should have stood the poet in almost as good stead in the eyes of the Almighty as if he had lived a life along the straight and narrow path of Christian virtue (which he evidently, certainly as far as Bowman is concerned, did not). Moreover, Bowman's claim that Goethe sacrifices religion to art would seem to accord religion a status higher than that which Goethe himself was at pains to claim for it in his discussion of 'höhere Lebensinteressen', and hence belies Bowman's assertion of Goethe's unity of thought, expression and action in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*: the autobiography is, for Bowman, a poetic construct only in terms of its putative invalidation, through poeticization, of religion: in all else, it is life itself. The terms of Bowman's argument may be valid: his application of them in criticism of Goethe's attitude to religion invalidates itself. Moreover, Bowman seems to justify his assertion of a unity of religious thought in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* on the grounds that, although religious interest cedes to poetic considerations in Goethe's autobiography, the 'aesthetic' is but a minor consideration in the scrutiny of Goethe's work<sup>119</sup>. Precisely what Bowman understands by the 'aesthetic' is not defined in the context of his analysis of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. What is evident, however, is that he frowns upon the seemingly merciless exploitation and manipulation of religious

<sup>117</sup> *Life into Autobiography*, op. cit., pp.65f.

<sup>118</sup> Bowman cites (ibid., p.66) the biblical dictum 'by their fruits ye shall know them' as evidence of Goethe's potential religious rehabilitation.

<sup>119</sup> 'Thus in "Dichtung und Wahrheit" religion gives way to poetry ... if the work stands up to close scrutiny from all sides - and the aesthetic is only one of them, to my mind a minor one ...'. (Ibid).

material in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* by which all higher religious sense apparently perishes in order that the artist's concern for his art may be advanced. Bowman persists in his concern that the presence of religious material in an ostensibly non-religious context is ultimately detrimental to religious morality:

one cannot help wondering if in such circumstances the virtue does not go out of religion, at least for the holder of such a tenet. Can an artist make really effective use of religious motifs, if he does not believe in them?<sup>120</sup>

Again, Bowman begs the question. He does not detail what he means by the 'religious motifs' he perceives to exist in the text of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, and he does not seem to differentiate between the factual, quasi-objective accounts of the author's experience, the analogical reformulations of biblical stories, and the inclusion of specific and sporadic religious images and idioms in Goethe's text. Whether or not Goethe 'believed' in these, Bowman is surely in no position to judge (his judgement being in any case based on a misplaced faith in the simple evidential status of the literary text, autobiographical or otherwise), and to what 'effective use' Goethe is to put them is not covered by the terms of Bowman's argument.

I hope it will be clear, then, that scholarship on Goethe's 'religion' - even Bowman's exceptionally bold attempt to move beyond vague generalizations - has put forward no valid and tenable thesis to gauge the function of Goethe's use of religious material in terms of his artistic contextualization, nor an adequate formulation of the 'aesthetic considerations' to which he is held to subvert religion in his works. That this inheres in part at least in an inadequate critical appraisal of Goethe's personally-held beliefs has, I hope, been shown; and this inadequacy is in turn compounded by the persistent view of the secularization process in culture as of something negative and detrimental to religion. An overview of the critical debate on Goethe's religion reveals a confusion based on conflicting interpretations of the elements from the religious tradition manifest in the works of Goethe, interpretations which bring his putative personal faith to bear on these elements. A certain degree of critical consensus is manifest, notably with regard to the interest, explicitly acknowledged by Goethe, in the precepts and manifestations of the early Church and original Christianity, and the significance of his own cultural milieu for the evolution of a personal and personalized religious creed. Franz's postulation of Goethe's 'Säkularisierung des Christentums'

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

did much to clarify the focus of Goethe's 'religion' in terms of a re-objectification of traditional religion in his contribution to the Western cultural tradition. Subsequent studies have not, however, considered the nature of Goethe's secularization in terms of this contribution, but seem persistently to be concerned with the ethical validity or invalidity of using religious material in a secular context. Contemporary scholarship recognizes that this attitude inheres in Goethe's own post-Enlightenment milieu, but tends towards general assumptions which are not corroborated by particular analyses. Clearly, the way is open for an interpretation of Goethe's use of his religious inheritance which appreciates his overriding concern with the perpetuation of tradition in the midst of change, and which eschews the historically limited question of the ethical appropriateness or inappropriateness of secularizing religious notions and entities in art. For the eighteenth century was without doubt an age in which all established notions - be they religious, scientific, philosophical, or ethical - were called into question and hence validated or invalidated by investigative thought. It is against this background that Goethe's particular mode of secularization must be viewed.

Man muß sich um Goethes Stellungnahme richtig einzuschätzen,  
die geistige Gesamtlage und die große Krisis des Christentums  
in der Aufklärungszeit vergegenwärtigen.<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER II

### THE RELEVANT CULTURAL CONTEXT: THE PHENOMENON OF SECULARIZATION IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

That the eighteenth century is to be considered primarily and unequivocally as the philosophical 'Age of Enlightenment' is a commonplace of post-eighteenth-century scholarship of that period. The popular French textbook series *Les Métamorphoses de l'Humanité*, for instance, neatly categorizes the years 1700-1800 as 'le temps des libertés' in its volume *Les Aventures et les Révolutions*<sup>2</sup>. Slightly more informed, perhaps, but nonetheless artificial, is the setting of the boundaries of the Age of Enlightenment in convenient secular (in the temporal sense of the term) division initially with the birth in 1689 of Montesquieu<sup>3</sup> - the free-thinking sceptic whose writings are held to have pioneered much of the subsequent questioning and ultimate rejection of established philosophical and social norms in his native France, and consequently throughout eighteenth-century Europe<sup>4</sup> - and finally with the advent of the French Revolution exactly one hundred years later. The prefigurative social and political watershed year of 1715 and the disillusioned transition into intellectual Romanticism in the post-1795 era also provide a convenient temporal classification of the Age of Enlightenment. Whatever the inevitably artificial temporal barriers, the intervening years which span the notional eighteenth century are traditionally regarded as the 'century of light'; the period in intellectual and social history in which man

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Franz, op. cit., p.163.

<sup>2</sup> *Les Métamorphoses de l'Humanité. Une Histoire de l'art et du monde*. Sous la direction de Robert Philippe. '1700-1800 Le Temps des Libertés. Les Aventures et les Révolutions', Paris, 1967.

<sup>3</sup> See for example the titular premise of Paul Hazard's *La Pensée Européenne au XVIIIe siècle. De Montesquieu à Lessing*, (2 volumes), Paris, 1946. (Reference will also be made here to J Lewis May's translation, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century. From Montesquieu to Lessing*, London, 1954).

<sup>4</sup> Mark Hulliung, *Montesquieu and the Old Regime*, (London, Berkeley, 1976) characterizes Montesquieu's attack on the political establishment of his day as 'the *Aufhebung* of old regime thought' (p. x); perceiving Montesquieu as the theoretician whose ideas were to be realized by his successors: 'Montesquieu had interpreted the world, others would have to change it' (p.230).

asserted himself and his control over his spiritual and social destiny; the century of antipathy to religion, of the overwhelming abrogation of blind faith, and the demand for assurance and certitude in the apprehendable facts of concrete, material existence. The eighteenth century is, therefore, tautologically, a 'century' of 'secularization', combining the two primary definitions of the term in a concept of worldliness and temporality. Humankind, and not God, was proclaimed the centre of the eighteenth-century world and all that went on within it. The political importance of the Church diminished in direct proportion to the rise of the State politic. Material certainty in the present took commanding precedence over a vague hope for spiritual salvation. Happiness and satisfaction in the actual world of the 'here and now' were asserted over a putative eternal blessedness in the postulated otherworldly realm called Heaven. The eighteenth century wanted things accomplished for the people who lived then and there, and accomplished in the tangible, experiential world: it was, on the face of it, an inherently secular age.

Enlightened philosophy, the intellectual child of eighteenth-century secularism, prospered throughout Western civilization and is fundamentally a European phenomenon. Before concentrating on the situation in Germany which is obviously specifically relevant to Goethe, I propose to consider the Enlightenment in its wider significance as a broadly European cultural, philosophical and intellectual movement; to examine the nature of the process of secularization as a dimension of the Enlightenment and as an ongoing result of the movement in a 'secular' age; in order to clarify the particular focus of eighteenth-century philosophical and cultural trends in Germany; and ultimately to view Goethe's particular mode of secularization against his immediate background and in terms of the Enlightenment as a general cultural phenomenon.

That Goethe was born into the middle of the century of Enlightenment is a demonstrable historical fact requiring no special emphasis here. That he is not generally considered a representative figure of the movement, but rather an idiosyncratic observer, and something of an unwilling heir, of this particular intellectual climate, is an apparently accepted view in most Goethe scholarship<sup>5</sup>. That the significance of this enlightened inheritance for Goethe is to be considered merely

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<sup>5</sup> Wilkinson and Willoughby's *Goethe. Poet and Thinker* (op. cit.) and T J Reed's *Goethe* (op. cit.) are notable exceptions to this view.

as an accident of birth (the facile assumption, for example, that Goethe was born 50 years too late to have been actively involved in the Enlightenment) is, of course, a specious and insufficient appraisal of the man, the movement and the nature of the inheritance. Subsequent focus on Goethe's assimilation of the enlightened tradition into which he was born, in which he was intellectually and socially raised, which influenced his world, his perception of this world, and his contribution to it, will, I hope, reveal definite and tangible links between Goethe's cultural activity and the secular Age of Enlightenment in what I shall argue is Goethe's particular mode of secularization.

Consideration of the Enlightenment as an age of radical antipathy toward religion, of faithlessness and godlessness and a wholly inimical attitude toward the Church and all it represents, is a common conception aptly summarized by Ernst Cassirer at the outset of his study of religion within his text *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*:

Wenn man nach einer allgemeinen Charakteristik des Aufklärungszeitalters fragt, so scheint für die traditionelle Auffassung und Beurteilung nichts so sehr festzustellen, als daß die kritische und skeptische Haltung gegenüber der Religion zu den eigentlichen Wesensbestimmungen der Aufklärung gehört.<sup>6</sup>

According to Cassirer, the Age of Enlightenment affirms the autonomy of the human race and proclaims the individual's sole responsibility for its own life and orchestration of its own destiny. The Age of Enlightenment, as the implicit dialectic of its self-assumed title suggests<sup>7</sup>, involves an increase in the light of reason employed to promote a corresponding diminution in the darkness of superstition and mystical obscurantism which had, in the reckoning of the new, 'enlightened' thinkers, clouded human judgement and self-appreciation throughout the course of Western civilization. The principal late twentieth-century scholars of the Enlightenment emphasize this radically anti-clerical aspect of the age, its philosophy and its adherents. Peter Gay, for instance, perceives the vehemence of eighteenth-century religious antipathy as the terminal point in a long process of alienation and disenchantment, the seeds of which

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<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p.178. English translations of Cassirer's work, where appropriate, are taken from Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, translated by Fritz C A Koelln and James P Pettigrove, Boston, 1955 (see p.134).

<sup>7</sup> See H B Nisbet, "Was ist Aufklärung?" The Concept of Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Germany', *Journal of European Studies*, Vol. XII, 1982, pp.77-95 (p.84).

were sown in Renaissance humanism<sup>8</sup>; to germinate initially in the revolutionary philosophical, sociological and educational ideas of Locke, Newton and the English deistic humanists, and, transplanted across the Channel through the broadening of national perspectives and increasing awareness of other lands and climes which was also a social factor of the exploratory eighteenth century<sup>9</sup>, flourishing in a blaze of anti-clericalism and antipathy toward religious interpretations of the world with the advent of French Encyclopaedism.

The Encyclopaedists, a self-proclaimed and jealously self-guarding philosophical élite, compilers of the self-assumed definitive dictionary of intellectual and social concepts valid for their modern world, were more than scathing in their condemnation of the Church and its adherents, in their proclamation of their new philosophy and new world-view as the only legitimate and justifiable way forward to freedom from slavery and liberty from tyranny; and in the real, socio-political, sense as well as in the realms of morality, psychology and philosophy. 'Religion' is not accorded a mention in its own right, but is discussed under the, for the Encyclopaedists thoroughly disagreeable, concept of 'superstition', which is 'tout excès de la religion en générale'<sup>10</sup>, and is contrasted unfavourably with atheism which, contrary to superstition, has not hampered or hindered the intellectual progress of humankind, does not further social injustice in its quest for the fulfilment of its cause, does not place unnatural moral exigences on the individual, but allows the human being to develop his or her personal potential to the full. There is no further discussion of the 'Etre suprême' mentioned in the article on superstition; indeed, an entry on 'Dieu' is conspicuous by its absence in the Encyclopaedia, its alphabetical place being putatively, and perhaps not insignificantly, between the articles on Diane, the daughter of Jupiter, and the pagan goddess Dioné<sup>11</sup>.

Voltaire it was who coined the famous battle-cry of the assault on the

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment. An Interpretation*, op. cit., p.255. Gay's subtitle, 'The Rise of Modern Paganism', marks from the outset the rebellion against Christianity which categorizes his characterization of the men he calls the 'philosophes' and the particular philosophy they embraced and promoted.

<sup>9</sup> For an account of the corresponding effect of the broadening of geographical horizons upon cultural horizons, see Hazard, trans. cit., pp.4ff.

<sup>10</sup> John Lough's edition of selected articles from *The Encyclopédie of Diderot and d'Alembert* (Cambridge, 1969) includes this discussion on 'superstition' (pp.212ff.) which is curiously absent from the Hermann edition of Diderot's *Oeuvres Complètes* (cf. below), on which Lough collaborated.

<sup>11</sup> Diderot, *Oeuvres Complètes, Edition critique et annotée*, ed. John Lough, Jacques Proust, Paris, 1975-, (25 Vols.), Vol. XVII, pp.12f.

superstitious excesses of the religious tradition, *écrasez l'infâme*, of which the frame of reference was quickly extended as open war was declared on religion in general, in all its forms and in all its manifestations. The bellicose nature of this assault is reflected in the imagery of commentators on the philosophy of the age: Gay speaks of 'conflict'; of confrontation with the 'enemy'; of 'neutral zones'; of militancy and domination; antagonism, warring factions and strife<sup>12</sup>. Paul Hazard's categorization of the militant nature of eighteenth-century philosophical and social demands emphasizes their revolutionary zeal which would have no truck with gradual and peaceful reform:

It was more than a reformation that the eighteenth century demanded, it was the total overthrow of the Cross, the utter repudiation of the belief that man had ever received a direct communication from God; of the belief, in other words, in Revelation. What the critics were determined to destroy, was the religious interpretation of life<sup>13</sup>.

The Christian tradition was, for the 'new' thinkers of the eighteenth century, the major determinant of the society and philosophy they were concerned to revolutionize; and together with the commonplace assumption that the philosophers of the Enlightenment were concerned to abolish their Christian religious heritage, comes the notion that the eighteenth century had no conception of cultural evolution in general: that 'enlightened' thinkers disregarded history and the historical process as chaotic and meaningless. They are held to have considered in supreme self-confidence the era in which they themselves were living and working as the primary period in world history, and to underestimate to the point of dismissal the achievements of the past, in a gross negation of the value of historical and cultural tradition. There seems to be some scholarly disagreement regarding the philosophical nature of the ensuing ostensibly non-traditional, non-theological world. One critic has noted the Enlightenment's 'blithe disregard for anthropology'<sup>14</sup>, commenting that the cultural milieu of the eighteenth century had no truck with evolution in what he calls 'the anthropological sense'<sup>15</sup>. The German theologian and historian Ernst Troeltsch had pointed, however, to the historically defined nature of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, which he perceived as a united movement against the received religious tradition: its impetus inspired and maintained by its overwhelming concern to

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<sup>12</sup> Gay, op. cit., pp.37, 59 and passim.

<sup>13</sup> Hazard, trans. cit., p.xviii.

<sup>14</sup> Robert T Clark, *Herder. His Life and Thought*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1955, p.216.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.188.

root out the natural basis of a united metaphysic *precisely by taking stock of the historical and traditional elements thereof*:

In alledem ist [die Aufklärung] die erste umfassende und prinzipielle Opposition gegen die dualistisch-supranaturalistische Gestalt der Religion. Aber indem sie das ist, ist sie keineswegs wie sie und ihre Gegner oft geglaubt haben, die natürliche und normale Form des menschlichen, frei sich selbst überlassenen Denkens, sondern ein durch und durch historisch bestimmtes Ereignis bestimmter Verhältnisse und Lagen.<sup>16</sup>

Cassirer, moreover, had noted and examined philosophical anthropology - collation of, and reflection on, all information, notional and factual, available on man and humanity - as the predominant metaphysical science of the eighteenth century<sup>17</sup>: the Enlightenment is, for Cassirer, a fundamentally anthropological age, and the world-view it promoted is consequently unequivocally anthropological. It was the happiness, comfort and material well-being of humankind in an acclaimed human-centred world which was the priority of the eighteenth century. The individual engaged in self-indulgence, not through frivolous hedonism, but in actual awareness of personal wants and needs, and of the ability, the self-assumed directive, to attend to their fulfilment. The Enlightenment, then, far from disregarding anthropology, made the science of humanity both its impetus and its goal; and historical conditions were of paramount importance in understanding the nature of humankind in the present. Scientific progress proceeds by means of questioning established precepts, and the objective of this progress is the amelioration of the human condition. Hence traditional Christian mortification of the flesh and general hostility to the things of this world, the implicit abasement of humankind, the necessity of humility and self-sacrifice preached by the Church and demanded by the religious tradition, were wholly and

<sup>16</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, 'Aufklärung' [from *Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 3. Auflage, ed. Albert Hanck, 2.Bd., Leipzig, 1897, pp.225-241]. Reprinted in Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 4, *Aufsätze zur Geistesgeschichte und Religionssoziologie*, hrsg. Hans Baron, Tübingen, 1925 (pp.338-374), and in *Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland*, hrsg. Franklin Kopitsch, München, 1976, pp. 245ff., (p.246).

<sup>17</sup> See Cassirer, op. cit., Zweites Kapitel, 'Natur und Naturerkenntnis im Denken der Aufklärungsphilosophie', which starts with the premise: 'Um die Bedeutung zu ermessen, die die Naturerkenntnis für die Entstehung und Gestaltung des modernen Weltbildes besitzt, darf man nicht bei der Betrachtung all der Einzelzüge stehen bleiben, die sie dem *Inhalt* dieses Weltbildes eingefügt und durch welche sie es entscheidend umgestaltet hat. Der Umfang dieser Einwirkungen scheint fast unermesslich zu sein; und doch erschöpft sich in ihm keineswegs das Ganze der bildenden Kraft, die von der Naturerkenntnis ausgegangen ist. Ihre entscheidende Leistung liegt vielmehr an einer anderen Stelle: sie besteht nicht sowohl in dem neuen gegenständlichen *Gehalt*, der durch sie dem menschlichen Geiste vermittelt und zugänglich gemacht wurde, als vielmehr in der neuen *Funktion*, die sie ihm zuwies. Die Naturerkenntnis führt nicht schlechthin in die Welt der Gegenstände hinaus: sondern sie wird für den Geist zum Medium, innerhalb dessen er seine eigene Selbsterkenntnis vollzieht' (p.48).

unequivocally rejected. The era of superstitious religious belief was proclaimed over, a medieval anachronism of no relevance in the modern world, an unwanted, unsolicited impediment to human social and moral progress. The overall trend was one from Church to world, from God to humanity, from religious to secular; and manifested itself in the conceited optimism of a philosophy which refused to admit of predecessors and successors in its proclamation of the supremacy of the present moment.

Now, this general view of the Enlightenment as a social and intellectual movement proclaiming itself the beginning and end of all civilization, as an age which disclaimed its entire cultural heritage and displayed particularly virulent hostility towards religion, is of course, as has been pointed out by Gay and Cassirer, for example, erroneously simplistic; and some reconsideration needs to be borne in mind if gross misjudgements of the period and its philosophy are to be avoided. That enlightened philosophy, certainly in France, was inimical to the established Church and its doctrines is not to be denied. The Encyclopaedia of Diderot and d'Alembert, and the violently anti-religious atheism of d'Holbach, are testimony enough of the extreme religious antipathy of the leading figures of the French Enlightenment. Nor was the primary motive-factor in the founding of the new philosophy less than an urgent concern to cast off the shackles of inherited culture and proclaim a New Man in a New, and newly discovered, World. Less apparent, however, is the background to this urgency; the reasons - both personal and cultural - behind the philosophers' vehement dislike, distrust and disavowal of their Christian tradition. For as Gay has argued<sup>18</sup>, it was more - or less - than a disinterested concern for philosophical truth and intellectual purity which fired the philosophers' consuming desire to annihilate religious belief. By Gay's analysis, if the philosophers' overall aim was an honourable one - the amelioration of the human condition in the material world - their means were somewhat less than righteous. Their aversion to Christianity cannot be explained simply in terms of a struggle to uphold the light of reason against what they considered the obscurity and obscurantism of revealed religion, a fight for the rights of man against the conception of a God who seems to deny the claims of humankind and to work against the better interests of his own created image. To contest to the

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<sup>18</sup> See Gay, *op. cit.*, pp.37ff. and *passim*.

point of outright denial the validity of the established and venerated tradition of Christianity was an audacious act: it was this sheer audacity which necessitated the vehemence of their assault on the precepts of religion. Unable to admit of any justification for the Christian religion, any virtue or value in its precepts, unwilling to concede of any benefits at all in adherence to the Christian God, the philosophers in the main were forced into ever more radical positions, compelled to demand the negation of the Christian faith in all its manifestations, to abrogate the very existence of God and to dismiss all notions of belief, faith and worship as chimeric, fallacious and contrary to the best interests of humankind and human civilization. For their denial and abrogation of Christianity to be of any effect and to any purpose, it had to be, or certainly to *seem*, total: the ferocity of their attack is itself suspiciously defensive. Only in opposition to a worthy adversary could the philosophers of the Enlightenment, acting in accordance with the general socio-political climate of their age, account for themselves and recognize themselves as a group, as a valid intellectual movement. Their unified goal, the objective which gave the movement its impetus and the philosophy its substance, was the repudiation of revealed religion and the annihilation of the Church which proclaimed it.

In this respect, Isaiah Berlin's euphoric appreciation of 'the intellectual power, honesty, lucidity, courage and disinterested love of the truth of the most gifted thinkers of the eighteenth century'<sup>19</sup> rings rather hollow. Far more sophisticated are Gay's balanced and clear perceptions of the intellectual vicissitudes of the leading proponents of enlightened philosophy - their bias, their bigotry, their obstinacy - the understanding of which in no way diminishes his appreciation of their merits. Gay notes that the affirmed quest for knowledge which fired the enthusiasm and determined the direction of the major figures of the European Enlightenment, a quest undertaken with the Horatian tag *sapere aude* as its motto and its justification, disguises but feebly the need of the philosophers to vindicate their own existence and the force and direction of their philosophical attack in a general condemnation of the Christian tradition as a whole:

In the midst of the struggle for objectivity they could not themselves be objective: myth could be sympathetically understood only after it had been fully conquered, but in the course of its conquest it had to be faced as the enemy ... The Enlightenment had to treat religion as superstition and error in

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<sup>19</sup> *The Age of Enlightenment. The 18th Century Philosophers*. Selected, with introduction and interpretive commentary, by Isaiah Berlin, New York, 1956, (p.29).

order to recognize itself.<sup>20</sup>

Christianity in the eighteenth century, then, is not condemned by its own precepts, but by what Gay considers as the bigoted tendency of enlightened thought which had to equate religion with obscurantist, fear-provoking and intellectually suffocating superstition in order to realize itself and justify its attack in countering an enemy worthy of the campaign they sought to wage. The leading exponents of enlightened philosophy, certainly the French Encyclopaedists who were the most prolific and vociferous champions of the movement, brooked in general no distinction between Church and faith, between dogmatic institutionalization and personal belief, between noxious superstition and caring, ameliorative religion. Their antagonist was the Christian world:

the most militant battle cry of the Enlightenment, *écrasez l'infâme*, was directed against Christianity itself, against Christian dogma in all its forms, Christian institutions, Christian ethics, and the Christian view of man.<sup>21</sup>

Thus it would seem that the enlightened thinkers, with their general aversion to religion, could not accept that the Christian faith was of any worth or had any valid place in their modern world. On the contrary, it was, for them, a diseased cultural organ whose removal from the body of their new civilization they sought most determinedly. Their annihilation of superstition - of obscurantist mythopoeia and ecclesiastical pomp and ceremony - included the annulment of personal faith and devotion, and demanded the abrogation of the existence of any revealed God. Gay mentions 'the philosophes' bland identification of religion with superstition'<sup>22</sup>. But Cassirer notes the pertinent point that Voltaire's cautious distinction between faith and superstition - by which *l'infâme* is held to imply not Christian faith proper, but what the Church had done to distort the purity of the original Christian message and the potential of personal adherence to this doctrine - was not upheld by the next generation of enlightened thinkers, notably the Encyclopaedists, who hailed Voltaire as their spiritual leader and intellectual example<sup>23</sup>. The common understanding of the Enlightenment as a philosophical temper wholly inimical to the principles of religion is certainly not consonant with Cassirer's perception of a union of faith and knowledge against the common enemy of superstition: superstitious fear and empty ceremony are,

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<sup>20</sup> Gay, op. cit., p.37.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.59.

<sup>22</sup> Gay, *ibid.*, p.237.

<sup>23</sup> Cassirer, op. cit., p.178.

for Cassirer, as contrary to the spirit of true faith as they are inimical to the quest for rational knowledge and intellectual clarity:

Der eigentliche radikale Gegensatz zum Glauben ist nicht der Unglaube, sondern der *Aberglaube*, denn er rührt an die Wurzeln des Glaubens, er läßt den Quell versiegen, aus dem die echte Religion entspringt. Hier sehen sich daher Wissen und Glauben einem gemeinsamen Gegner gegenüber: und der Kampf gegen ihn ist die erste und dringendste Aufgabe, die es zu bewältigen gilt. In ihr können und sollen sich beide vereinen: und erst auf Grund dieser Einigung wird sich sodann die Auseinandersetzung zwischen ihnen selbst und die Bestimmung ihrer beiderseitigen Grenzen vollziehen lassen.<sup>24</sup>

Cassirer's perception of the beneficial nature of a harmonious coexistence of rational and supra-rational world-views, of a symbiotic interrelation of the quest for new knowledge and the affirmation of the old faith, indicates that the real force and direction of eighteenth-century religious antipathy are not easily categorized. Peter Gay recognizes a private mutual admiration behind the public opposition of philosopher and Churchman<sup>25</sup>, but sees these ties as arising more from grudging affection than from the recognition of a common philosophical aim, from personal friendship rather than intellectual affinity. Certainly, the philosophers were living and working in a society dominated by the Christian Church; or rather, in a society where the Church's past domination still exercised a significant influence. In their attempt to free their society from its religious foundations, they were in effect also estranging themselves from their immediate world, from their own background, education, and contemporary milieu. They were, moreover, materially dependent upon the social order whose abolition they called for as loudly as they demanded the dethronement of the divine<sup>26</sup>. In France, where the strife was at its keenest, the compromises were correspondingly at their most pronounced. D'Alembert and d'Holbach were the most notable aristocrats among the French Enlighteners: but no matter how liberal their principles and their philosophy, their social rank was - albeit temporarily - assured. Voltaire, as royal historiographer and dependent on royal patronage, was necessarily less than vociferous in his condemnation of Court life. Given the political and social importance of the Church at this time, the abrogation of religion constituted outright social revolution, but the repudiation of class barriers in any real sense was not a task

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<sup>24</sup> Cassirer, op. cit., p.215.

<sup>25</sup> Gay, op. cit., pp.23ff.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.25: 'The intellectual revolution over which the Enlightenment presided pointed to the abolition of hierarchy as much as to the abolition of God'.

to which the philosophers applied themselves with any overwhelming enthusiasm or determination:

Seeking to distinguish themselves, the philosophes had little desire to level all distinctions; seeking to be respected, they had no intention of destroying respectability. Their gingerly treatment of the masses, which became less patronizing as the century went on, reveals their attachment to the old order and their fear of too drastic an upheaval.<sup>27</sup>

Materially, therefore, they inevitably lived off the system they attacked, and seemed little discomfited by the compromise. Intellectually, they were seeking to eradicate a cultural tradition the roots of which went very deep indeed, and were in fact inextricably entangled in their own thoughts and formulations:

... the philosophes boasted that they were making all things new, but far from discarding their Christian inheritance, they repressed, and retained, more than they knew.<sup>28</sup>

This is Peter Gay's account of the persistent force of the Christian tradition and the Christian doctrine in the minds of the French proponents of eighteenth-century enlightened philosophy. The harder they tried to cut themselves free, the more enmeshed in their inherited tradition they became. There was an uneasy dual allegiance, but they could not allow themselves to admit it. The cultural background they denied intruded continually upon their collective psyche: if the ultimate aim was certain, the aspiration to it was troubled and disquieted; if not wholly possessed, the rational philosophers of the Enlightenment were indeed 'haunted' by the spirit of the Christian tradition<sup>29</sup>. Haunted because, as exponents of what Gay maintains was considered an exclusively *rational* philosophy<sup>30</sup>, the Enlighteners could not admit to being at all susceptible to emotional pressures. Here is the node of the apparently uneasy relationship between reason and religion in the eighteenth century in general. For what they repressed was, broadly speaking, the *emotive* appeal of Christianity: the Christian tradition as an intrinsic and integral part of their cultural and social

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.26. Here Gay's debt to his scholarly predecessor and mentor Carl Becker is evident: 'Most eighteenth-century minds were too accustomed to a stable society with fixed ranks, too habituated to an orderly code of manners and a highly conventionalized art, to be at all happy in a disordered universe', Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, New Haven, 1932, p.49.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.59.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.: 'Christianity did not retain possession of their intellects, but often it haunted them'.

<sup>30</sup> An over-simplification in the light of the consideration given to the role of feeling by Diderot and certainly by Rousseau; who, despite his ultimate estrangement from the main camp of the Enlighteners, must certainly be considered a major proponent of 18th-century enlightened thought.

background. What their general assertion of the historical independence of their age and their proclaimed new world and world-view vainly attempted to deny was not just their material dependence on the existing social order, but their historical conditioning as characters on a cultural continuum where the past underpins the present and the present relies on the past. The Enlighteners were every bit as historically, materially and culturally conditioned as any and all philosophical and intellectual movements which had preceded them, and this element of material determination manifested itself in their emotional dependence on their cultural tradition, which could not be accounted for in rational terms, and which returned uninvited to intrude upon their intellects and undermine their philosophical authority. Their denigration of the Christian tradition was born of a failure to recognize the appeal and value of this tradition to them, and the invalidity of their denigration lies in its over-emphasis on the rational at the expense, and attempted denial, of the emotional. If the principal aim of enlightened philosophy was to free the individual from received ideologies, and dissolve established tradition in preparing a path into modernity, then it was the inability to perceive, admit and justify the inevitable subjectivity of their own approach and response which prevented the philosophers from fully achieving their objective. It is in the subsequent imbalance between rational objectivity and emotional pull that the inappropriateness of the eighteenth century's perception of its own secularization process becomes apparent. The progress towards a secular, religionless world, the often affirmed goal of enlightened philosophy, is far from a unidirectional and unremitting advance. The spirit of the Christian tradition is not so easily exorcised.

There is considerable justification in the notion, therefore, that rather than a directly anti-Christian and irreligious movement, instead of an entirely original philosophy with no recourse to preceding tradition, the Enlightenment was to some extent but a derivative restatement of traditional values. The movement's very title, of course - *Enlightenment*, *Aufklärung*, 'siècle des *lumières*' - makes use of an image that was theological, and significantly Christological, long before the eighteenth century took it for its own<sup>31</sup>. The triumvirate of Christian virtues - faith, hope and charity - is to some extent perpetuated in form but disguised in name. The new philosophy is itself a kind of faith; and total, lifelong commitment to its propagation

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<sup>31</sup> Nisbet's essay 'Was ist Aufklärung?' (loc. cit.) discusses this point in some depth. Paul Hazard makes the biblical, Christian connection plain, quoting from John 8:12: 'I am the Light of the world', Hazard, trans. cit., p.31).

and dissemination is demanded of its adherents. 'Optimism', belief in the ultimate goodness of humankind and aspiration towards the achievement of human potential, is but a secularized hope: a temporalization of the nebulous Christian promise of other-worldly sublimity into a call for the realization of potential human happiness in the actual world (the cliché notion of the 'best of all possible worlds', which Voltaire chose as the main focus of his attack on the philosophy of Leibniz, demands of course the fulfilment of man in a *secular* matrix). Charity, disinterested Christian love, found its enlightened parallel in the humanitarianism, concern for and understanding of one's fellow human, that was to form the basis of the new society. In this respect, the philosophers of the Enlightenment changed nothing; instead they took upon themselves what had traditionally been ascribed to religion, for the most part left God out of their scheme of things, and claimed credit for what were the traditional precepts of the Christian faith. They may have demanded revolution, claimed to have outlawed religion forever, but they themselves assumed the yoke and carried out the work. Gay purposefully caricatures the philosophers of the Enlightenment as 'medieval clerks in modern dress, ungrateful and forgetful heirs of the Christian tradition'<sup>32</sup>. What they did, according to Gay, was to substitute for Christian values the values of the Enlightenment, changing the material matrix of the spiritual notions but perpetuating the essence of human emotional and psychical life.

Like all caricatures, however, this of Gay's is one in which certain notable features are accentuated and heightened in order to present a distorted and deliberately inaccurate, if corrective, portrait. It is a generalizing picture which, perhaps deliberately, quite fails to take into consideration the very different aims and attitudes of religion and philosophy in the eighteenth century. What was taking place in some particular contexts was, as I hope to demonstrate, not merely a crude derivation but a calculated, conscious exploitation. For if, as we have seen, the eighteenth-century philosophers appropriated the attributes and the learning of the Christian tradition, then their major fault lies therefore only in their failure to acknowledge the debt. The object of their concern was humanity itself; the matrix of their operation the real, experiential world; their aim the improvement of the material condition and the intellectual satisfaction of humankind in this world. But if the process of secularization, which for Gay represents little more than a 'piratical usurpation' of the

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<sup>32</sup> Gay, *op. cit.*, p.322.

inherently Christian religious spirit of the Western tradition, is to be understood as a symbiotic inter-relationship of sacral and secular realms, then the common notion of the Enlightenment as an age inimical to religion is clearly contradicted, and the cultural context relevant to this appraisal of Goethe's attitude to religion comes into sharper focus.

Gay does note that the term 'secularization' must be applied with care to the movement of eighteenth-century thought, following David Martin's warning against ill-considered application of the term in his (Gay's) acknowledgement that 'secularization is a word easy to use and therefore easy to misuse'<sup>33</sup>. He denies that the categorization of the dissolution of clerical concerns and abrogation of a theocentric world may be described merely as the 'secularization of life in the eighteenth century'. For Gay, 'secularization' does not denote the overall collapse of the Church, but the gradual atrophy of its power, its social, intellectual and political significance and its frame of reference:

To speak of secularization, therefore, is to speak of a subtle shift of attention: religious institutions and religious explanations of events were slowly being displaced from the center of life to its periphery.<sup>34</sup>

In these terms, religion is not destroyed, but inexorably rendered impotent; God is not obliterated, but dethroned and exiled from the primary concerns of life; religion remains a social force, but emasculated, alienated and, ultimately, thoroughly unimportant. Gay's 'subtle shift of attention' implies a gradual process of religious atrophy and the abrogation of all religious explanations of life which does not seem to differ greatly from the notion of a 'collapse' in the Church and the clerical sphere he so stringently avoids in his careful definition of secularization as a cultural process at work in the eighteenth century. His depiction is, of course, metaphorical: the 'collapse' of the Church is taking place in the opinion of the masses; but the overwhelming significance of his phraseology is of an emasculated Church and an ineffectual religious code brought about by the secularization of life and thought in the eighteenth century, and the consequent assumption by the secular realm of values, spheres of influence, and powers traditionally ascribed to the Church and to the sacral, religious view of humankind in the divinely-ordained and divinely-controlled world.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.338.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

It is Gay's assertion of 'the essential hostility between eighteenth-century religion and eighteenth-century secularism'<sup>35</sup> which underpins his definition of secularization as a phenomenon of the Enlightenment. The realm of the sacral and that of the secular are thus perceived as irreconcilable opposites and the relationship between them as one of outright antagonism. Robert Clark's analysis of the influence of the early German Enlightenment on the thought and expression of Johann Gottfried Herder reveals a similarly inadequate appraisal of the concept of secularization to which he so frequently alludes. Christian Wolff and his disciples embarked, according to Clark, upon a 'secularization of religious concepts'; Wolff's *Vernünftige Gedanken von den Wirkungen der Natur*<sup>36</sup> was the expression of a 'secularization of the universe'<sup>37</sup>; Robert Lowth's treatise on Hebrew poetry, which Herder apparently read and appreciated, served 'to secularize the Bible by subjecting the revered document to a purely secular criticism'<sup>38</sup>; acquaintance with all of which documents contributed, for Clark, to 'Herder's constant use of secular sources, his application of an inchoate historical method'<sup>39</sup>. Clark's juxtaposition of the 'secularism' of Herder's expression with the lack of precise historical method the scholar and biographer attributes to Herder only adds to the confusion engendered by his assertion of the non-anthropological nature of the Enlightenment in general (a secular world-view being inherently man-centred; the object of its concern being humanity in the realm of human experience). If there is a conceptual difference in the terms 'secularism' and 'secularization', it is surely that the former refers to a state and the latter to a process. Clark seems to commingle the 'secularism' he perceives in the writings of Herder with a vague notion of a secularization process at work in the cultural world: what he mistakes for a static end-product, something which has been rendered permanently secular, is on the contrary representative of an ongoing process through time from past to present. A movement which secularizes cannot be a-historical, since to secularize involves an awareness of the past and an intuition of the future in the transitory apprehension of a present moment. In these terms, secularization in the eighteenth century is, therefore, not a finite negation of the divinely-ordained sphere, but a progression towards a tangible and apprehensible amelioration of the human

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp.322f.

<sup>36</sup> Halle, 1712.

<sup>37</sup> Clark, op. cit., pp.12f.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp.27f.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.212.

condition in the experiential world. What is happening in the prevalent enlightened philosophy of the eighteenth-century is, I shall argue, not a simple diminution of the significance of religion, not a mere 'shift of attention' from the centre of life to the estranged and unimportant periphery, but a shift of emphasis *within* religion and the religious sphere. Secularization is neither anti-historical nor anti-religious: the Age of Enlightenment is not a faithless age.

A faithless age is an age without purpose. A faithless age cannot believe in itself, cannot aspire to any recognizable goals, is therefore unproductive and insignificant<sup>40</sup>. Such a purely sceptical outlook as is necessitated by an age of faithlessness is irreconcilable with the real and positive achievements of the Enlightenment, with its social and political progress and its intellectual endeavour. Indeed, according to Ernst Cassirer, the principal achievement of enlightened philosophy lies not in the abrogation of religion, but, conversely, in the evolution of a new, valid and lasting religion of its own:

Die stärksten gedanklichen Impulse der Aufklärung und ihre eigentliche geistige Kraft sind nicht in ihrer Abkehr vom Glauben begründet, sondern in dem neuen Ideal der Gläubigkeit, das sie aufstellt, und in der neuen Form der Religion, die sie in sich verkörpert.<sup>41</sup>

Cassirer defines this 'new form of religion' in terms of the Enlightenment's 'unquestionable faith in the reformation of the world'<sup>42</sup>, and of its own appointment and assumed ability to carry out this reformatory mission. Clearly, Cassirer's perception of religion within the Enlightenment is not of a crude debasement of Christian doctrine, nor of the simple substitution of religious faith with philosophical conviction. What Cassirer seems to point to is precisely the shifting emphasis suggested by Gay: what matters to the thinkers of the Enlightenment is not the letter of religious dogma, nor the interpretation and execution of dogma, but the analysis of the phenomenon of belief *per se*. For Cassirer, the fundamental objective of the Enlightenment is not the repudiation of religion, but the rational justification and

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<sup>40</sup> A commonplace of historiographical thought. See, for example, Goethe's well-known pronouncement: 'Alle Epochen, in welchen der Glaube herrscht, unter welcher Gestalt er auch erscheine, sind glänzend, herzergebend und fruchtbar für Mitwelt und Nachwelt. Alle Epochen dagegen, in welchen der Unglaube, in welcher Form es sei, einen kümmerlichen Sieg behauptet ... verschwinden vor der Nachwelt', *West-östlicher Divan*, Noten und Abhandlungen, 'Israel in der Wüste', HA II 208. Referred to by Cassirer, *op. cit.*, p.181.

<sup>41</sup> Cassirer, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.181: 'Hier herrscht überall ein echtschöpferisches Grundgefühl, ein unbedingtes Vertrauen zur Weltgestaltung und Welterneuerung'.

affirmation of faith as the guiding and defining principle in the individual's coming to terms with its world. Human desire for increased understanding of the self was complemented by an investigation of what had for so long been taken for granted, and faith - as distinct from the practices of the orthodox Church and the obscurantism of superstition which the Enlightenment unilaterally revoked - enjoyed a resurgence of interest and concern through the concern rationally to justify its precepts.

Religion, then, was a force to be reckoned with in the eighteenth century. Gay finds that historical evidence of the resurgence of belief which flooded Europe in the wake of the French Revolution, returning many of the former faithful to the arms of the mother Church, bears testimony enough that Christian faith was not put to death by the Enlightenment<sup>43</sup>. One may dispute the logic of Gay's argument (Christianity is, like any other philosophical, intellectual or religious movement, not logically justifiable merely in terms of its popularity and its persistence), but his premises are clear: religion was trodden underfoot by the march of philosophical progress, but the life-force was not stamped out of faith. Christianity did not stand passive and crestfallen as the philosophers of the Enlightenment stripped her bare, discarding what they disliked, distorting what they mistrusted, assuming for themselves what they thought they could exploit. Instead, the old faith itself underwent a major reconsideration - and largely thanks to the resurgence of interest and of questing intellect encouraged by the demands of enlightened philosophy. The Church had to swim with the tide of the times if it were not to be dissolved in its flow, or stagnate in a pool of torpor. The Christian faith was forced to examine itself anew, to account for itself anew, and to struggle for its recognized place in society and in the popular intellect. Theology, first attacked by rationalism, is now invaded by it<sup>44</sup>. The Christian faith defends itself against the movement of the age *by* the movement of the age. 'Es war die Zeit gekommen', writes the German literary historian Hermann Hettner, 'daß die Theologie zu ihrer Vertheidigung die Waffen von der Philosophie entlehnen mußte'<sup>45</sup>. Enlightened theology, or rational religion, is the legitimate offspring of

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<sup>43</sup> Gay, *op. cit.*, p.338: 'The religious revival that gripped the educated and the intellectuals in the wake of the French Revolution testifies to the validity of the Christian persuasion, in the midst of and after a century of philosophical propaganda'.

<sup>44</sup> See *ibid.*, p.22: 'One of the most significant social facts of the eighteenth century, a priceless gift from the enlightened style to the Enlightenment of the philosophes, was the invasion of theology by rationalism'.

<sup>45</sup> Hermann Hettner, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, Braunschweig, 1909, Zweites Buch, p.59.

eighteenth-century secularization.

It is not without significance that it was a scholar working specifically within the historical German cultural tradition who (long before Gay) pointed to this cooperative amalgamation of reason and religion, of faith in God and investigative rationalism, in the eighteenth century. Thus far, for the purposes of orientation, I have considered the Enlightenment as a European phenomenon, a single unified movement which transcended geographical, political and cultural barriers and united the continent of Europe in the proclamation of its philosophical and social goals. Cosmopolitanism was the watchword of the fraternity: British sceptics like Hume were welcomed in France, French dissidents like Voltaire were received at the court of Prussian kings. Enlightened Europe was tolerant, liberal and emancipated: all contrasting cultural heritages were apparently likewise disclaimed and discarded in the assertion of a unified, modern world of rational purity and cultural autonomy. It would be an erroneous over-simplification, however, to assert that the transcendence of geographical boundaries heralded a concomitant abrogation of cultural and historical differences. As we have seen, it is a common misconception of scholarship of the eighteenth century that the Enlightenment is to be considered as an age without historical awareness, as a philosophical movement which not only underestimates the achievements of the past, but denies that it *has* a past, which refutes any debt to cultural tradition and repudiates its origins on the continuum of Western culture in order to proclaim itself unique, unprecedented and unparalleled. It is quite absurd to suggest that the Enlightenment landed plump and fortuitous in the lap of a culturally unified Europe of the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment was indeed a revolutionary movement; but in the historic sense revolution is of course primarily the transformation of a pre-existing model, a return to source but in a different form. The Enlightenment was the product of a set of very particular social and intellectual conditions recognizable in the form and nature of the movement across the different cultural traditions which nurtured it. Paul Hazard compares the eighteenth century's view of its cultural history to a cluttered building site which has to be cleared of the miscellaneous jumble which encumbers it before a new construction can be erected<sup>46</sup>. The illogicality of the proposition here is obvious: the new building can only be

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<sup>46</sup> Hazard, *op. cit.*, p.113.

erected using existing materials. The Enlightenment was not born of nothing. Cultural tradition may be transformed, but cannot be annulled; and the significance of the transformation - the ideas engendered, movements born, the very means of expression and mediation - is dependent to a great extent upon the nature of the pre-existing culture. Carl Becker's *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* depicts a metaphorical destruction and consequent rebuilding of Augustine's 'Heavenly City' which demands a preparation for the future in terms of a re-appraisal and re-assimilation of the past<sup>47</sup>; a notion which Hazard seems to have overlooked in his insistence on the outright novelty of enlightened philosophy. Peter Gay's essay on Becker's thesis emphasizes that this utilization of traditional material and historical cultural precepts was conscious and deliberate: an informed co-ordination of modern philosophy and traditional religion, of historically-based rationalism and optimistic faith, of the materially defined secular world-view and the sacrality of a divinely ordained world<sup>48</sup>. This appraisal of the conscious nature of the philosophers' assimilation of the theological tradition into their proclaimed modern world-view is one which Gay seems to have revised in his own major work on the Enlightenment, where he maintains, in a perpetuation of his favoured bellicose *leitmotiv*, that the philosophical utilization of the precepts of the Christian tradition was an unconscious by-product of the philosophers' inability to rid themselves entirely of the influence upon them of the Christian way of life:

The battlefields of history are strewn with unintended consequences; the appropriation of Christian labors for secular purposes is not the least of these.<sup>49</sup>

If a conscious re-appraisal of traditional cultural material is not recognized and acknowledged as a motive-factor in the philosophy of the eighteenth century, it is difficult to understand and explain why, despite the Enlightenment's claim to be an international, transcultural movement, there are sharp divergences of opinion and attitude, particularly between the German and French models, and particularly and most significantly with regard to the ingression of enlightened philosophy into the

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<sup>47</sup> Becker's premise is the attempt 'to show that the *Philosophes* demolished the Heavenly City of St Augustine only to rebuild it with more up-to-date materials', op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Gay, 'Carl Becker's Heavenly City', loc. cit. p.43: 'the *philosophes* knew exactly what they were doing; they were building a new, earthly city. And in building it they used, along with much new material, some of the old Christian bricks. Far from being less modern than they knew, they were even more modern than they claimed'.

<sup>49</sup> Gay, *The Enlightenment. An Interpretation*, op. cit., p.359.

domain of theology: the seeming paradox of the eighteenth century that is 'rational religion'.

Voltaire adhered to the principles of English deism, the belief in a creative God operating according to a process of rational causality, leading to the logical conclusion that the world exists and was therefore created, by a Creator by definition divine; being something of a final compromise of rationalism with religion by which the 'miraculous' order of the universe is conceded as the sole factor of human earthly life which cannot be explained and apprehended in purely rational terms. But John Locke's treatise on religion, tellingly entitled *The Reasonableness of Christianity*<sup>50</sup>, seems to have met with little or no favour in the context of the French Enlightenment<sup>51</sup>, which apparently sought not to reconcile rational and religious precepts. French deism is essentially reductionist: religion is stripped of all non-rational elements, all mythopoeic thinking is filtered out. What remains is but a recognition of the pre-existence of some principle of universal order and regularity. Diderot and the Encyclopaedists, however, as has been seen, would have no truck with any religious interpretation or explanation of life at all. Working against the strong and rigid backdrop of Roman Catholicism, these most radical of the French Enlighteners were especially uncompromising in their general condemnation of religion. Even deism, which in its mechanistic appreciation of a distant, detached creative force, is ultimately irreconcilable with the personal, revealed God of Christianity, they rejected as 'an amorphous hybrid and a weak compromise'<sup>52</sup>. In this respect, the rational theology of the eighteenth century is not a significant force in the context of the French Enlightenment.

In Germany, however, the relationship between reason and revelation, between philosophy and theology, was considerably less polemical. Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity* finds many echoes and parallels in style and standpoint within the writings of the figures generally associated with the German Enlightenment: the speculative theology of Lessing's *Das Christentum der Vernunft* (1784)<sup>53</sup>, the

<sup>50</sup> *The Works of John Locke*, a New Edition, Corrected, in Ten Volumes, London, 1823, Vol. VII, pp.1ff.

<sup>51</sup> Gay, *The Enlightenment. An Interpretation*, op. cit., p.321, quotes from Voltaire's *English Notebook* (*Notebooks*, 45): 'Mr Lock's<sup>(51)</sup> reasonableness of Christian religion<sup>(51)</sup> is really a new religion'; replacing, for Voltaire, one set of dogmatic precepts with another and hence invalid and disagreeable.

<sup>52</sup> Cassirer, trans. cit., p.134.

<sup>53</sup> *Lessings Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, ed. Julius Petersen and Waldemar von Olshausen, Berlin, Leipzig, Wien, Stuttgart, 1925-35, Vol. 20, pp.106ff.

moral authority of Kant's *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793)<sup>54</sup>, even Fichte's highly Kantian early work *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung* (1791)<sup>55</sup>, are all concerned with the ultimate reconciliation of reason and revelation, of rational analysis and the indefinable nature of the revealed God of Christianity. It is apparent in the accounts of much post-eighteenth century scholarship of that period that the impetus of the movement of Enlightenment in Germany is held to be less toward the annihilation of a religious world-view in general than toward the reconciliation of rational and religious tempers in the propagation of a 'reasonable religion' acceptable to philosophers and Churchmen alike, to men of faith and men of reason: the appeal, direction and promotion of eighteenth-century philosophy in Germany was, broadly speaking, toward a 'reasonable faith'. Within the context of the German Enlightenment, theology as the science of religion and theological discussion as a social act retained a quite positive meaning and significance<sup>56</sup>. The German Church did not shut its doors to the Enlighteners, and the latter were not ashamed to take advantage of this hospitality. Ernst Troeltsch points again to the radically different positions of the French and German Enlightenments in their attitude to and understanding of the theological tradition:

Gleichwohl hat die Theologie wenigstens in der ersten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts in England und in der zweiten in Deutschland noch eine positive Bedeutung für die Aufklärung erlangt, während freilich die französische Aufklärung durch den tödlichen Gegensatz gegen den unbeugsamen Katholizismus zu reiner Verneinung verurteilt worden war.<sup>57</sup>

The disparity of attitude and aim between the French Enlighteners and their German counterparts may be explained initially and superficially in terms of the discrete cultural traditions which engendered the differing rational tempers of enlightened philosophy across Europe. The religious establishment in France was so deeply entrenched in the social consciousness of the country, and so solidly fortified a cultural bastion, that the philosophical movement which opposed its teaching could not concede any value whatsoever in its precepts. Religion meant the Roman Catholic Church, and all faith, all active belief in a living, revealed God had to be included in the general condemnation of Church doctrine if the Enlightenment in France were to

<sup>54</sup> *Immanuel Kants Werke*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Berlin, 1922-23, Vol. VI, pp.139-353.

<sup>55</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke*, Zweite Abtheilung, Berlin, 1845.

<sup>56</sup> See Ernst Troeltsch, 'Aufklärung', loc. cit., p.270, and Nisbet, 'Was ist Aufklärung?', loc. cit., p.86.

<sup>57</sup> Troeltsch, 'Aufklärung', loc. cit., p.270.

consolidate itself as the only viable alternative to the religious world-view it decried. The German *Aufklärer*, on the other hand, were seemingly concerned to promulgate their corresponding ideas *alongside* the established Church, to their mutual advantage. It was not in the annihilation of cultural tradition that the *Aufklärer* consolidated their movement, but in the assimilation of their philosophy with the socio-religious conditions which fostered it. Not by disclaiming all precedents, but by recognizing their cultural derivation and their debt to tradition did they secure the foundation, and therefore the future significance, of their ideals. It is in the recognition of the historical origin and dependency of the relationship between religion and philosophy in the eighteenth century that the movement of secularization in the German cultural context is distinct and demands particular attention.

Indeed, the ideas and ideals of enlightened philosophy in Germany were largely promulgated by means of clerical and theological vehicles: the Sunday sermon, for example, served as a principal medium for the spreading of reformed thinking, albeit subject to a certain degree of Christian censorship<sup>58</sup>. In the German context, it seems that the philosophers of the Enlightenment recognized the need to ally themselves to their potential adversary, and that religion in turn drew benefit from the resurgence of interest and intellectual endeavour which accompanied the questioning of received ideas. Hermann Hettner aptly encapsulates the fundamental differences between French and German attitudes to religion in the philosophical eighteenth century, though with an unaccountable concentration on Catholicism which perhaps betrays the author's own religious standpoint:

Der deutsche Aufklärer brach nicht mit den wesenhaften Grundlagen der katholischen Kirche, wie der französische, aber er suchte den Katholizismus innerlich fortzubilden.<sup>59</sup>

The historical relationship between Enlightenment and theology in the German context is not one of outright antagonism, as was so evidently the case in France, but of symbiosis; not of irreconcilable opposition, but of mutual productivity and fruitful co-existence. Cassirer, too, points to a dynamic development in eighteenth-century thought in Germany which ensues directly from the reconciliation of at first sight antagonistic principles in the formation of a new way of looking at the world:

Freilich hat der Kampf um das Recht der 'natürlichen Religion' und um das Verständnis zwischen Vernunft und Offenbarung in Deutschland niemals die

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<sup>58</sup> See Nisbet, *op. cit.*, p.86.

<sup>59</sup> Hettner, *op. cit.*, Zweites Buch, p.277.

gleiche Schärfe angenommen, die er innerhalb des französischen Kulturkreises besitzt. Denn hier tritt er auf einen anderen Gegner; hier steht er nicht mehr ausschließlich einer Orthodoxie und einer kirchlichen Hierarchie gegenüber, die mit ihrer Autorität und ihrem unbedingten Herrschaftsanspruch die freie Bewegung des Denkens zu unterdrücken strebt, sondern hier bestand die Aufgabe vor allem in der Auflockerung eines religiösen Systems, das selbst schon die mannigfachsten Keime einer neuen Denkart in sich trug.<sup>60</sup>

Fundamental to both these critics' appraisals of the relationship between reason and religion in eighteenth-century Germany, then, is an awareness of a positive and fruitful collaboration between two apparently antagonistic ways of looking at the world. In particular, it is the religious sphere which is held to have benefited from the insurgence of rational thought: Hettner implies that the *Aufklärer* encouraged the Catholic Church to undergo an internal process of dynamic growth and development; Cassirer notes that rational analysis and reconsideration furthered the germination of seeds of new thought *which were already present in the religious system*. Clearly, the symbiotic relationship between reason and religion in eighteenth-century Germany is one of synthesis, of mutually beneficial cooperation. If, as I shall demonstrate, it is to be perceived as a relationship of mutual subordination as conceptualized in the principles of binary synthesis, then the significance of Goethe's cultural milieu for an appreciation of his mode of secularization is will be clear, and the critical necessity of tracing his attitude to religion to the 'crisis of Christianity' in the eighteenth century will take on a new force and a new meaning.

Herbert Dieckmann, in an essay which makes direct comment on Cassirer's *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* and its reception by subsequent scholars, notes not only that the general view of the Enlightenment as an age inimical to religion does not hold in the German context, but that it quite fails to take into consideration the nature and significance of the real tension between rational philosophy and living faith in the eighteenth century generally:

One of the most frequent misunderstandings in the interpretation of the eighteenth century concerns its attitude to religion. Hazard sees in the hostility to Christian faith the common denominator of the multiple currents of that period. There is undoubtedly some truth in this generalization, and it is quite valid for such authors as Morelly or d'Holbach; but when it is extended to religion and faith in themselves, it leads to a complete misrepresentation of eighteenth-century thought; a thought which, far from simply opposing the

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<sup>60</sup> Cassirer, op. cit., p.234.

Church, is deeply engaged in a serious and passionate inner struggle with religion and receives many of its problems and even its very methods of thinking from the religious tradition. The Age of Enlightenment [*sic*], or, to be concrete, some of this [*sic*] representatives, penetrated to the problem of religion and faith itself and sought either new forms of religion or an acceptable modification of existing creeds. There is a deep polarity of disbelief and belief in the eighteenth century, a polarity which is to be understood as a dialectic movement.<sup>61</sup>

In the specifically German context at least, then, the overwhelming trend must be seen as being toward what Cassirer calls 'the collaboration of reason and revelation'; a fruitful co-operation between the antagonistic opposites of faith and philosophy in the formulation of a new system which admits the claims of both, furthers the interests of both, and leads to the enhancement of rational thought and religious faith:

Vernunft und Offenbarung bleiben als ursprüngliche Erkenntnisquellen anerkannt; sie sollen sich nicht bekämpfen, sondern ergänzen, und sie dürfen gewiß sein, daß kraft dieser Ergänzung ein geschlossenes Ganze, ein einheitlicher Sinn der religiösen Wahrheit zustande kommt.<sup>62</sup>

For these scholars at least, then, the relationship between reason and religion in the context of the *Aufklärung* is one of a cooperation between apparently polarized opposites which produces a new 'whole', a 'unity' of what Cassirer calls 'religious truth', a novel entity which contains and expresses the claims of both antithetical components. Expression of religious revelation and rational understanding of faith are equally significant results of this cooperation, which is best explained in terms of a binary synthesis through which each of the antithetical poles is furthered and enhanced by subordinating itself to the other.

That the ensuing system is indeed something novel, a new religious and rational order, has, however, been a matter of some dispute. Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* categorizes Kant, Fichte and the later Hegel as 'German Idealists' whose emphasis on the mind rather than on matter distinguishes them from the primary movement of French philosophy, and leads to what amounts to a propagation of traditional theology in the new philosophy they claimed to embrace and promote:

Although their efforts were in part revolutionary, they themselves were not

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<sup>61</sup> Herbert Dieckmann, *Studien zur Europäischen Aufklärung*, München, 1974, pp.218-233, 'An Interpretation of the Eighteenth Century (On: Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*)' (p.224).

<sup>62</sup> Cassirer, op. cit., p.235.

intentionally subversive; Fichte and Hegel were very definitely concerned in the defence of the State. The lives of all of them were exemplary and academic; their views on moral questions were strictly orthodox. They made innovations in theology, but they did so in the interests of religion.<sup>63</sup>

Russell's entrenched atheism lends his categorization of the 'German Idealists' a rather dismissive ironic tone: clearly, for him, their unwillingness to rid themselves of religious feeling and to strive wholeheartedly toward a religion-less world is a philosophical flaw which implicitly negates the value of their ideas and work. His implicit dismissal of Kant and his immediate philosophical followers as simply incapable of denying the personal pull of religion in order to postulate a wholly materialistic world-view is of course (albeit deliberately) naïve and one-sided: perhaps no-one, within the German context, was more aware of the dangers of indiscriminate religious 'worship' and the noxious strangle-hold held by dogmatic religious intransigence on the march of philosophical progress than Immanuel Kant; possibly no-one strove more than he to justify and to categorize moral demands in terms of purely human reason, and to promote the potential amelioration of human existence in terms of human capacity for self-improvement.

Kant's preface to the first edition of *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* starts with the premise:

Die Moral ... bedarf also zum Behuf ihrer selbst (sowohl objectiv, was das Wollen, als subjectiv, was das Können betrifft,) keinesweges der Religion, sondern, vermöge der reinen praktischen Vernunft, ist sie sich selbst genug.<sup>64</sup>

For Kant, morality points to religion, not vice versa; morality is the necessary reference to a religious end; and in this religious end is inspired the idea of God. Morality may well be divinely ordained, but the human being cannot know God or be sure of his intentions: what is known to the human individual is the moral imperative, from which notions of God, the soul, and immortality are inferentially derived:

Moral also führt unumgänglich zur Religion, wodurch sie sich zur Idee eines machthabenden moralischen Gesetzgebers außer dem Menschen erweitert, in dessen Willen dasjenige Endzweck (der Welterschöpfung) ist, was zugleich der Endzweck des Menschen sein kann und soll.<sup>65</sup>

It follows that, for Kant, the religious sphere needs must ally itself with reason: for if

<sup>63</sup> Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, ed. cit., p.677.

<sup>64</sup> Loc. cit., p.141.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp.144f. Kant's footnote emphasises the primacy of morality over religion: 'Die Moral führt unausbleiblich zur Religion'.

religion insists on maintaining an antagonistic distance from rationalism, religion will inevitably be the losing party in the war it itself declares<sup>66</sup>. Religion has first to admit that it owes its existence to morality, which in Kant's view is necessarily rational, and has a function in the material world only in terms of its amelioration of the human condition in the furtherance of a 'better' human being. Kant's categorization in this thesis of the radically evil nature of humankind, which naturally prevents full moral development, stems from his (Kant's) definition of two contradictory poles striving against one another for superiority in the human being: the moral law of reason, out of which religion and the notion of God spring, and the self-love which insists on acting only in what the individual himself considers to be his or her own best interest. Morality operates in the general human sphere and subordinates individual concerns to its all-embracing ameliorative purpose: the human being is radically 'evil' in the sense that it is instinctive self-love - concern for self-preservation, self-propagation and the satisfaction of personally assumed interest - which conditions observance of morality; and not the moral law which qualifies and determines the gratification of selfish concerns. Reason and instinct, when not co-ordinate, fight against one another to the detriment of general human interest. In this respect, Kant's acknowledgement of the role of *feeling* in mediating between rational causality and pathological concerns in the sphere of religious investigation is particularly telling:

Vernunftreligion und Schriftgelehrsamkeit sind also die eigentlichen berufenen Ausleger und Depositäre einer heiligen Urkunde ... Aber es tritt noch ein dritter Prätendente zum Amte eines Auslegers auf, welcher weder Vernunft, noch Gelehrsamkeit, sondern nur ein innerliches *Gefühl* bedarf, um den wahren Sinn der Schrift und zugleich ihren göttlichen Ursprung zu erkennen.<sup>67</sup>

For Kant, it is a particular kind of feeling of moral rectitude which, when harnessed to the rationality of a moral code, allows humankind to further the desire for instinctive self-proclamation and self-preservation in the co-ordination of the moral dictates of rationality with the felt instincts of the experiential sphere. It may be argued that what we see in Kant here is an intuition of the role of synthesis of pathological and rational drives which Schiller brought to philosophical and rhetorical fruition in his *Ästhetische Briefe* and which underpins much of Goethe's own thought and expression. But it is the differences rather than the similarities between Kant's notion

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.105: 'Denn eine Religion, die der Vernunft unbedenklich den Krieg ankündigt, wird es auf die Dauer gegen sie nicht aushalten'.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.211.

of synthesis in this respect and that of Schiller which are particularly telling here. For if one of Kant's greatest contributions to the rational religion of the eighteenth century lies in his acknowledgement of the role of moral *feeling*, it is important to differentiate between Kant's perception of the legitimate *a priori* feeling that accompanies moral insight, and the practical awareness of the role of the human senses which forms the basis of Schiller's acknowledged 'challenge to Kant' in the essay *Über Anmut und Würde*<sup>68</sup>. Nevertheless, Kant's perception of the significant role of feeling in the determination of man's rational morality and the actions perpetrated under a moral law of religion underpins the rational temper of religion in eighteenth-century Germany, and distinguishes the German tradition of enlightened thought from the mainstream of the French Enlightenment. If the sacral realm of that which is traditionally ascribed to God, determined by God, and concerned with the fostering of a divinely ordained world-view, and the secular realm of the material world, in which the human being operates with the aim of improving his or her own condition, are viewed as correlative polarities of the opposition of faith and reason, abstraction and concretion, the realm of the spiritual and the realm of the material, then what Kant describes as 'ein innerliches Gefühl' is that indefinable quality in human consciousness which transcends the set boundaries of these opposing domains. It is this kind of moral insight which gives life and breath to material existence, which gives abstract morality its strength and potency, and which inspires and directs the human being's fulfilment of rational, material objectives. Kant's exemplary rationalization of religion in the eighteenth-century world recognizes the active significance of human emotional commitment, albeit in a very narrow and specified way, as giving spirit to the letter and inner force to external action. The spirit of the Christian tradition, which for Peter Gay returns uninvited to intrude upon the intellects of the eighteenth-century philosophers, is, according to Kant, to be recognized and harnessed to fruitful productivity<sup>69</sup>.

In his consideration of the German Enlightenment's understanding and

<sup>68</sup> A concise account of this challenge is found in WW, pp.xxxv. Walter Kaufmann in *Discovering the Mind*, op. cit., Vol. I, offers another dimension to Kant's reception of Schiller's criticism with the assertion that this prompted Kant to search and account for his own personal feelings and their basis (pp.117ff.). It seems more pertinent here to concentrate on the ramifications of philosophical discussion rather than on those of personal soul-searching.

<sup>69</sup> Kaufmann offers a candid account of Immanuel Kant as a wholly regulated human being who lived his life according to the dictates of the moral imperative he adduced, and argues, after Nietzsche, that this synthesis of rational and moral imperatives is the secret of Kant's public success (ibid., pp.92ff.). Thanks are due to R H Stephenson for bringing this to my attention.

conception of itself in the eighteenth century, H B Nisbet follows Cassirer in depicting the German theological tradition as a 'theology of compromise'<sup>70</sup>, deriving from the tendency towards harmony and the reconciliation of antagonistic principles which is the linch-pin of the seminal philosophy of Leibniz as popularized and promulgated by the teachings of Christian Wolff. As Cassirer notes:

Im System Christian Wolffs kommt es nirgends zu einer schroffen Trennung zwischen dem Gehalt des Glaubens und dem des Wissens, zwischen Offenbarung und Vernunft. Die Rechte beider sollen vielmehr sorgfältig abgewogen und genau gegeneinander abgegrenzt werden.<sup>71</sup>

For the early German rationalists, then, faith and philosophy, reason and religion, are equivalent and equally important, and their equilibrium is maintained by their constant reciprocity and interpenetration. Troeltsch's depiction of the theology of the German Enlightenment as 'durch und durch apologetischer Kompromiß'<sup>72</sup> is surely born of his appreciation of a tradition of reconciliation and synthesis of philosophy and religion. However, the notion that contemporary German theology welcomed with open arms and minds the theories of Leibniz and Wolff would itself be erroneously simplistic. Wolff's rational philosophy of theology was controversial; he upset the apple-cart of conventional received belief, and his polemic was greeted with strong antipathy and aversion by the established theologians of his day. Far from a harmonious co-existence and interaction, the initial impact of enlightened philosophy on the German theological tradition was something of a loud and discordant confrontation. The only harmony to result from the co-existence of traditional theology and new philosophy in the Germany of the eighteenth century was in the initial reaction within the established Church itself, as disparate theological circles overlooked their petty doctrinal differences in order to present a united front to their rationalist aggressors. Thus a degree of opposition between philosophy and religion was indeed established:

Seit der Ausbreitung der Wolff'schen Philosophie und des englischen Deismus lag der Schwerpunkt der religiösen und kirchlichen Bewegung nicht mehr im Kampf und Gegensatz der einzelnen christlichen Kirchen und Bekenntnisse, sondern im Kampf und Gegensatz von Philosophie und Theologie, von Vernunft und Offenbarung, von Denken und Glauben.<sup>73</sup>

The German religious establishment responded to the rationalist threat by entrenching

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<sup>70</sup> Nisbet, op. cit., p.86.

<sup>71</sup> Cassirer, op. cit., p.234.

<sup>72</sup> Troeltsch, 'Aufklärung', loc. cit., p.272.

<sup>73</sup> Hettner, op. cit., Zweites Buch, p.32.

itself in intransigent fundamentalism. Wolff, whose principal objective was to prove by means of reason that God exists, was proclaimed a miscreant, and the ideas he expounded were denounced as dangerous, anti-Christian and atheistic. He himself was - albeit temporarily - ousted from his professorial post at the University of Halle and suffered personal antagonism and ostracism<sup>74</sup>. Nevertheless, Wolff's application of rational philosophy to theological domains, his reasoning to the existence of God, stimulated much interest and fostered a not inconsiderable following in the early eighteenth century. The Church's initial recourse to dogma and biblical absolutism did not reflect favourably on the religious establishment against the attractive clarity of Wolff's systematic reasoning. Indeed, the French scholar Marcel Thomann notes that one of the first self-appointed tasks of the so-called Encyclopaedists was a translation and adaptation of the works of Christian Wolff, recognized by the French Enlightenment as a seminal figure in the march of rational, philosophical progress<sup>75</sup>. Voltaire's personal dislike and philosophical disapproval of Wolff, which Thomann concisely documents, stems, according to the scholar, from Wolff's own intransigent dogmatism: 'écrasez l'infâme' was, after all, directed against all absolute dogmas and doctrines, of which Wolff's metaphysic, which seemed to claim to explain the inexplicable and determine the indeterminable, was one<sup>76</sup>. Despite the judgement of Elie Luzac, quoted by Thomann, that Wolff remains 'l'auteur le moins élégant que l'on connaisse'<sup>77</sup>, Mirabeau's appraisal that Wolff is 'celui qui eut l'influence la plus grande et la plus utile sur l'esprit humain en Allemagne'<sup>78</sup> holds sway over the judgement of the significance of Christian Wolff for the spread of enlightened philosophy in general and for the German *Aufklärung* in particular. Indeed, although Wolff's philosophy is generally agreed to be both shallow and derivative, his strength

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Erstes Buch, pp.217f.

<sup>75</sup> Marcel Thomann, 'Voltaire et Christian Wolff', in *Voltaire und Deutschland*, ed. Peter Brockmeier et al., Stuttgart, 1978, pp.123f.: 'Faut-il rappeler que le projet initial des promoteurs de l'*Encyclopédie* était l'édition de Wolff, traduit et adapté?' (p.129), [Need one be reminded that the initial project of the Encyclopaedists was an edition, translation and adaptation of the works of Wolff?].

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.132: 'Nul n'ignore cependant qu'en plus de la métaphysique il [Voltaire] déteste les dogmes en tout genre: "Ecrasez l'infâme". Or Wolff est aussi l'incarnation du "système" figé et dogmatique. Sa métaphysique ne prétend-elle pas expliquer l'inexplicable?' [All are aware, moreover, that, even more than metaphysics, Voltaire detests all dogma: "Ecrasez l'infâme". Now, Wolff is also the incarnation of the fixed and dogmatic "system". Does his metaphysic not itself claim to explain the inexplicable?].

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p.125, [the least elegant author known to us].

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.124, [he who had the greatest and the most useful influence on the spirit of man in Germany].

lies not in the originality of his thought but in the part he plays in the formation of the German mind. 'Mit Recht sagt Hegel, daß vor Allen Wolff der Lehrer der Deutschen genannt wird', claims Hettner<sup>79</sup>. It is the teaching of Christian Wolff which obliges the German religious establishment, initially somewhat against its will, to accept and assimilate the rationalist trend of enlightened thought, laying the foundation for the eventual synthesis of reason and revelation expounded in the eighteenth century initially by Baumgarten and later by Semler<sup>80</sup>. Wolff's systematization of the more abstruse Leibnizian philosophy was essentially a dogmatic and unimaginative popularization, a justification of non-rational belief through a compromise with rational proofs; and was quickly overtaken and superseded by the subsequent scholarly and philosophical trends of the German eighteenth century<sup>81</sup>. Wolff it was who rocked the boat, harnessing the authority of his predecessor Leibniz to do so; but the largest waves were made by those who followed him. In the wake of the Wolffian theology of rational proof, the Christian Church was denigrated and ridiculed for its radically fundamentalist reaction:

Es wurde zum guten Ton gerechnet, das Christenthum geringzuschätzen und es höchstens als nützlichen Zügel des Pöbels gelten zu lassen.<sup>82</sup>

One positive aspect of this response, however, was the increased exegetic study encouraged within the domain of bibliocentric theology. Entrenched biblical absolutism engendered an initially negative response to religion in the philosophical sphere: the absolute veracity of the Bible claimed by religious fundamentalists, the indisputability of its divine revelation, was first questioned and then refuted. Fundamentalist recourse to biblical source was, in this respect, essentially counter-productive. But most significantly, simultaneous with a loss of faith in the primacy of biblical text came an appreciation of the Bible as a cultural phenomenon, as a poetic work of supreme human value quite consonant with the principles of the enlightened movement. Viewed as a work of human endeavour, the Scriptures were perceived as a

<sup>79</sup> Hettner, op. cit., Erstes Buch, p.199.

<sup>80</sup> See *ibid.*, Zweites Buch, pp.259ff., for a full discussion of Semler's contribution to the tradition of German theological rationalism.

<sup>81</sup> See Gay, op. cit., pp.329f.

<sup>82</sup> Hettner, op. cit., Zweites Buch, p.32. The Marxist overtones, or undertones, in Hettner's account of the early 18th century's judgement of the role of religion in the light of a rational, materialistic theology are not without significance. It has been argued, of course, that Marx's definition of religion as a useful 'opium of the masses' implies the social comment that the unconditional acceptance of the precepts of religion is only necessary in order to combat man's sense of helplessness in the face of the world's evils, and that religion would have no function whatsoever if these social evils were abolished. (See, for example, H B Acton, *What Marx Really Said*, London, 1967, pp.24f.)

creative delight in themselves:

Die Bibel ist, wie schon Herder scharf hervorhebt, unendlich menschlicher und darum unendlich dichterischer.<sup>83</sup>

This appreciation of the Bible as the human conception of the divine order is one of the major achievements deriving from the inter-relationship of reason and religion, and in this respect, no single contribution to the religious character of German eighteenth-century thought is as significant as that of Johann Gottfried Herder. <sup>For Hettner,</sup> Herder's approach to theology may be described as somewhat 'untheologisch', rooted as it is in his emotional attraction to the Bible as a work and source of poetic folklore. The religion he embraces is not dependent upon textual revelation; the theology he expounds is not rooted in dogmatic biblical absolutism. Nor is his metaphysic directed at the rationalization of faith and the material justification of the existence of God. Herder's faith and the means by which he expresses it are evolved from his appreciation and understanding of the position of the Judaeo-Christian Bible on the continuum of Western civilization, as a text born of a specific mythological and anthropological tradition which it in turn disseminates and perpetuates<sup>84</sup>. Herder's religion is in this way intensely human and is based on a profoundly personal, yet universally significant, appreciation of the fundamentally human and humanitarian nature of the biblical text.

Herder's own avowedly idiosyncratic approach to the Bible and to the dissemination of the biblical tradition is based, as he himself admits and to which he gave telling notice in a famous essay, on the writings of Thomas Abbt<sup>85</sup>. Herder perceives, in the style of Abbt, echoes and resonances of the style of the Bible: he sees Abbt's imagery to be frequently the imagery of the Scriptures; his message that of the theological tradition. Abbt's overwhelming contribution to the tradition he consciously and unashamedly uses is, for Herder, his *personal appropriation* ('nur freilich *sich zu eigen gemacht*'<sup>86</sup>) of received biblical notions, images and language. Herder attempts to define this 'biblical style' of Abbt's, a style which is often mentioned by preachers and non-preachers alike, without, as Herder perceives, a true and fitting appraisal of its nature, its significance, or its contribution to the overwhelming message of Abbt's

<sup>83</sup> Hettner, op. cit., Zweites Buch, p.113.

<sup>84</sup> See *ibid.*, Drittes Buch, pp.56ff.

<sup>85</sup> Herder, *Ueber Thomas Abbt's Schriften, Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Suphan, Berlin, 1877, Vol.II, pp.249ff.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.278 (Herder's italics).

writings. His appraisal of the force and import of the biblical imagery of Thomas Abbt is quoted here at length, because it indicates with acute relevance Herder's awareness of the emotional power of the Bible as a cultural source with a particular, exceptional, unparalleled appeal to the reader or listener. The message of the Bible, contained in its language and expressed in its imagery, is best reiterated and most appropriately conveyed in the language of the biblical tradition:

Und *Bilder aus der Religion*? Warum nicht? wenn sie passend, schildernd, bekannt oder gar rührend sind. Die Religion ist eine reiche Quelle solcher Bilder, und warum soll ich es mir verbieten, daß, wenn ich nicht blos für den reinen Verstand, sondern mit Bildern reden will, und muß, daß ich zu der Quelle eile, in die meine Einbildungskraft in zarter Kindheit getaucht wurde, aus der in das Gedächtniß meiner Leser Ströme geleitet wurden: die mir am nächsten zur Hand, meinen Lesern die sicherste, und für meine Materie vielleicht die ergiebigste, die nahrhafteste, die wohlschmeckendste ist? Freilich! wenn *Philologen auf abenteuerlichen Kreuzzügen*, nicht Bilder unsrer Religion, sondern blos der Orientalischen Seite unsrer Religion geben: nicht sie geben, um in einer edlen, bekannten und nachdrücklichen Sprache, sondern um *seltsam, fremde*, oder gar *possierlich* zu reden: so mag dies Mißbrauch sein; nur hebe er nicht den Gebrauch auf, sonst verschließt man uns ein Bilderkabinett, das ehrwürdig, reizend, reich ist, jedem offen steht, und zum Glücke uns von Jugend auf offen stand.<sup>87</sup>

What is apparent in the writings of Thomas Abbt, and most effectively conveyed in Herder's appraisal thereof, is the emotional power and force of the Bible as a cultural entity, as an integral part of the human being's upbringing and experience, as a document - ostensibly arid words on an impersonal page - which arouses feeling, unleashes emotion, produces a sensuous response. Indeed, the inefficacy of abstract rationalism without any consideration of and service to human emotionalism is a recurring theme in the writings of Thomas Abbt:

Kurz, weder die Metaphysik über das menschliche Herz, noch das alberne Zeug ohne Philosophie über dasselbe ist für den gemeinen Mann zugerichtet.<sup>88</sup>

The important figure is the human being, the significant matrix is the world, but material well-being does not discount, negate or abrogate the spiritual: it assimilates the emotional into the material, emphasizes the emotional matrix of the human mind, and promotes a moral authority dependent on ethical duty in the world, dictated by

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.286 (Herder's italics).

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Abbt, *Vom Verdienste*, Berlin, Stettin, 1765, p.353.

individual conscience and guided by personal feelings<sup>89</sup>. It is the potential power of the appeal to human feeling which characterizes the rational religion of the German Enlightenment in its promotion of a philosophically acceptable religion which accounts for, builds upon, and in turn disseminates the emotional force of the Scriptures and of the theological tradition based upon them. Reason, according to Kant's schematic analysis of the relationship between human morality and the notion of God, instigates faith; but it is feeling which gives it force and meaning, and carries it to its potential. Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* defines 'Glaube' according to Aquinas' indisputably rational appreciation of conscious and informed appropriation of feeling: [*fides est*] *actus intellectus, secundum quod movetur a voluntate ad assentiendum*. Human feeling is recognized as the significant inspiratory force in the fruitful tension between reason and revelation, between rationalism and religion, in the German eighteenth century. A study by the modern German scholar Anselm Maler of epic verse in the eighteenth century categorizes a mid-century movement in Germany as 'Dieses Programm einer ästhetischen Emanzipation des religiösen Gefühls'<sup>90</sup>. Maler's particular concern here is with the religious poetry of Friedrich Klopstock, whose *Messias* carries the mystical intensity of the Christian tradition into an ostensibly secular, literary text:

Klopstock bejaht die poetische Darstellung des göttlichen Mysteriums, weil er die Dichtkunst als Nachahmung des 'Geist Schöpfers' für ebenbürtig hält, und führt mit seiner Argumentation mitten in die Problematik der ästhetischen Säkularisation, durch welche die Gegenstände der Bibel mit Heilsgeschichte dem privaten Schönheitsempfinden überantwortet werden.<sup>91</sup>

The author's categorization of Klopstock's utilization of religious material and the corresponding effect thereof on the receptive consciousness as 'aesthetic secularization' conveys precisely the notion of a co-ordination of sacral and secular realms of human experience in a personal, emotional response. Clearly, what is held to be occurring in the cultural re-appraisal of the religious tradition in the German eighteenth century is an awareness of the human significance of religious ideas when

<sup>89</sup> Stephenson in *Goethe's Wisdom Literature* notes the distinction common in the 18th century, and certainly drawn by Abbt, between intellectual persuasion (*Überführung*) and ethical conviction (*Überzeugung*): it is in the sensuous appeal of the external, linguistic form that moral truths find their true force and meaning (op. cit., pp.147f.).

<sup>90</sup> Anselm Maler, 'Versepos', in *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*. Band 3: *Deutsche Aufklärung bis zur Französischen Revolution 1680-1789*, ed. Rolf Grimminger, München, Wien, 1980, pp.365ff., (p.384).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p.379.

couched in a familiar language which speaks directly to the human being and encourages an emotional response in the human consciousness.

The overall trend of eighteenth-century biblical exegesis, then, is toward a humanistic appreciation of the human origins of the text and its implications, its significance and its force for humanity as a whole. As the human being understands and interprets the world according to his or her individual experience, so it is that the uniqueness of the individual personality lends uniqueness and vitality to the cultural *Gemeingut* which has been inherited, of which the religious tradition is an integral part. Christianity, in its purest form - as the religion of Christ, not in the guise or form of any particular denomination or creed - is not an arid system of dogma, but demands active, personal involvement: the Bible, for the enlightened theologians of the German eighteenth century, is a textbook for living. The stark differentiation is between the Christian religion as an established system, on the one hand, and the 'religion of Christ' which is to be perceived in the spirit of biblical myth:

Das Christenthum, fortgehend durch alle Zeiten und Nationen, war ... eine über allen Nationalismus erhöhte Menschen- und Völkerreligion; nicht nur Religion also, sondern die einzige Religion der Menschheit, höchste Tendenz und Bestimmung der menschlichen Natur, Humanität.<sup>92</sup>

It is this quest for true Christianity, for the living God of the revealed Christian religion, untrammelled by formality and untarnished by dogma, which characterizes the rational temper of religious investigation in the German eighteenth century.

For Johann Christian Edelmann, it is the dogmatic intransigence of the Lutheran tradition which has transformed the living truths of the Christian Bible into what Edelmann calls a 'Götzen-Bild der Buchstaben'<sup>93</sup>: the dynamic truths of the Christian faith are stultified by excessive adherence to the letter of dogma, to the external forms of prescribed patterns of worship. It is this suffocation of the spirit of the Christian tradition upon which Edelmann vents his wrath; the spirit itself he

<sup>92</sup> Hettner, op. cit., Drittes Buch, p. 82.

<sup>93</sup> In *Moses mit Aufgedeckten Ansichten* (1740), I 80. Quoted by Walter Grossmann in his edition of Edelmann's *Abgenöthigtes jedoch Andern nicht wieder aufgenöthigtes Glaubens-Bekennniß*. Faksimile-Neudruck der Ausgabe 1746 mit einer Einleitung von Walter Grossmann, Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt, 1969, p.XVII. A notion which Nietzsche may be seen to have taken to heart in his own parodistic *Götzen-Dämmerung*, where the implication may be that biblical absolutism stifles human development by its unconditional observance of the letter of the religious tradition: 'Ich fürchte, wir werden Gott nicht los, weil wir noch an die Grammatik glauben', *Werke*, ed. Colli, Montinari, Berlin, 1969, Sechste Abteilung, Dritter Band, (VI 3), p.72.

attempts to maintain, to enhance and to promote.

Edelmann's unashamed Spinozism brought only vilification and castigation upon him: his latter-day apologist Walter Grossmann defends him as a 'spirit out of time', a prophet unwelcome in his own country, categorized and dismissed with the stigma of atheistic materialism, of Spinozism, thrust upon him by a contemporary world as yet unwilling to listen to a non-orthodox approach to religion, to the inherited religious tradition and the accepted religious world-view<sup>94</sup>. Grossmann notes that the overwhelming tone of Edelmann's writings is 'ein stolzes aufklärerisches Gefühl'<sup>95</sup>. The object of Edelmann's most vituperative criticism was not, according to Grossmann, religion itself, but the arid, entrenched dogmatism of the Church. His own deeply religious feeling and personally engaged theology are held to pervade all his writings. Edelmann's Spinozistic language, for Grossmann, reveals a continuing urge to seek after the Creator in the continuing metamorphosis of creation, to convey the dynamism of creation in the dynamism of a language of feeling. Grossmann asserts that Edelmann's overwhelming aim is the communication to his readers of the living image of the living God ('des alles erfüllenden, alles belebenden and bewegenden Wesens')<sup>96</sup>. Feeling co-exists with reason: 'empfinden, schauen und betrachten stehen nebenbürtig neben erkennen', as Grossmann puts it<sup>97</sup>. Edelmann's great and greatly overlooked contribution to the rational temper of religion in eighteenth-century Germany is his communication of a God he rationally approved and personally experienced in the felt dynamism of his language, and in his castigation of an ecclesiastical tradition persistently concerned with the stifling of true religious feeling in the furtherance of its formal doctrines.

Lessing, who knew and appreciated the writings of Edelmann, although he did not, for very pertinent political reasons, propagandize and openly patronize them as he

<sup>94</sup> Walter Grossmann, *Johann Christian Edelmann. From Orthodoxy to Enlightenment*, Mouton, The Hague, 1976: 'For the first time in *Moses* a German thinker, writing in his mother tongue, openly professed his agreement with Spinoza. Edelmann had no immediate followers, since his work aroused only indignation against him and brought only vilification upon him. Half a century later Spinoza's name came to be mentioned openly and with reverence by Goethe and Herder. The story of the condemnation or silencing of the work of Edelmann and, with it, of the religious ideas and criticism of Spinoza, is part of the history of German intellectual life between 1740 and 1775, particularly in the Prussia of Frederick II', (p.112).

<sup>95</sup> J C Edelmann, *Abgenöthigtes jedoch Andern etc.*, ed. cit., p.XVIII.

<sup>96</sup> *Moses etc.*, loc.cit., II 157. See Grossmann, *J C Edelmann. From Orthodoxy to Enlightenment*, ed. cit., pp.130, 135.

<sup>97</sup> In his edition of Edelmann's *Abgenöthigtes jedoch Andern etc.*, ed. cit., p.XVII.

did those of the equally contentious Hermann Samuel Reimarus<sup>98</sup>, distinguishes the religion of Christ from the Christian religion in a series of consequent maxims published under the title *Die Religion Christi*. Lessing's premise is primarily and unequivocally the essential humanity of Jesus Christ:

Ob Christus mehr als Mensch gewesen, das ist ein Problem. Daß er wahrer Mensch gewesen, wenn er überhaupt gewesen, daß er nie aufgehört hat, Mensch zu sein, das ist ausgemacht.

It is therefore, according to Lessing, the humanity of Christ which distinguishes the religion embraced and promoted by him as a person from the Christian religion which takes his name:

Folglich sind die Religion Christi und die christliche Religion zwei ganz verschiedene Dinge.<sup>99</sup>

The quest for the fundamental truths of human existence which fired the Enlightenment as a general cultural phenomenon, fires equally the search for divine revelation in the personality of Christ, freed from the shackles of dogmatic apocrypha and extraneous forms of worship. Lessing's paramount concern is with the material basis of the religious faith he expounds: the human existence of the Godhead he reveres and the active, ameliorative morality of the faith he embraces. His personal belief does not compromise his philosophical precision. Indeed, in a famous letter to his brother Karl, Lessing had pointed out the inherent dangers of an indiscriminately rationalizing approach to religion:

Mit der Orthodoxie war man, Gott sei Dank, ziemlich zu Rande; man hatte zwischen ihr und der Philosophie eine Scheidewand gezogen, hinter welcher eine jede ihren Weg fortgehen konnte, ohne die andere zu hindern. Aber was tut man nun? Man reißt diese Scheidewand nieder und macht uns unter dem Vorwande, uns zu vernünftigen Christen zu machen, zu höchst unvernünftigen Philosophen.<sup>100</sup>

For Lessing, human reason is necessarily paramount in the search for a valid religion:

Ich sollte es der Welt mißgönnen, daß man sie mehr aufzuklären suche? Ich sollte es nicht von Herzen wünschen, daß ein jeder über die Religion bei meinen Sudeleien einen andern Zweck hätte, als jene großen Absichten

<sup>98</sup> See Grossmann, *J C Edelmann. From Orthodoxy to Enlightenment*, ed. cit., pp.174ff. Grossmann sketches the main political factors hampering free speech and philosophical innovation in the Germany of Frederick II: 'The fact is that in 1780 it was still hazardous to write or to say what Edelmann had dared to say in 1740' (p.177).

<sup>99</sup> *Lessings Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, ed. cit., Vol. 23, pp.352f.

<sup>100</sup> 2 ii 1774. See G E Lessing, *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Wolfgang Stammer, München, 1950, Vol. 2, pp.1132f.

befördern zu helfen?<sup>101</sup>

Lessing shows himself contemptuous of the platitude that in the controversy between reason and revelation, in the ostensibly irreconcilable polarity of instinctive faith and rational investigation, the 'truth', whatever it is and however it is to be obtained, lies somewhere vaguely between the two extremes. Only reason, for Lessing as for Kant, can decide the possibility and claims of revelation in terms consonant with human appreciation and understanding<sup>102</sup>. The standpoint of the eighteenth-century German rationalists is, therefore, in this respect, no weak compromise, but an informed co-operation of reason and religion, of which the ultimate affirmation and only legitimate goal is the amelioration of the human material state through the improvement of moral awareness. Lessing had no reservations in subscribing to the deist thesis that basic Christianity is perfectly simple ethical teaching, that the ultimate aim of religion is to promote a better human in a better world through the prescription and propagation of certain behavioural requirements.

In Lessing's *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, an unequivocal attempt to define historically and materially the influence of religious faith on human civilization, there is a well-known apparent inadequacy in Lessing's formulation of rationally defined morality over purely revealed religion, which arises from a superficial contradiction on Lessing's part. In the 4th paragraph of his treatise he asserts that:

Erziehung gibt dem Menschen nichts, was er nicht auch aus sich selbst haben könnte: sie gibt ihm das, was er aus sich selbst haben könnte, nur geschwinder und leichter. Also gibt die Offenbarung dem Menschengeschlecht nichts, worauf die menschliche Vernunft, sich selbst überlassen, nicht auch kommen würde.<sup>103</sup>

In the 77th paragraph, however, Lessing revises this judgement and claims that revealed Christianity has indeed helped the human being to an understanding and appreciation of his world which human reason would never have reached unaided:

Und warum sollten wir nicht auch durch eine Religion, mit deren historischen Wahrheit, wenn man will, es so mißlich aussieht, gleichwohl auf nähere und bessere Begriffe vom göttlichen Wesen, von unsrer Natur, von unsern

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.1132.

<sup>102</sup> A particularly interesting point, perhaps, as my supervisor pointed out, in the light of Goethe's saying, 'Man sagt, zwischen zwei entgegengesetzten Meinungen liege die Wahrheit mitten inne. Keineswegs! Das Problem liegt dazwischen, das Unschaubare, das ewig tätige Leben, in Ruhe gedacht' (HA XII 422, §417; Hecker §616).

<sup>103</sup> *Lessings Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, ed. cit., Sechster Teil, pp.61ff., (p.64).

Verhältnissen zu Gott, geleitet werden können, auf welche die menschliche Vernunft von selbst nimmermehr gekommen wäre?<sup>104</sup>

One frequently postulated solution to this apparent contradiction in Lessing's thought is the notion, which Lessing himself adumbrated, that revelation, in terms of a non-rational religious force, is superfluous in the face of human reason, but that, although ultimately unnecessary inasmuch as reason will achieve its own ends unaided in time, is nonetheless a help, an attribute to reason, in accelerating the advance towards the goal. What must be emphasized here, however, is that this 'goal' is a necessarily undefined ultimate 'truth'; undefinable because its definition would be its achievement, and its achievement is humanly impossible without its definition. For Lessing, reason is the means towards the achievement of this goal: a dynamic progression, not a static end-product. Reason and revelation are two conceptually irreconcilable polarities which nonetheless work together in the progression to an ultimate goal which they cannot define. Lessing's conception of the *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* depends on the constant co-ordination of reason and revelation; the reconciliation, in co-operative tension, of these two philosophical and historical polarities.

What is most significant about the universal, positive religion of Christ proclaimed by Lessing in particular is that its timelessness, its transcendence of temporal and cultural barriers, is rooted firmly in a historical awareness of the civilization which nurtured it. Both Lessing and Herder evolved their religious concepts from the perspective of a historical appreciation of the cultural origins and implications of the Christian tradition. Indeed, it is in the domain of enlightened theology, as it advances from the abstractions of Leibniz and the systematization of Wolff, that the spirit of historical awareness manifests itself as the fundamental principle of the German theological Enlightenment. For in the German context, the theologians of the Enlightenment were acutely aware of the debt they owed to their forerunners, the scholars of the Renaissance and post-Renaissance cultural periods throughout Europe. The study by Semler, a leading exponent of German enlightened theology, of the historical basis of biblical events, derives ultimately from Erasmus, whom Semler is pleased to call 'the father of Protestant theology'<sup>105</sup>. Thus the charge

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p.79.

<sup>105</sup> See Cassirer, op. cit., pp.187f.: 'Semler ... knüpft in seinem Kampf gegen die Orthodoxie wieder unmittelbar an Erasmus an, den er als den eigentlichen Schöpfer der protestantischen Theologie bezeichnet'.

of anti-traditionalism that is too often levelled at the Age of Enlightenment certainly does not hold in the domain of German theological philosophy. Enlightened theology is overtly conscious of the general intellectual context out of which it evolved, and the imputation of temporal independence, arrogant dismissal of tradition, is definitively refuted by a consideration of the historical basis and character of the German Enlightenment. For enlightened theology does far more than reconcile faith with reason within the confines of a 'rational religion'. The religious ideals of the German Enlightenment cannot be reduced to an equation of belief with the acceptance of certain logically valid propositions. To view the Enlightenment as an era of pure intellectualism, unconditionally upholding the primacy of thought and theoretical evaluation, is to misrepresent the force of enlightened philosophy in its active emancipation of religion from the stranglehold of doctrinaire dogmatism. The theology of the German Enlightenment, by cementing itself firmly in the bedrock of its historical origins, succeeds in transcending all differences and points of conflict within the concepts and precepts of religious belief, and, as Cassirer puts it, 'emphatically proclaims the identity of religion amid all its different rites and despite all controversies regarding ideas and opinions'<sup>106</sup>. What the critical spirit of the eighteenth century demands, therefore, is a liberation from narrow-minded dogmatic intransigence, which will encourage aspiration to a comprehensive and universal awareness of God<sup>107</sup>. Such a transformation of the religious consciousness is effected by a synthesis of the rational and historical spirits of the age: the polarity of the concepts of reason and history is recognized and defined, and the inner movement of religious thought in the eighteenth century depends upon the reciprocal inter-relationship of these two opposing forces. The relevance and significance of Cassirer's terminology for an understanding of the heuristic usefulness of the concept of binary synthesis with regard to the relationship between reason and revelation in the German eighteenth century is such that his account deserves to be quoted in full:

Die noch immer herrschende, und, wie es scheint, unausrottbare Vorstellung, daß das achtzehnte Jahrhundert der geschichtlichen Welt fremd und verständnislos gegenübergestanden habe, daß seine Denkweise schlechthin 'unhistorisch' gewesen sei, wird schon durch einen Blick auf die Entwicklung

<sup>106</sup> The translation is Koelln and Pettigrove's, trans. cit., p.165. See p.221 of Cassirer's original *Philosophie der Aufklärung*: 'so tritt [die Aufklärung] mit allem Nachdruck für die Identität der Religion in aller Verschiedenheit der Riten und in allem Gegensatz der Vorstellungen und Meinungen ein'.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

der religiösen Problematik unmittelbar und schlagend wiederlegt. Denn die innere Wandlung, die hier einsetzt, ist eben dadurch bedingt, daß die Religion sich der Herrschaft des metaphysischen und theologischen Denkens entringt und sich einen neuen Maßstab, eine neue Norm der Beurteilung, erschafft. Diese Norm ist keine einfache; sie ist vielmehr auf zwei voneinander verschiedene Momente gegründet, die sie vereint und die sie miteinander in Einklang zu setzen sucht. Was sich in ihr darstellt, ist eine Synthese rationalen und historischen Geistes. Die Vernunft wird auf die Geschichte, die Geschichte auf die Vernunft bezogen: und in dieser Wechselbeziehung wird eine neue religiöse Gesamtanschauung und ein neues religiöses Erkenntnisideal gewonnen. Vernunft und Geschichte werden klar geschieden und in einer ständigen Spannung gegeneinander erhalten, auf welcher die gesamte innere Bewegung des religiösen Denkens im achtzehnten Jahrhundert beruht.<sup>108</sup>

The intellectual and cultural forces at work demand that theology, in order to defend its metaphysic of religion which is rooted in historical event and material existence, effect within itself the transition from dogmatic assertion to historical validation. The Age of Enlightenment, in the German context, is essentially an era in which religion is able, indeed obliged, to justify itself precisely by taking stock of its cultural origins and implications.

It is therefore apparent that the general judgement of the eighteenth century as an inherently secular age is one which requires considerable qualification and justification. Following Peter Gay's dictum that secularization 'is a word easy to use and therefore easy to misuse', it is advisable to found an analysis of the cultural processes at work in the age of Enlightenment upon a detailed and precise understanding of the nature and implications of the secularization process. The relationship between past cultural tradition and the 'present' moment in culture plays a significant role in this definition of secularization: the notion that the eighteenth century was a culturally and temporally autonomous age, abrogating all historical derivation and debt to tradition, has, it is hoped, been emphatically rejected. The Enlightenment, as has been said, was not born of nothing. That many of the principal tenets and ideas embraced by the eighteenth-century philosophers derive ultimately from pre-eighteenth-century movements: from the primary English materialist philosophy of the seventeenth century; from Renaissance and post-Renaissance

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., pp.244f.

humanism; from, indeed, the scholarship of ancient Classical scholars, has been indicated above. The Enlightenment as a general philosophical age and socio-cultural movement was emphatically aware, therefore, of its own place on a cultural continuum progressing onward from past to future through a specious present moment: a moment which, if apprehended, reflects the past and projects the future. The Enlightenment is the ongoing result of a 'secular trend' as defined in the previous chapter: a gradual progression from one end to another in a process which may be called, for the sake of argument and in anticipation of future justification, a process of secularization.

Furthermore, the categorization of the eighteenth century as a secular age does not imply the outright negation of the religious world-view. To remain within the German context directly relevant to this study, the process of secularization does not imply the gradual material atrophy of religious concerns and the intellectual progress toward the abolition of the concept of God. On the contrary, secularization points to a re-appraisal of religion in terms of objectively investigative rationalism, a justification of abstract reason in terms of its meaningfulness for the world in which it operates: in short, a mutually underscoring, mutually dependent and mutually conciliative communion of rational and religious tempers. The process of secularization ensues from the tension between sacral and secular realms of application and understanding: the force and implication of the secularization process derive from the co-operation of abstract reasoning and instinctive belief, of knowledge and faith, of intellectual appreciation and felt existence. Kant's understanding of objective morality and subjective desires harnessed together in productive co-operation only when human 'inner feeling' is recognized and acclaimed; Edelmann's castigation of arid dogmatism which stifles the potential of true human faith; Herder's acknowledgement of the power of language when related to individual experience; Lessing's insistence on the human appeal of the humanity of Jesus Christ; all point towards a conception of the religious tradition which is rationally justifiable only insofar as it admits of the power of non-rational and non-definable forces in human consciousness. Human feeling exists, as a non-manifest, non-tangible force in consciousness: the object of eighteenth-century religious rationalism is not only to acknowledge this feeling but to express and convey it in and through the arid abstraction of linguistic communication. Secularization is this concretion of feeling, the expression of the inchoate, the

encapsulation in the material matrix of the intangible experience of faith, instinct, belief, and feeling. Secularization expresses the otherwise inexpressible. The primarily sacral does indeed become ostensibly secular: the material world, in the writings of the eighteenth-century religious rationalists, assumes for itself what had traditionally been ascribed to religion. But in this respect the entire theological tradition would have to be described as a 'secularization': the sermons preached and the tracts written are expressed and conveyed to the world by the worldly media of the human voice and pen. What must be emphasized here is that feeling is not finite; it is not a question of a simple transfer from one realm of application to another, but of a reciprocal interaction between two opposing realms to their mutual benefit, development and dynamic growth. Secularization as a cultural phenomenon of the eighteenth century ensues from the productive co-operation of sacral and secular realms by which faith finds its justification in the secular matrix, and the material world acquires purpose and direction from its active acknowledgement of the working presence of the spiritual.

As Lessing had been at pains to point out, the 'truth' in the tension between these polar oppositions in the eighteenth-century world-view does not lie somewhere between the two extremes in a weak compromise of reason with faith, or of belief with rationalism. According to Schiller's schema, to which he gives active expression in his philosophical writings, the human being's approximation of the 'truth' of existence, the aspiration toward the fulfilment of human potential, demands the co-ordination of the most radically opposed components of physical and spiritual existence by which neither, and yet both, has precedence over the other. Self-interest submits to the moral law: the moral law serves a revised and improved self-interest. Reason defines faith: faith gives meaning and direction to a committed and experiential reason. Lessing, and most emphatically Kant, had emphasized that religion had to bow to the demands of reason in order to justify itself - Lessing by proclaiming the material origin of the Christian faith in the living personality of Jesus Christ; Kant in his declaration that religion loses any war it declares on reason - : conversely, and correspondingly, enlightened philosophy finds its force, its direction and its justification precisely by taking stock of the non-rational elements within it:

In ihren Ursprüngen und in ihrem Wesen ist die Aufklärung nachhaltig und in vielfältiger Weise bestimmt worden durch das religiöse Denken und Fühlen und durch die religiöse und metaphysische Tradition, von der sie sich zu

befreien suchte.<sup>109</sup>

The polarity between the two primary concepts in eighteenth-century thought is recognized and precisely defined; the opposing elements are not compromised one with the other in a simple levelling process. Clearly distinguished, reason as the guiding principle in the secular world and faith as the driving force in the realm of the sacral are kept in a state of constant tension. The 'new religion' which is held to ensue from the so-called 'compromises' of revelation and reason is in this respect a product of the ideal equilibrium between these two opposing forces: 'religion' is here raised to the apex of the diagrammatic triangle through its constant reciprocal tension with its polarized opposite; which itself takes precedence over 'religion' when viewed accordingly. The schema of a process of binary synthesis goes some way to explaining the nature and productive capacity of the tension between religion and reason in the eighteenth century, and hence the ostensibly conflicting interests and priorities of sacral and secular world-views. The process of secularization can no longer be understood in terms of a simple unremitting advance from sacral to secular realms: what is secularized holds and contains the intimation of its antagonistic sacral principle; neither has outright precedence over the other although momentarily one polarity may be seen to take the fore. What is sacral is simultaneously secular and *vice versa*: secularization in the eighteenth century implies, promotes and demands a corresponding sacralization which is there to be perceived in the phenomenal cultural object. Secularization as a cultural process is not a finite transition by which the religious interpretation of life is persistently atrophied and ultimately annulled. The relationship between philosophy and theology - and between religious practice and socio-psychological reflection - evolves into one of intensely fruitful symbiosis: religion seeks to apprehend and build on a philosophically valid basis; and the Enlightenment, as a brightening and becoming, as a pointer to the fundamental truths of human life, as a programme toward the amelioration of the human lot, is a religion of revelation in itself.

The eighteenth century is indeed an age which basks in renewed confidence in humanity and glorifies humankind and human works. An appreciation of the aesthetic merits of the biblical text does not, however, negate the faith the text proclaims. The secularization of biblical exegesis does not reduce Scripture to a human fiction, but

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<sup>109</sup> Herbert Dieckmann, 'Religiöse und Metaphysische Elemente im Denken der Aufklärung', in *Studien zur Europäischen Aufklärung*, op. cit., pp.258-274, (p.260).

proclaims the inner certainty of faith in a language which appeals to the human being. The ideals of the Enlightenment are but the manifestations of the process of cultural history which transforms Augustine's *City of God* to what for Hazard is the 'City of Men'<sup>110</sup>, and points towards *The Secular City* of a more recent theological study<sup>111</sup>. The 'City' in all three is Western Civilization: the process of transformation is one of perpetual evolutionary refinement. The secularization of cultural tradition in the eighteenth century encapsulates, in the theology, philosophy and writings of the major proponents of enlightened thought, the conscious interaction of theological tradition and modern world-view. Neither has ultimate precedence: the resultant philosophy is an ongoing process, through the co-ordination of opposing polarities, in a dynamic progression towards a cultural future through an informed assimilation of the past; an assimilation which is itself felt and experienced by the individual in his personal understanding of the relationship to the cultural entities at his disposal. As a phenomenon of the eighteenth century, secularization is born of the ideals and notions of the Enlightenment; but the implications of the process carry it beyond mere periodization. Secularization as a cultural process is rooted in the historical foundation of the eighteenth century, which is itself both an end and a beginning, a culmination and a foundation. The eighteenth century is where old and new meet in a cycle of completion and inception.

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<sup>110</sup> Hazard, trans. cit., Part II, pp.113ff.

<sup>111</sup> Harvey G Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*, New York, 1964.

### CHAPTER III

#### GOETHE'S ACCOUNT OF THE TRADITION OF RELIGION IN *DICHTUNG UND WAHRHEIT*

Am 28. August 1749, mittags mit dem Glockenschlage zwölf, kam ich in Frankfurt am Main auf die Welt. Die Konstellation war glücklich; die Sonne stand im Zeichen der Jungfrau, und kulminierte für den Tag; Jupiter und Venus blickten sie freundlich an, Merkur nicht widerwärtig; Saturn und Mars verhielten sich gleichgültig; nur der Mond, der soeben voll ward, übte die Kraft seines Gegenscheins um so mehr, als zugleich seine Planetenstunde eingetreten war. Er widersetzte sich daher meiner Geburt, die nicht eher erfolgen konnte, als bis diese Stunde vorübergegangen.<sup>1</sup>

Goethe's account of the time and place of his birth, with which he, not illogically, commences the first book of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, subordinates the social, political and cultural situation of the world he entered in this way and at that time to the cosmical and astrological factors operative at the moment of his coming into the world. His insistence on the favourable cosmic setting of his birth eschews reference to the actual physical conditions which were, reputedly, far less salutary: a difficult birth, a near-asphyxiated, scarce-alive infant, the product of a long and arduous labour<sup>2</sup> which, as Goethe would seem to have it, resulted not from any earth-bound, physical conditions, but from the inexorable movement of the heavenly bodies into the largely favourable positions which were to herald an auspicious event. Erich Trunz's commentary to the *Hamburger Ausgabe* of Goethe's works points to the embracing framework of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, which begins and ends with reference to the dependence on external, universal factors over which the individual has no control<sup>3</sup>. Goethe's description of the constellational positions which presided over his birth marks his awareness of himself as a historical character born at a specific time, in a specific place, over which he himself has no jurisdiction. The circumstances of his birth are described not only as a factual, physical occurrence, but also as a symbolic event: Goethe's coming into the world is portrayed by him, in the emphatic position of

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<sup>1</sup> HA IX 10.

<sup>2</sup> See Richard Friedenthal, *Goethe. Sein Leben und Seine Zeit*, op cit., p.7.

<sup>3</sup> 'Mit einem symbolischen Bild beginnt es und mit einem solchen endet es ... jedesmal die Beziehung zu höheren Mächten andeutend' (HA IX 644). Benjamin C Sax also delineates this opening passage as an example of Goethe's symbolizing of the inextricable inter-relationship of the specific self and the historical concentration which forms its world (*Images of Identity*, op. cit., p.107).

the opening paragraph of his autobiography, as a pre-determined occurrence presided over, influenced and carried to fruitfulness by the external, impersonal forces of the universe.

From the outset, then, Goethe marks the selectivity of his approach to autobiography. This is no quasi-objective portrayal by an individual of the events and facts of his life as he remembers them: *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is a highly conscious literary construct, a work of imagination which is rooted in the factual events of a life lived, but not entirely reducible to a work of determinably objective historical veracity. The author selects his material and portrays this in his own way, emphasizing that which is conducive to his purpose and ignoring that which is not. The opening of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* encapsulates the recognized paradox of autobiographical writing: the persona is not the author, nor even the narrator, but a presentation by the author of an idealized self operating in a set of subjectively remembered or symbolically portrayed conditions, re-objectified in the literary text for assimilation and apprehension by the reader.

What is immediately striking in Goethe's account of his century and its temper is the tone of detached objectivity in which he relates events, describes personalities and depicts the prevalent philosophical and cultural trends. The mature Goethe is of course distanced temporally from the society and culture of the late eighteenth century which provide the external matrix of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, and this must contribute to, but cannot wholly account for, his objective detachment from the character whose experiences he relates. Goethe achieves distance in style and tone from even his most individual and personal experiences. As author, he removes himself as far as possible from the historical personality which is himself as experiencing individual, and relates his autobiography with affected objectivity and impersonality, creating a literary persona ostensibly independent of himself as writer. As the *Vorwort* to *Dichtung und Wahrheit* makes explicit, Goethe is offering, not the candid, confessional account expected in a conventional autobiography, but a 'halb poetische, halb historische Behandlung'<sup>4</sup> where the *Stoff* is historical event and living personality, and the *Gestalt* is the artistic transmutation of this factual basis into the poetic truth of a consciously formulated work of art. The purpose of this chapter is to examine in these terms Goethe's accounts of the religious and metaphysical ideas and moments which

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<sup>4</sup> HA IX 10.

informed his cultural world in these terms: as a conscious, artistic presentation of the views and events which formed the religious tradition he assimilated, and to which Goethe evolved, and presented, his own personal attitude.

The relationship between the formative hand of the mature author and the experiences of the youthful protagonist, of course, forms the basis for all informed critical study of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as autobiography. Goethe's mature reflections on the events and influences of his youth are related from a standpoint of authorial detachment which is both temporal and experiential, and deliberately ironic, and it with this in mind that his account of the development of his religious consciousness must be approached. For this is indeed pervaded by a sense of irony which borders at times on the gently cynical. The childish desire, for instance, to erect an altar to God and effect a sacrifice thereon 'auf gut alttestamentliche Weise'<sup>5</sup> is recounted impersonally: the protagonist is not the author, but an artificially quite independent character, 'der Knabe'. Goethe makes his presence felt, however, in his role of ironic narrator, finding and stating the moral of the story:

und fast möchte man diesen Zufall als eine Andeutung und Warnung betrachten, wie gefährlich es überhaupt sei, sich Gott auf dergleichen Wegen nähern zu wollen.<sup>6</sup>

Thus we see that the formative hand of Goethe the artist, recounting the early years and experiences of himself as the protagonistic 'Knabe', is omnipresent in the internal structure of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. The symbolic framework of the work as a whole is reflected microcosmically in the structure of Book I, which ends with an ironic description of the young Goethe's puerile attempts to interfere with the workings of the heavenly spheres which presided over his own so auspicious entry into the world. The child's strongly bibliocentric education founds his desire to approach God as did the Hebrew forefathers of whom he learns and reads; but the experienced eye and ironic tone of the detached narrator highlight the naïve foolishness of such an attempt. The haplessness of the individual in the face of the forces of the universe is emphatically portrayed: it is the religious motif - in the sense of man at the mercy of higher forces operative in the universe - which presents itself as the predominant theme and underlying impetus of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as a creative and descriptive

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<sup>5</sup> HA IX 44.

<sup>6</sup> HA IX 45.

whole<sup>7</sup>.

The more Goethe recedes from his narrative, the more he eclipses himself and his explicitly personal impressions, the more acutely is the forming and reforming hand of the author to be perceived in the text. Indeed, Goethe in his autobiography is never closer to the truth than when at his most ironic, never more present in his text than when most affecting distance from it; for it is at these times that he, as creative author, is most at pains to couch the truth of historical event in a veil of artistic presentation. The basic content of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as autobiographical account, as a personal view of a specific time and place, cannot be divorced from the elements of discursive sophistication and structural artistry in Goethe's expression. Goethe the author of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* exploits the experiences of Goethe the boy and young man as the basis for a telling and pertinent commentary on society and culture, on institutions and traditions, on life and living, and relates these experiences in turn in a highly conscious exploitation of the medium of language and poetic form. 'Poetry' and 'Truth' are the mutually dependent polarities in the formation of an informed, consciously artistic work of creative history.

The perspicacity of childish insight, for example, affords the mature author the opportunity to comment on the inadequacy of received religion to explain and account for the world. The boy Goethe is unable to understand and accept the natural catastrophe of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 in terms of his catechistic education: the benevolent, patriarchal God of the catechism is not commensurate with the appalling injustice of this city's indiscriminate destruction:

Der Knabe, der alles diese wiederholt vernehmen mußte, war nicht wenig betroffen. Gott, der Schöpfer und Erhalter Himmels und der Erden, den ihm die Erklärung des ersten Glaubensartikels so weise und gnädig vorstellte, hatte sich, indem er die Gerechten mit den Ungerechten gleichem Verderben preisgab, keineswegs väterlich bewiesen. Vergebens suchte das junge Gemüt sich gegen diese Eindrücke herzustellen, welches überhaupt um so weniger möglich war, als die Weisen und Schriftgelehrten selbst sich über die Art, wie man ein solches Phänomen anzusehen habe, nicht vereinigen konnten.<sup>8</sup>

Goethe thus exploits his autobiographical standpoint to allude to the great wave of

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<sup>7</sup> Trunz notes with regard to Goethe's description of this childish religious exercise: 'Daß er sie an das Ende des 1. Buches stellt, deutet an, daß von allen Motiven des Buches dieses - das religiöse - besondere Bedeutung habe und daß von hier Bezüge ausstrahlen zu allen Büchern, die nun folgen' (HA IX 663).

<sup>8</sup> HA IX 30f.

scepticism and doubt which flooded Europe in the wake of the Lisbon earthquake. He draws an explicit parallel between his individual childish questioning, and the general intellectual and theological confusion and disarray; neither of which could offer a coherent explanation of the wanton death and destruction of Lisbon, and the ensuing social dissolution, in terms consonant with established religious teaching. Derek Bowman's commentary points to two levels at which this passage operates: a disingenuous portrayal of the boy's bewilderment, and an awareness of the problematic side of human nature on the part of the mature author<sup>9</sup>. Trunz notes that Goethe's father possessed in his extensive library the most notable academic discussions of the Lisbon earthquake and its influence on the prevailing understandings of the universe and its workings; books with which the young boy might arguably have been familiar, and with which the author of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* most certainly was: Goethe's own account concentrates on the impact of this natural disaster upon the questioning psyche of the boy, without discussing in any depth the intellectual repercussions of the event<sup>10</sup>. Instead, the historical standpoint of the young protagonist is exploited to portray the general popular confusion and lack of understanding of the event and its implications at the time.

Disillusionment with religious dogma, as part of Goethe's general education and upbringing, evidently set in early. A primary influence, quite apart from insight into the inadequacies of the catechism in the face of the actual world, was an obvious boredom with the arid intransigence of a received religion which contained little of appeal to the active and imaginative child:

Doch war der kirchliche Protestantismus, den man uns überlieferte, nur eine Art von trockner Moral: an einen geistreichen Vortrag ward nicht gedacht, und

<sup>9</sup> *Life into Autobiography*, op. cit., pp.53f.

<sup>10</sup> HA IX 654. Goethe's affectedly childish account eschews reference to the monumental philosophical effects of this natural disaster in the 18th century. See, for example, Voltaire's 'Poème sur le Désastre de Lisbonne, ou Examen de cet Axiome: Tout est Bien' (1756), *Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire*, Paris, 1877, Vol. 9, pp.470ff.; the subtitle of which makes plain that the attack is directed primarily at the optimistic philosophy of Alexander Pope - encapsulated in his famous statement in the *Essay on Man*, 'Whatever is, is right' - in the face of such manifest natural injustice. The force of Voltaire's *Préface* to his poem (ibid., pp.456ff.) deals principally with a discussion of the views presented by Pope in the English tradition of Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke, and mentions only obliquely Leibniz, whose philosophy of sufficient reason comes in for more studied satirical attack in the *conte philosophique*, *Candide* (1759). The Leibnizian philosophy of 'Optimism', the contention of a rationally coherent universe in which all things have a purpose and that existence itself, because it exists, is necessarily perfect, is here the principal target of Voltaire's scorn; which conceals but barely Voltaire's own philosophical conviction, corroborated by such natural phenomena as the Lisbon disaster, that all is far from right in the world, and that man has to combat evil in order to achieve the ultimate putative perfectibility of existence.

die Lehre konnte weder der Seele noch dem Herzen zusagen.<sup>11</sup>

Aridity is indeed a recurrent image in Goethe's account of his religious education. Elsewhere in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, in a chapter (Part II, Seventh Book) concerned largely with the young man's reception of the prevailing cultural temper and literary movements of the time<sup>12</sup>, Goethe offers a general judgement of the Protestant Church at the time of his youth and its insistence on rigorous, mechanistic learning by rote at the expense of any appeal to the senses and to the imagination of the individual. Mechanistic, formalized and formulaic learning was, for him, barren and unproductive; and familiarity with the forms of the catechism served only to breed a certain contempt for the 'trocknen, geistlosen Schlendrian' of dogmatic teaching:

Den Katechismus, eine Paraphrase desselben [Religionsunterricht], die Heilsordnung wußte ich an den Fingern herzuerzählen, von den kräftig beweisenden biblischen Sprüchen fehlte mir keiner; aber von alledem erntete ich keine Frucht.<sup>13</sup>

It is, Goethe insists, the lack of 'Fülle und Konsequenz'<sup>14</sup> of contemporary Protestant worship which causes breakaway sects to establish alternative forms of worship incorporating a more personal involvement in the act of faith. The teaching of Protestant doctrine, as Goethe experienced it, alienates the individual by its overwhelming emphasis on the letter of dogma and text, and fails to appeal, according to Goethe's autobiographical account, because the emphasis on the letter of dogma stifles the potential of imaginative apprehension of teaching into a way of life. Repetition without engagement is, for Goethe, meaningless and unproductive:

um etwas gern zu wiederholen, muß es [dem Menschen] nicht fremd geworden sein.<sup>15</sup>

The insistence on a purely cerebral apprehension of the teachings of Protestantism favoured by Goethe's contemporary religious establishment does nothing to unite rational understanding with sensuous appreciation, and cannot therefore sustain the interest and promote the active engagement of the individual in the living out of the dogmas professed. Protestantism, as experienced by the young Goethe and portrayed

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<sup>11</sup> HA IX 43.

<sup>12</sup> 'Das 7. Buch bringt den Jüngling in Verbindung mit den großen kulturellen Schöpfungen, die auf ihn als Künstler und als religiösen Menschen wirken, zumal mit der Literatur und der Kirche', Trunz, HA IX 713.

<sup>13</sup> HA IX 292.

<sup>14</sup> HA IX 288.

<sup>15</sup> HA IX 289.

in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, negates the sensuous in its insistence on the rational and does not, therefore, hold any lasting and durable significance for the experiencing individual.

Such dogmatic absolutism, insisting on one indisputable and immutable interpretation of religious text, event and practice, and their unquestioning acceptance by the receptive individual, is, for Goethe, dangerously self-indulgent. It leads to an unnecessarily abstruse complication into formulaic tenets requiring a set interpretation of their meaning and application; furthering, in turn, what Goethe describes as an almost paranoid fixation with one set of ideas and the stipulation of one absolute interpretation of them which admits of no alternatives and encourages only blind acceptance thereof and unquestioning adherence thereto:

In der Folge trat jedoch bei mir das Übel hervor, welches aus unserer durch mancherlei Dogmen komplizierten, auf Bibelsprüche, die mehrere Auslegungen zulassen, gegründeten Religion bedenkliche Menschen dergestalt anfällt, daß es hypochondrische Zustände nach sich zieht und diese, bis zu ihrem höchsten Gipfel, zu fixen Ideen steigert.<sup>16</sup>

Dogmatic intransigence, which allows of no questioning and admits of no possibility of alternative views, has, according to Goethe's depicted understanding of the religious temper of his age, a negative influence on the growth and development of religious thought and of the Church which promotes it. It leads to a self-fixated concentration on one interpretation and ultimately to a brittle, static and hence invalid conceptualization, into one set form, of intrinsically dynamic notions. Dogma begets cliché, and what is cliché stops developing and hence, ultimately, ceases to have a valid function in the world. The 'fixen Ideen' which result from such intransigent dogmatism are, for Goethe, a negative manifestation of the established Church's entrenched preoccupation with the furtherance of its own doctrines.

Elizabeth M Wilkinson's authoritative study of the concepts of *Polarität* and *Steigerung* in Goethe's thought<sup>17</sup>, concepts which have their primary reference in his scientific writings but are of vital relevance to his understanding and interpretation of all natural processes, including intellectual thought-processes and the dynamics of human feeling, has indicated clearly and unequivocally that any reference on Goethe's

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<sup>16</sup> HA IX 293.

<sup>17</sup> "Tasso - ein gesteigerter Werther" in the Light of Goethe's Principle of "Steigerung", *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 44 (1949), pp.305-328, reprinted in German in *Goethe: Neue Folge des Jahrbuchs der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, Vol. 13 (1951), pp.28-58, and in Elizabeth M Wilkinson and L A Willoughby, *Goethe Poet and Thinker*, op. cit., pp.185-213.

part to the principle of *Steigerung* - especially in those utterances of his later life formulated in the light of his scientific experimentation - deserves to be considered with care and analyzed as a conscious consideration of a particular process. Wilkinson notes that the process of *Steigerung*, which Goethe analyzed and detailed primarily through his scientific observation and experimentation as a natural process inherent in the organic development of plants and the physiological growth of animal organisms, is a dynamic process present and active in the very pulse of the universe, of which thought-processes, cultural development, moral and social issues and human physical existence are integral, necessary and equally organic forces. Goethe's understanding of *Steigerung* is of a vital, dynamic process of life itself, and this reference, in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, to a *Steigerung* of dogmatically prescriptive concepts into 'fixed notions' which are paranoically self-preoccupied requires some emphasis, justification and analysis.

R H Stephenson has argued that the concept of *Steigerung*, together with its related principle, *Polarität*, has a relevant application and a conscious use in texts relating to Goethe's political thought. Stephenson analyzed Goethe's conceptual presentation, in a passage from *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, of the relevance and active presence of a natural, organic process in this sphere of human social intercourse<sup>18</sup>. Wilkinson highlighted the inseparability in Goethe's scientific observation, his thought and his means of expression, of the principles of *Steigerung* and *Polarität*<sup>19</sup>: an organism develops and refines itself, a thought-process increases its application and

<sup>18</sup> See R H Stephenson, 'The Coherence of Goethe's Political Outlook', loc. cit., pp.81ff. The relevant passage from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is to be found in HA X 114ff. Stephenson argues that Goethe is concerned 'to present a normative theory of society' in which social structures evolve and interact through subordination to and coordination with one another. T M Holmes' article, 'Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*: The Dissolution of the Embattled Idyll' (*Modern Language Review*, Vol. 82, 1987, pp.109-118) disagrees that the social theory presented here by Goethe is 'normative', and contends that the formation Goethe depicts is 'contingent and temporary' (p.115). Stephenson had, in fact, noted that Goethe was here employing the device of *fiction*, a projection of postulated ideal human relationships upon a historical society, and it is this perception of a deliberate conceptualization on Goethe's part which clarifies the significance of *Steigerung* and *Polarität* here, upon which Holmes' argument for the final dissolution of unspecified social structures also rests.

<sup>19</sup> 'Here is the idea of a progress organic and slow, achieved not by a soaring leap, but gradually, stage by stage, not by reaching out towards some ideal conceived in the mind, but by realizing, through activity, the potentialities of one's own nature. Here, too, is the intimate connection of ascent with polarity, for in 'kämpfend und spielend' we recognize that rhythm of tension and release which Goethe later felt to be the very pulse of the universe, made palpable to us in our breathing in and breathing out. And already he is feeling towards the idea of what he was to call 'Specification', the differentiation of what is vague and inchoate (here *Gefühle*) into something of clearly defined form and function (here *Fähigkeiten*)', Wilkinson, "'Tasso - ein gesteigerter Werther'" in *Goethe Poet and Thinker*, op. cit., p.189.

intensifies its significance, through reciprocity with its opposing principle. This is *Steigerung* operating with, in Goethe's terms as elucidated by Wilkinson, appropriate *Specification*: reference to, heed of, care and consideration of and interaction with its polarized opposite in form and content. For as Wilkinson has noted, 'Goethe uses the same word *steigern* indifferently in a positive and negative sense'<sup>20</sup>. Indifferently, but not irresponsibly. In his reference to the intensification of fixed dogma into an absolute and static set explanation, Goethe is not describing that intensification and constant refinement of one aspect of life and thought which is to result from reciprocal subordination with its polarized opposite. The hallmark and the guiding force of *Steigerung* as an active, dynamic force, is of a synthesized form of one entity in its relation to its polarized opposite in an aspiration toward the highest forms of life and thought available to the human being: the *Steigerung* of intransigent dogma which concentrates only upon itself, taking account of nothing else, results, according to Goethe, in a brittle fixation of ideas which can only have a detrimental, and ultimately destructive, effect. As Wilkinson noted, 'like everything else, functioning alone and unchecked, *Steigerung* becomes dangerous'<sup>21</sup>; and according to Stephenson's analysis of Goethe's political thought, it is precisely such a *Steigerung* of one idea or set of ideas, functioning without reference to, consideration of and interaction with an alternative view, which in Goethe's view leads to the breakdown of society and of political and inter-personal relations. Social structures are themselves not fixed and intransigent positions, and must evolve through interaction and interdevelopment: the failure of one social group to take its subordinates or superiors into consideration will result ultimately in the destruction of all coherent social fabric<sup>22</sup>. For Goethe in his description of religious dogmatism, then, it is the arid intransigence of the established Church which is to prove its downfall: only in the acceptance of and interaction with opposing religious groups, alternative religious - and non-religious - views and different biblical and catechetical interpretations will religious thought be able to develop its full potential and acquire its true meaning for mankind in the world. Religion, and the religious establishment, must view itself and account for itself in historical and cultural perspective. Otherwise, what the world has to deal with are the extreme dogmas of a self-fixated culture which will perish in the stasis of its own

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.202.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.200.

<sup>22</sup> See Stephenson, 'The Coherence of Goethe's Political Outlook', loc. cit., pp.84f.

intransigence. This plethora of meaning and implication is present in one reference on Goethe's part to a specific concept which scholarship has indicated to have a significance peculiar to Goethe, an awareness and understanding of which is vital to a fuller appreciation of the overall import of Goethe's text. The selective, formative and allusive hand of the author is omnipresent in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*: Goethe's account of the brittle aridity of his received catechetical education points to his awareness of the dangers of ignoring the laws which govern all natural processes, including cultural development, and intimates the significance of synthesis for the evolution of his attitude to religion in general.

Goethe was raised in a predominantly Protestant environment, and his primary religious education was conducted, in both familial and official spheres, under the historical rubric of the Lutheran confession; but his personal self-education and social awareness combined both Protestantism and Catholicism and their respective manifestations, in an appreciation of both principal confessions as cultural forces. Trunz notes that the societies of Frankfurt and Leipzig of the time Goethe depicts in the first books of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* were almost exclusively Protestant, and that the interest in Catholicism which is apparent from the text of Goethe's autobiography reflects the interest and experience of the author at the time of writing, rather than the concern and direct dealings of the protagonist at the time described<sup>23</sup>. Goethe's main criticism of Protestantism - the rigid intransigence of its dogmatism - is here related to his awareness that the reformed confession lacked the substance of sacrament to sustain the interest and grip the imagination of the faithful. This leads to a favourable judgement of Catholic sacramentalism as the symbolic representation of the divine principle, as a corporeal manifestation of the numinous; as, therefore, a physical encapsulation in the secular world, albeit in the sacral context of a religious ceremony, of the very essence of the divine:

Die Sakramente sind das Höchste der Religion, das sinnliche Symbol einer außerordentlichen göttlichen Gunst und Gnade. In dem Abendmahle sollen die irdischen Lippen ein göttliches Wesen verkörpert empfangen und unter der

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<sup>23</sup> Trunz, HA IX 729: 'Das Wesen der katholischen Kirche hat Goethe in seiner Leipziger Zeit wohl kaum beschäftigt. Daß er dieses Thema hier behandelt, ist begründet in seinem Interesse zu der Zeit, als er *Dichtung und Wahrheit* schrieb'. Trunz also remarks that the large and comprehensive library of Goethe's father - catholic in the exact sense of the term - would have afforded the younger man the opportunity to read and learn of the doctrines and teachings of the Roman Catholic tradition (HA IX 731).

Form irdischer Nahrung einer himmlischen teilhaftig werden.<sup>24</sup>

Here again, Goethe deliberately extricates himself, as authorial subject, from his autobiography, and gives an account of Roman Catholic religious worship which is ostensibly impersonal and objectively descriptive. Goethe's protagonist in his description of the experience of sacrament is 'der Mensch': it is 'der Mensch' who experiences the union of external action and inner feeling in the Eucharistic sacrament:

Er [der Mensch] muß gewohnt sein, die innere Religion des Herzens und die der äußeren Kirche als vollkommen *eins* anzusehen, als das große allgemeine Sakrament, das sich wieder in so viel andere zergliedert und diesen Teilen seine Heiligkeit, Unzerstörlichkeit und Ewigkeit mitteilt.<sup>25</sup>

It is 'ein jungendliches Paar' which experiences the sacrament of marriage in Goethe's account; 'das Kind' which is presented for baptism; on the body of 'der ganze Mensch' that last unction is performed<sup>26</sup>: Goethe's description is ostensibly objective, uninvolved and impersonal, with the author artfully distanced from the material objects and events of his autobiographical depiction. Kurt Jahn notes that the rhetorical artifices employed by Goethe in describing these rituals without admitting any personal involvement in them or adherence to them was largely lost on his contemporary readers<sup>27</sup>. His Protestant friends found the passage 'anstößig'; to his Catholic friends and readers they were, as Düntzer points out in his edition, 'zu wenig katholisch'<sup>28</sup>.

Goethe's explicitly personal dealings with the Catholic Church are, in fact, viewed in a considerably less flattering light. His retrospective description conveys an imaginative participation in the felt experience of sacrament, but he does not admit to having himself submitted directly to established Roman Catholic ritual forms with any meaningful sensation of personal involvement. He reports a sincere desire to avail himself of the opportunity for confession and absolution enjoyed by his circle of acquaintances, alludes to his personal formulation of a confession he wished to give,

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<sup>24</sup> HA IX 289.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> HA IX 289f; HA IX 291.

<sup>27</sup> *Goethes Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Halle, 1908, p.264.

<sup>28</sup> *Goethes Werke, Deutsche National-Litteratur*, gen. ed. Joseph Kürschner, Berlin und Stuttgart 1882-98, Vol. XCVIII, p.xlvii. Quoted by Cooper, op. cit., p.173, as part of a detailed account of the reception of Goethe's autobiography. An exception to this generally unfavourable reception came from the strongly Catholic Sulpiz Boisserée: 'Die wunderschöne Darstellung der Sakramente erregt Bewunderung; ... so ist jeder hingerissen von der tiefen Einsicht und dem schönen Gefühl, welches dem Wesentlichen und Ganzen zu Grunde liegt' (letter to Goethe, 20 xii 1812). See also Trunz, HA IX 732f.

only to resort, on hearing the unwelcoming, unattractive nasal tones of his putative confessor, to the simplest formulaic set confessional piece he could find and recite:

... erlosch auf einmal alles Licht meines Geistes und Herzens, die wohl memorierte Beichtrede wollte mir nicht über die Lippen, ich schlug in der Verlegenheit das Buch auf, das ich in Händen hatte, und las daraus die erste beste Formel, die so allgemein war, daß ein jeder sie ganz geruhig hätte aussprechen können.<sup>29</sup>

Goethe is left unmoved, impenitent and spiritually unenlightened by the experience of established, ritualized confession. Moreover, he expresses an almost superstitious fear of the consequences of unworthily partaking of the sacrament of the Eucharist, evoking images of hellfire and eternal damnation for the desecrator of the 'Holy Table' in this way, to the extent that he resolves to sever all contact with the Church as soon as he leaves the immediate society which thrust this form of established religion upon him<sup>30</sup>. Confessional religion seems therefore to have been viewed by Goethe at the time of his life he is here reporting as a social phenomenon to which he abrogates any personal commitment or involvement: his natural inclination toward religion is thwarted and distorted by the empty formality he perceives in established religion. Evidently, the admiration for, and attraction to, religious sacrament which is manifest in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* inheres more in the mature and experienced reflections of the author than in the contemporary dealings of the historical protagonist with established rite and ritual. It will be the purpose of this part of my study to postulate a reconciliation of the apparent impersonal admiration for, but personal abrogation of, the received religious tradition; to examine how and to what extent a specifically and peculiarly Goethean stamp is accorded to these comments, views and reported experiences: for the moment, it suffices to evoke the appropriate context by recording Goethe's accounts as indicative of his concern to portray in a superficially objective manner the main trends and views which informed his religious world.

In his attitude to non-established religion, Goethe's retrospective account admits and displays an explicit appreciation of a personalized conception of the divine being and a more individualistic approach to worship. As noted earlier, it was rigid confessional dogmatism which was, according to Goethe's mature judgement, the

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<sup>29</sup> HA IX 293.

<sup>30</sup> 'Dieser düstre Skrupel quälte mich dergestalt, und die Auskunft, die man mir als hinreichend vorstellen wollte, schien mir so kahl und schwach, daß jenes Schreckbild nur an furchtbarem Ansehen dadurch gewann und ich mich, sobald ich Leipzig erreicht hatte, von der kirchlichen Verbindung ganz und gar loszuwinden suchte' (HA IX 294).

reason for the formation of so many breakaway religious groups and sects in the mid-eighteenth century:

Deswegen ergaben sich gar mancherlei Absonderungen von der gesetzlichen Kirche. Es entstanden die Separatisten, Pietisten, Herrnhuter, die 'Stillen im Lande', und wie man sie sonst zu nennen und zu bezeichnen pflegte, die aber alle bloß die Absicht hatten, sich der Gottheit, besonders durch Christum, mehr zu nähern als es ihnen unter der Form der öffentlichen Religion möglich zu sein schien.<sup>31</sup>

Here again the deliberate detachment of the mature author from the views and experiences of the youth he is depicting is to be perceived in the slightly ironic tone of the account, which gently mocks the profusion of these individual sects in their concern to find a suitable name for themselves ('und wie man sie sonst zu nennen und zu bezeichnen pflegte'); and casts implicit doubt on the absolute validity of these sundry conceptions of Christian worship with the rhetorical attenuation 'zu sein schien'. And here again, the protagonist experiencing and assimilating these religious sects is explicitly distinguished from Goethe the author: the judgements presented here in the first book of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* are artificially attributed to the historical 'Knabe', with whose experiences this first book is largely concerned<sup>32</sup>. Indeed, directly contingent to this first reference in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* to the historical religious phenomenon of Pietism and its various manifestations is the ironically related account of the young boy's attempt personally to approach God through the Old Testament altar-building exercise which has been described. It failed; the first book ends with a warning as to the inadvisability of such individualistic attempts to tamper with the divine spheres; but Goethe's own interest in the personal religious worship of Pietism is apparent throughout *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Goethe's account of his own relationship with the devoutly Pietist Susanne von Klettenberg, for instance, is related in tones of undisguised reverence and admiration for the purity of the woman's active and engaged faith, for her strength and constant cheerfulness despite her own illness<sup>33</sup>, and the absolute trust she placed in her God. All four books of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* testify to a sustained playfulness in his relationship with Susanne von

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<sup>31</sup> HA IX 43.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.: 'Der Knabe hörte von diesen Meinungen und Gesinnungen unaufhörlich sprechen: denn die Geistlichkeit sowohl als die Laien teilte sich in das Für und Wider'. Here again is a point to which we shall return: the polar opposition of spiritual and lay (secular) worlds is set; but Goethe's mode of secularization intimates a potential reconciliation of this polarity which must be adduced.

<sup>33</sup> See HA IX 338f., HA X 41f., and passim.

Klettenberg, by which he tested her patience and tried to shock her with his protestations of heathenism, his irreverent attitude towards God, and his objective admiration for a faith which he himself would not wholeheartedly embrace<sup>34</sup>. Yet while admiring and explicitly praising such total religious commitment, Goethe is unable, or unwilling, within the context of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* at any rate, wholly to commit himself to the Pietist world-view, to surrender himself utterly to such an absolute, unquestioning faith. For the various Pietist groups of Goethe's time, man is inherently sinful and can redeem himself only in the eyes of his professed Lord through total faith and commitment. Goethe's Pelagian rejection of the traditional biblical notion of 'original sin' - a concept which is Pauline rather than directly Christian, being assimilated into the general Christian tradition principally through Paul's letter to the Romans<sup>35</sup> - is a doctrinal rejection which Goethe is held to have undertaken early in his conscious life, through acquaintance with Gottfried Arnold's *Unparteyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie*, which figured in his father's library in Frankfurt<sup>36</sup>. Pietism, on the other hand, arose from the Augustinian notion of predestination and reliance on the will and mercy of God; compounded by the

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the self-confessedly arrogant claim, in response to Frl. von Klettenberg's observation that all Goethe's troubles inhered in his not being reconciled with God, that, far from being out of step with the deity, Goethe was himself in a position to forgive God for the latter's failure to exploit better Goethe's potential: '... das alles komme daher, weil ich keinen versöhnten Gott habe. Nun hatte ich von Jugend auf geglaubt, mit meinem Gott ganz gut zu stehen, ja, ich bildete mir, nach mancherlei Erfahrungen, wohl ein, daß er gegen mich sogar im Rest stehen könne, und ich war kühn genug zu glauben, daß ich ihm einiges zu verzeihen hätte. Dieser Dünkel gründete sich auf meinen unendlich guten Willen, dem er, wie mir schien, besser hätte zu Hülfe kommen sollen. Es läßt sich denken, wie oft ich und meine Freundin hierüber in Streit gerieten, der sich doch immer auf die freundlichste Weise und manchmal, wie meine Unterhaltung mit dem alten Rektor, damit endigte: daß ich ein närrischer Bursche sei, dem man manches nachsehen müsse' (HA IX 340). See too the description of his picture, and inclusion in the text of its attributive poem, which characterizes the author as a distanced, non-Christian observer, but nonetheless placates its devoutly Christian subject in its application of Christian terminology, and only fires the enthusiasm of Frl. von Klettenberg's concern for the spiritual welfare of her 'wayward' young friend (HA X 41f.).

<sup>35</sup> See Romans 5:12: 'It was through one man that sin entered the world, and through sin death, and thus death pervades the whole human race, inasmuch as all men have sinned'.

<sup>36</sup> Gottfried Arnold, *Unparteyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie, vom Anfang des Neuen Testaments biß auf das Jahr Christi 1688*, Frankfurt a. Main, 1699-1700. Trunz, explicitly summarizing pre-1949 scholarship of this aspect of Goethe's thought, notes that Goethe's abrogation of the Protestant doctrine of original sin is a prominent *leitmotiv* in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*; and that Goethe's adherence to the Pelagian heresy was a sustained view: 'Unter den religiösen Motiven in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* ist der Gegensatz zur protestantischen Sündenlehre eins von den wesentlichsten; Gedanken der Jugend, in der Darstellung abgetönt durch das Denken späterer Jahre; Goethes Anschauungen über diesen Punkt waren sich weitgehend gleichgeblieben' (HA X 591).

Lutheran concern for justification through faith<sup>37</sup>: Goethe's refusal to admit his own inherently sinful nature and attempt to reconcile himself with God - while relying utterly on the mercy of the latter - through constant reverence and inner devotion, negates the fundamental guiding principle of Pietism and presages Goethe's ultimate irreconcilability with this particular form of Christian worship. The subsequent unwillingness of the Pietist sects to accept Goethe as a fellow-member and fellow-Christian first disturbs, and then alienates him:

Ich mußte jedoch bemerken, daß die Brüder so wenig als Fräulein von Klettenberg mich für einen Christen wollten gelten lassen, welches mich anfangs beunruhigte, nachher aber meine Neigung einigermaßen erkältete.<sup>38</sup>

Pietism interests Goethe, appeals to his sense of the unorthodox and imaginative: it remains, however, ultimately but another manifestation of religion in society, a body which presents its own dogmas as unassailable and unquestionable. The Pietistic sects and their religion are an integral part of Goethe's upbringing and education, of his inherited tradition in general, and his autobiographical account of their influence upon him bears testimony to this religious force as a social factor. The practices of Pietism in the eighteenth century in Germany are, for Goethe in the context of his autobiography, to be described and evaluated as independent phenomena, as an objective reality rooted in personal, subjective experience. In this way, Goethe exploits his own particular experience of Pietism as the starting-point for a general judgement of individualistic, non-established religion, its conception and its historical function within the Western tradition; leading him to an account of the phenomenon of 'Positive Religion'<sup>39</sup>.

'Positive Religion' in the German eighteenth century implies adherence to the traditional Christian concept of a God revealed to the world in and through the person of Jesus Christ; and worship of this personal deity in the thoughts and actions of

<sup>37</sup> See Loewen, *Goethe's Response to Protestantism*, op. cit., p.13: 'The principle of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) stands at the head of the Lutheran teaching ... In the Bible, Luther found confirmed the traditional doctrines of the Trinity, the humanity and divinity of Christ, the inspiration of the Scriptures, and the belief in the total depravity of man. In the last point in particular Luther believed himself to be in direct theological line with the teachings of St. Paul and St. Augustine'. Loewen accepts Goethe's account in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* that he was not explicitly acquainted with the doctrine of Pelagius until a reprimand from his elders prompted him to study the medieval theologian (see HA X 44; Loewen, op. cit., pp.29f.). The disputed issue of Goethe's direct derivation of his rejection of 'original sin' from Pelagius does not alter the relevance of Goethe's instinctive belief in the inherent goodness and benevolent potential of man.

<sup>38</sup> HA X 43.

<sup>39</sup> HA X 42.

everyday life. The theologico-philosophical opposite of such personally felt and inwardly impelled faith is the phenomenon of ‘natürliche Religion’ which is the theological offspring of the Enlightenment. What is ‘natural’ is, according to enlightened thought, that which is available to and explicable by man in terms of human reason: ‘natürliche Religion’ is a conscious attempt logically to explain the world, to appreciate intellectually the existence of God, and to adhere to logically adduced principles of moral conduct, without recourse to the acceptance of the burdens of sin and guilt and their putative redemption through the inexplicable revelation of God in Christ. ‘Natürliche Religion’ is therefore broadly equatable with the rational religion of the German *Aufklärung*. The *Abhandlungen von den vornehmsten Wahrheiten der natürlichen Religion* of Hermann Samuel Reimarus has as its premise:

Wer ein lebendiges Erkenntnis von Gott hat, dem eignet man billig eine Religion zu: und sofern dieses Erkenntnis durch die natürliche Kraft der Vernunft zu erhalten ist, nannte man es natürliche Religion.<sup>40</sup>

For the principal exponents of German enlightened philosophy, this concept of a ‘natürliche Religion’, independent of established doctrinal apocrypha and the implicit acceptance of inexplicable ephemeral phenomena in the religious sphere, was the only valid means of reconciling a God humankind could not ultimately apprehend, with the tools of human reason at the human being's disposal. Erich Trunz's commentary on the concept of ‘natürliche Religion’ in eighteenth-century Germany cites, among others, Edelmann's *Die Göttlichkeit der Vernunft* and Lessing's *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* as primary expressions of ‘natürliche Religion’, which reached its philosophical zenith, according to Trunz, in Kant's *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*<sup>41</sup>. Goethe's own mention of the philosophical phenomenon of ‘natürliche Religion’ in the late eighteenth-century milieu he is describing provides no objective consideration and appraisal of these specific works, nor of their contribution to his own evolved understanding of rational religion in the eighteenth century. He chooses to concentrate on the ‘tendency to arm-chair theology’ (the term is R H Stephenson's) of eighteenth-century *Popularphilosophie*, views the age's concern with philosophy with a somewhat cynical eye, and expresses this in tones of light irony:

<sup>40</sup> H S Reimarus, *Abhandlungen von den vornehmsten Wahrheiten der natürlichen Religion*, Tübingen, 1754. Quoted by Trunz, HA IX 722.

<sup>41</sup> See Trunz, HA IX 723.

Nach einer solcher Vorstellung war nun jeder berechtigt, nicht allein zu philosophieren, sondern sich auch nach und nach für einen Philosoph zu halten. Die Philosophie war also ein mehr oder weniger gesunder und geübter Menschenverstand, der es wagte, ins Allgemeine zu gehen und über innere und äußere Erfahrungen abzusprechen.<sup>42</sup>

It is this general concern with philosophical discussion and rational justification which causes contemporary theology, in Goethe's view, to attempt to validate the faith it propounded in terms of the logical morality of 'natürliche Religion':

Auf diesem Wege mußten die Theologen sich zu der sogenannten natürlichen Religion hinneigen, und wenn zur Sprache kam, inwiefern das Licht der Natur uns in der Erkenntnis Gottes, der Verbesserung und Veredlung unserer selbst zu fördern hinreichend sei, so wagte man gewöhnlich sich zu dessen Gunsten ohne viel Bedenken zu entscheiden.<sup>43</sup>

With this lightly scathing judgement of the age's sometimes indiscriminate concern with philosophical justification, the mature Goethe ostensibly dismisses the fundamental impetus of eighteenth-century rational religion as the product of a general over-emphasis on intellectual procedure. Within the overall context of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, however, Goethe's allusion here to 'natürliche Religion' is not to be underestimated. The 'natürliche Religion' of rational justification, and the 'positive Religion' of inward meditation and acceptance of revelation, together provide one of the fundamental religio-philosophical polarities of Goethe's contemporary world. Goethe maintains that his primary response to the mutual disaffection which arose between himself and the Pietist sects, with which he had enjoyed some affiliation, was a serious programme of research into the theological history of the Christian Church, with its pendulum-like swings from orthodoxy to heresy. The polarity of dogma and counter-dogma is the linch-pin of historical Christian theology, by which the Christian faith has established itself historically, and in terms of which its philosophical growth and development may be charted. The primary result of Goethe's research is an overwhelming awareness of the Christian tradition as historical material, of Christianity as a body of learning and knowledge which demands to be assimilated and perpetuated. In this respect, it is not simply a desire for inner peace and personal atonement which prompts Goethe's formulation of 'ein Christentum zu meinem Privatgebrauch': his individual conception of the Christian tradition and its function is

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<sup>42</sup> HA IX 273f.

<sup>43</sup> HA IX 274.

founded on an understanding of Christianity as cultural inheritance, of the history of Christian theology, in terms of the opposing and contradictory dogmas engendered and explored, as the foundation and perpetuation of knowledge as a general cultural body:

die Kluft, die mich von jener Lehre trennte, ward mir deutlich, ich mußte also auch aus dieser Gesellschaft scheiden, und da mir meine Neigung zu den Heiligen Schriften sowie zu dem Stifter und den früheren Bekennern nicht geraubt werden konnte, so bildete ich mir ein Christentum zu meinem Privatgebrauch, und suchte dieses durch fleißiges Studium der Geschichte, und durch genaue Bemerkung derjenigen, die sich zu meinem Sinne hingeneigt hatten, zu begründen und aufzubauen.<sup>44</sup>

Traditional Christianity is thus the basis of Goethe's 'Christentum zu meinem Privatgebrauch'; the Christianity of textual, biblical origin and specifically, if obliquely, the Christianity of Christ and the earliest Christian Church. The dogmatic rigidity of institutionalized Christianity has given rise to alternating polarities of heresy and orthodoxy: individual assimilated experience and knowledge make of these heresies and orthodoxies something new and vital that is grounded in tradition and aspires from this basis to a novel perception of tradition and a significant understanding of its function. Erich Trunz notes, with reference to Goethe's reading, in conjunction with his autobiographically reported interest in religious history, of Arnold's *Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie*:

Er sieht überall in der Geschichte eine Polarität zwischen Innerlichkeit und Äußerlichkeit, Mystik und Ratio, Seele und praktischer Lebensbewältigung. Er will nicht Geschichte der Dogmen und Kirchen, sondern Geschichte der Frömmigkeit, der Seele.<sup>45</sup>

Goethe's acquired view of the religious tradition is of a tension of polarized opposites which, if it is not to manifest itself in barren, dogmatic intransigence, must take account of alternative doctrines and interpretations, and grow and develop in fruitful, if tense, coexistence with them. Here again, then, is an intimation of the significance of the concept of binary synthesis for an appreciation of Goethe's attitude to religion.

Thus it is that Lavater's ultimatum, 'Entweder Christ oder Atheist!' is met coldly by Goethe on both an intellectual and a personal level. Such absolutism is, for Goethe, entirely negative: it leaves no room for questioning, for self-awareness, for development through analysis and rational justification. It insists that it is right without

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<sup>44</sup> HA X 45.

<sup>45</sup> Trunz, HA X 759.

any overall awareness of its own significance:

Entweder Christ oder Atheist! Ich erklärte darauf, daß, wenn er mir mein Christentum nicht lassen wollte, wie ich es bisher gehegt hatt, so könnte ich mich auch wohl zum Atheismus entschließen, zumal da ich sah, daß niemand recht wisse, was beides eigentlich heißen solle.<sup>46</sup>

What Goethe seems to be advocating here, then, is not an absolute, unquestioning faith, but a personal and individually evolved relationship with the Christian tradition, which recognizes its own uniqueness, and will not impose itself uncompromisingly on others. Goethe has 'cherished' (*gehegt*) his own attitude to and understanding of Christianity; an individual relationship with the Christian tradition which he himself has fostered and which he would not presume to assert as a world-view absolutely valid in its own terms and demanding to be accepted unconditionally by others. Goethe offers an account of his personally evolved attitude to the Christian tradition in the context of his autobiography, but does not demand that these personal views be accepted as absolutes: the context makes plain that Goethe's conception of religion is of direct relevance only to him as protagonist. Likewise, the autobiography charts the protagonist's resentment and rejection of the imposition by others of their intransigent world-views upon him.

Similarly, Goethe does not concur with the overwhelming body of opinion of his century which castigates Spinoza and the Spinozist philosophy as an atheistic, anti-Christian heresy<sup>47</sup>. Spinoza was held to deny not only the existence of God, but also any theistic conception of a transcendental deity. David Bell's work on the reception of Spinoza in the German tradition admirably summarizes and analyzes the reaction in Germany to Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* subsequent to its publication in 1670. Bell intimates the accomplishment of Goethe, deriving from the influence of his mentor Herder, and their philosophical and cultural predecessor Lessing, in overcoming the general castigation of Spinoza as a stereotypical 'wicked

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<sup>46</sup> HA X 16. There is a possible oblique irony here, in the attribution of a dogmatic 'either/or' stance to Lavater. The novelistic character Werther writes to his friend Wilhelm: 'Mein Bester, in der Welt ist es sehr selten mit dem Entweder-Oder getan; die Empfindungen und Handlungs-weisen schattieren sich so mannigfaltig, als Abfälle zwischen einer Habichts- und Stumpfnase sind' (HA VI 43). Commentaries relate the second part of Werther's remarks here to Goethe's reading of Lavater's *Physiognomie*: the 'Wilhelm' character in *Werther* may, in his apparent dogmatism, have more in common with Lavater than is generally realized.

<sup>47</sup> The history of the overwhelmingly negative reception of Spinoza in 17th-18th-century Europe is summarized by Martin Bollacher in the section 'Spinoza Maledictus' of *Der junge Goethe und Spinoza. Studien zur Geschichte des Spinozismus in der Epoche des Sturms und Drangs*, Tübingen, 1969 (pp.22-37).

atheist', and of his philosophy as immoral, socially dangerous and culturally detrimental. Bell's language confirms those accounts offered in the previous chapter of this study of the established Church's bellicose reaction to new ideas, theologies and philosophical views which did not cohere with accepted dogma:

It is difficult to appreciate the achievement of men like Lessing, Herder and Goethe with regard to their understanding of Spinoza, unless it is realized just how distorted was that image by a hysterical and frightened opposition. The *Theological-Political Treatise* was immediately attacked with ferocious animosity ... the stereotype of Spinoza as the wicked atheist soon established itself.<sup>48</sup>

As Bell reminds us, it was Pierre Bayle's attack on Spinoza in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* which intensified the accusation of atheism to the extent that Spinozism became synonymous with atheism<sup>49</sup>, and any open consideration of Spinoza's works and writings met with public calumny, cultural castigation and stigmatization. The extent to which Lessing, even towards the end of his distinguished life, when general renown gave weight and credence to his expressed opinions, was prepared openly to admit his adherence to the philosophy of Spinoza, still remains under a cloud of doubt, and is apparent in his propagandization of the works of Reimarus in preference to the unquestionably Spinozistic theories of Edelmann<sup>50</sup>. The overwhelming opinion of the late eighteenth-century world about which Goethe is writing in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* equated Spinozism with atheism and decried any analytical appreciation of the Spinozist system.

Bell notes, however, that Gottfried Arnold had pointed out as far back as 1699 in his *Unparteyische Kirchen-und Ketzer-Historie* that Spinoza, far from denying that God exists, did speak of God and postulate the existence of an absolute and infinite

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<sup>48</sup> David Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe*, Institute of Germanic Studies, London, 1984, p.2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.3. It is this article in Bayle's 'Dictionary' which, Goethe claims, displeased him to the extent that it rekindled his interest in Spinoza and prompted his attempt to form his own opinion of Spinozism. (See HA X 76f.). Bollacher offers a detailed analysis of Bayle's attack on Spinoza in *Der junge Goethe und Spinoza*, op. cit., pp.25ff., noting: 'Der paradoxe Charakter des Bayleschen Spinozabilds tritt in aller Schroffheit hervor, wenn der Autor des "Dictionnaire" Spinozas Lehre abtut als "la plus monstrueuse hypothese qui se puisse imaginer, la plus absurde, & la plus diamétralement opposée aux notions les plus évidentes de notre esprit", zugleich aber die Persönlichkeit Spinozas mit Wörtern des Respektes, ja der Bewunderung schildert' (pp.26f.).

<sup>50</sup> See Grossmann's reference in *J C Edelmann. From Orthodoxy to Enlightenment*, op. cit., p.177, to the 'öffentliches Schweigen' of Lessing on his Spinozism. For Bollacher, the failure of Lessing to propagandize Edelmann's Spinozism is due more to unfortunate timing: 'Edelmann ... starb, als Lessing sich bereits Spinoza zugewandt hatte', *Der junge Goethe und Spinoza*, op. cit., p.36.

divinity<sup>51</sup>. The divine being asserted by Spinoza, the *deus sive natura*, may be incompatible with the traditional Christian concept of a God revealed to the world in the person of Jesus Christ, or with the conception of the eighteenth-century deists of a ruling, transcendental deity, but the notion of an absolute being is inherent in the metaphysic of Spinoza<sup>52</sup>. Spinoza's concept of an immanent God, present and active in all existent manifestations, was alien to Christians and deists alike. Together with the vague notion of pantheism, which was indiscriminately applied to Spinoza's metaphysic, came the concomitant accusation of a blasphemous materialistic conception of the Godhead:

The logical development of the charge that Spinoza confused God and the world in a gross pantheistic, almost pagan fashion, was the accusation of materialism, which was regarded as a blasphemous form of atheism, since it reduced God to the level of matter, and also meant that all things were moved by a mechanical necessity.<sup>53</sup>

Bell's discussion of the problem of pantheism and materialism in Herder's, and Goethe's, reception of Spinoza, disputes the relevance here of the notion of 'pantheism', as absolute immanence, and of its corollary concept of 'pantheism', which includes the notion of a transcendent deity, since these are both as loosely-defined concepts which merely label specific understandings of the world without attempting to elucidate or explain their application and significance<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> See Bell, op. cit., p.4. Bollacher analyzes the content and repercussions of Arnold's appreciation of Spinoza in *Der junge Goethe und Spinoza*, op. cit., pp.55ff.

<sup>52</sup> 'There is no doubt that in Christian or deist terms Spinoza's philosophy must be regarded as atheistic, for their God is far removed from Spinoza's ... His monism and determinism were incompatible with the anthropomorphism and transcendentalism of Christians and deists' (Bell, op. cit., p.4).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>54</sup> 'The idea of God as the source of all being, which Herder finds and endorses in Spinoza, means that the relation of God to the world is necessarily an immanent one. This inevitably raises the spectre of pantheism once again, and Herder is just as anxious to free Spinoza from this unjustified charge. The application of the term pantheism, however, causes particular problems, since it is often applied in the vaguest manner. In its strictest sense it connotes an identification of God with finite nature, and to this extent Spinoza's earliest critics truly believed that he did actually confuse God and the world, and thus felt that pantheism, which was considered both atheistic and blasphemous, was a justifiable description of his system. In critical literature the use of the term has, however, been less exact, and often seems to indicate merely a feeling for the divine element in nature. The fact that Spinoza and Herder accept a deity that is immanent in nature does make it possible to speak of their pantheistic tendencies, but the use of the term is fraught with such dangers and has such misleading implications that it is better avoided. There can be little objection to a judicious application of the term, with careful definition, but too often the vagueness of the word can be used with misleading effect: to suggest, for example, that the 'pantheism' of Spinoza, Herder and Goethe is simply materialism. The uncritical and imprecise use of the notion of pantheism can therefore be distorting, since it carries a host of undefined implications' (*ibid.*, p.112).

Thus the premise of Bell's thesis is that the principal achievement of Herder, Lessing and Goethe is their approach to Spinoza 'on his own terms', without recourse to categorical definitions and conceptual castigations:

Herder, Lessing and Goethe were able to achieve a deeper and more fruitful understanding because they were prepared to approach Spinoza *on his own terms*. The failure of Bayle, Leibniz, Wolff, and the innumerable antagonists of Spinoza was precisely to approach him from a preconceived standpoint and with didactic tendentiousness.<sup>55</sup>

Goethe's approach to Spinoza is thus personally derived from the writings of the man himself; and the correspondence with Jacobi in the course of the year 1785 reveals the extent to which Goethe's attitude to and understanding of the teachings of Spinoza set him apart from the prevailing temper of his century. Initially, he identifies himself with Jacobi in his point of view, which, Goethe assumes, must imply an appreciation of Spinoza similar to Goethe's own:

Du erkennst die höchste Realität an, welche der Grund des ganzen Spinozismus ist, worauf alles übrige ruht, woraus alles übrige fließt. Er beweist nicht das Daseyn Gottes, das Daseyn ist Gott. Und wenn ihn andere deshalb Atheum schelten, so möchte ich ihn theissimum ia christianissimum nennen und preisen.<sup>56</sup>

The publication of Jacobi's 'Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an Herrn Moses Mendelssohn', the so-called *Spinozabriefe*, in the same year, however, made apparent the divergence of opinion of the two men over the validity and significance of Spinoza's teachings. Jacobi's interpretation of Goethe's poem 'Prometheus' served, as Goethe says in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, 'zum Zündkraut einer Explosion'<sup>57</sup>, as Goethe's contemporaries embarked on a heated debate as to the consonance or non-consonance of Spinoza's putative pantheistic materialism with the revealed and transcendental deity of the Christian tradition. Goethe rejects outright the absolute equation of Spinozism with atheism which is the foundation and conclusion of Jacobi's thesis:

Daß ich Dir über dein Büchlein nicht mehr geschrieben verzeih! Ich mag weder vornehm noch gleichgültig scheinen. Du weißt daß ich über die Sache selbst

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Preface, p.x.

<sup>56</sup> Goethe to Jacobi, 9 vi 1785, GA XVIII 851. The attribution of 'superlative' Christianity to Spinoza is, of course, highly provocative in context, but is surely indicative of more than an attempt on Goethe's part to rile his correspondent. Goethe's rekindled interest in Spinoza is born, not of a concern to confirm or deny the latter's orthodoxy or atheism, but with a perception in the works of the 'heretic' Spinoza of the 'highest form of Christianity', the Christianity of Christ Himself.

<sup>57</sup> HA X 49.

nicht deiner Meinung bin. Daß mir Spinozismus und Atheismus zweyerlei ist. Daß ich den Spinoza wenn ich ihn lese mir nur aus sich selbst erklären kann, und daß ich, ohne seine Vorstellungsart von Natur selbst zu haben, doch wenn die Rede wäre ein Buch anzugehen, das unter allen die ich kenne, am meisten mit der meinigen übereinkommt, die Ethik nennen müßte.<sup>58</sup>

Trunz notes that Jacobi's understanding of Spinoza is of a rational system of natural order and causality which is irreconcilable with any active, personally involved form of religious faith:

Auch Jacobis These war: Spinozismus ist Atheismus. Er versuchte philosophisch zu begründen, daß das rationalistische System Spinozas notwendig den Fatalismus und Atheismus in sich enthalte und daß daher "die recht verstandene Lehre des Spinozas keine Art von Religion zulasse".<sup>59</sup>

It is, according to Bell, the attribution of a fatalistic world-view to Spinoza which instigated most of the calumny which surrounded Spinozism in the eighteenth century. This arises, for Bell, from a misunderstanding of Spinoza's 'doctrine of necessity':

In attributing fatalism to Spinoza, Wolff is referring, like Leibniz before him, to Spinoza's doctrine of necessity: but Spinoza explicitly denies that he subjects God to fate, since God is determined by his own nature alone.<sup>60</sup>

Spinoza's postulation of the necessary self-regulation of existence was held, in Bell's view, to be the most absurd and potentially pernicious aspect of his thought, since it heralded a breakdown in the moral order, by which all human actions could be, and, indeed, had to be justified in terms of their ultimate derivation in a fatalistic acceptance of all things as they are. This is, however, for Bell, an erroneous misconception of Spinoza's doctrine of necessity; a misconception which equated fatalistic acceptance with the philosophical specification of determinism, and quite fails to differentiate passive submission to an external force from the conscious acceptance of moral necessity that is Spinoza's doctrine. Significantly, Martin Bollacher's introduction to his account of determinism in Spinoza's writings notes that fundamental to Spinoza's

<sup>58</sup> Goethe to Jacobi, 21 x 1785 (GA XVIII 880). Bell notes, with reference to Jacobi's reception of *Prometheus*, that Jacobi's subsequent condemnation of Goethe's poem as Spinozistic and hence atheistic is born of his fundamental misconception of Spinoza's metaphysics: 'Spinoza's rational explanation of the physical and mental aspects of nature exclude, indeed, Jacobi claims, are incapable of including, the realm of the supersensual, which is the realm of knowledge about God. For Jacobi, God is personal, separate from the world, acting on it in a transitive fashion; when he calls Spinoza's system atheistic, then, what he really means is anti-theistic. It was for this reason that the poem "Prometheus" was regarded by him as atheistic and Spinozistic, and moreover is the basic reason why he considered Lessing a Spinozist', *ibid.*, p.80.

<sup>59</sup> Trunz, HA X 593.

<sup>60</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, p.9.

theory as appreciated by Goethe is an overcoming of polarized antitheses through their reconciliation:

Die Überwindung des neuplatonisch-christlichen Gradualismus, die sich formelhaft in Spinozas Gleichsetzung von 'Deus' und 'Natura' ankündigt, polarisiert sich sowohl bei Spinoza wie auch bei Goethe in philosophischen Antithesen, die auf ihren Ursprung, die Erfahrung der durchgängigen Natureinheit, zurückweisen.<sup>61</sup>

Bell notes the failure of Spinoza's early critics to perceive Spinoza's reconciliation of necessity and moral freedom, and heralds the perception of this as a significant contribution to the understanding of Spinoza by Lessing, Herder and Goethe:

... how Spinoza reconciled necessity with a higher concept of freedom which not only did *not* destroy morality, but raised virtue to a rational imperative. The recognition of this side of Spinoza's thought [*sic*: 'thought'?] was to be one of the achievements of Lessing, Herder and Goethe.<sup>62</sup>

Thus here again we meet an implicit, if undeveloped, critical awareness of the notion of a synthesis of polarized opposites. The terms of Bollacher and Bell point to precisely that concept of binary synthesis which promotes the enhancement of one, or both, of the antithetical opposites - here 'freedom' and 'necessity' - through their reciprocal interaction. This postulation of the achievement of Goethe in particular in recognizing this aspect of Spinozism obviously deserves some further analysis here. Evidently, there are pointers in Goethe's appreciation of the writings of Spinoza to that 'highest form of Christianity' he so admired: possibly, the concept of binary synthesis will be helpful in delineating this religious appreciation and its significance.

In 1812, Goethe wrote to Knebel about his (Goethe's) ultimate breach with Jacobi. Spinoza is not explicitly mentioned, but the terms of Goethe's account offer some telling pointers to the nature of the irreconciliation of the two men in their debate of several years before:

Daß es mit Jacobi so enden werde und müsse, habe ich lange vorausgesehen, und habe unter seinem bornierten und doch immerfort regen Wesen selbst genugsam gelitten. Wem es nicht zu Kopfe will, daß Geist und Materie, Seele und Körper, Gedanke und Ausdehnung, oder ... Wille und Bewegung *die notwendigen Doppelingredienzen des Universums* waren, sind und sein werden, die beide gleiche Rechte für sich fordern und deswegen *beide zusammen wohl als Stellvertreter Gottes angesehen werden können* - wer zu dieser Vorstellung sich nicht erheben kann, der hätte das Denken längst

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<sup>61</sup> Bollacher, op. cit., p.176.

<sup>62</sup> Bell, op. cit., p.12.

aufgeben, und auf gemeinen Weltklatsch seine Tage verwenden sollen.<sup>63</sup>

Goethe's frustration with his erstwhile friend is unmistakable, but it is the nature of the dispute rather than its expression which is pertinent here. Spirit and matter, body and soul, and the other antinomies he mentions, are necessarily cooperative antitheses, and God is to be perceived precisely in and through this cooperation. This is the node of the Spinozist doctrine; this is the point at which Goethe's perception of a synthesis of polarized opposites in the workings of the universe takes shape and form.

*Dichtung und Wahrheit* attests to Goethe's discovery, in the writings of Spinoza, of a moral teaching which appeals to him, as he said, in its own terms and on its own merits:

Was ich aus diesem Werke [*Ethik*] mag hinauslesen, davon wüßte ich keine Rechenschaft zu geben, genug, ich fand hier eine Beruhigung meiner Leidenschaften, es schien sich mir eine große und freie Aussicht über die sinnliche und sittliche Welt aufzutun.<sup>64</sup>

It is, moreover, a moral teaching which is not unconsonant with that of Christianity, for despite the Church's castigation of Spinoza and accusations of blasphemous, heretical or simply outright atheism, there is an implicit and explicit appreciation in the writings of Spinoza of the pure moral message of Christ, when distinguished from the Christian doctrines perpetuated by the established Church<sup>65</sup>. Spinoza expresses, for Goethe, neither atheism nor deism, nor a religion of revelation. Goethe finds on his reading of Spinoza an understanding of the world which transcends received teaching, encompassing as it does the dynamism of nature and the function of human ethical conduct and function in the natural world. Goethe abrogates any compartmentalization of the Spinozist doctrine: he experiences, assimilates, and adapts.

*Dichtung und Wahrheit* testifies to a profound first-hand acquaintance with the writings of Spinoza; despite the discrepancies and irregularities in the explicit chronology of Goethe's account of his reading and consideration of Spinoza, as noted by Bell, who concludes that 'utilization of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* requires

<sup>63</sup> 8 April 1812, GA XIX 652f. (My italics).

<sup>64</sup> HA X 35.

<sup>65</sup> See Bell, op. cit., p.17: 'Spinoza regarded Jesus as a prophet with pure intention of God's essence, so that he teaches the true road to blessedness. On the other hand, however, Spinoza makes it plain ... that he has no time for the church's doctrines of Jesus's divinity'. Bell's explicit consideration of Goethe's reception and understanding of Spinoza attests to the principles of moral behaviour in Spinoza's doctrine which point to the harmony between actual conduct and philosophical theory and are thus reconcilable with the active teachings of Christ (see p.50 and fn.5, p.169).

circumspection and may not be entirely reliable'<sup>66</sup> as a witness to Goethe's reception of Spinoza's thought. Bell continues, however, to adduce the significance of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as an attestation of Goethe's general and evolved response from his earliest acquaintance with the writings of Spinoza to the time of his writing of his autobiography<sup>67</sup>. It is an acquaintance, however, which does not reveal itself in frequent explicit references to Spinoza and a detailed account of the relevance of his metaphysic to Goethe as autobiographical protagonist. Spinoza is in fact seldom mentioned: in connection with Goethe's relationship with Jacobi<sup>68</sup>; in the implicit reference to Spinozism in the 'wichtigen Punkte des Denkens und Empfindens' which characterized Lessing's attack on Jacobi's reception of *Prometheus*<sup>69</sup>; in Goethe's affirmed rediscovery of the writings of Spinoza, prompted by Bayle's article, in a passage which extends to a discussion of nature and natural harmony in general<sup>70</sup>. That Goethe sought not a simple confirmation of his own ideas and principles in Spinoza is explicit:

Denke man aber nicht, daß ich seine Schriften hätte unterschreiben und mich dazu buchstäblich bekennen mögen.<sup>71</sup>

What Goethe purports to have sought and found in Spinoza is, significantly, the *complement* of his own nature, a completion of the strivings of his uneasy personality in the harmonious natural peace of Spinoza's metaphysic:

Die alles ausgleichende Ruhe Spinozas kontrastierte mit meinem alles aufregenden Streben, seine mathematische Methode war das Widerspiel meiner poetischen Sinnes- und Darstellungsweise, und eben jene geregelte Behandlungsart, die man sittlichen Gegenständen nicht angemessen finden wollte, machte mich zu seinem entschiedensten Verehrer. Geist und Herz, Verstand und Sinn suchten sich mit notwendiger Wahlverwandtschaft, und durch diese kam die Vereinigung der verschiedensten Wesen zustande.<sup>72</sup>

There is a polarity here of a different order: the antithetical opposites are Goethe himself, with his tireless quest for knowledge and experience, and the serenity he

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.150.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.: 'There is no justification in completely disregarding the vital information given, simply because Goethe's account of his relation to Spinoza's thought may not be chronologically accurate ... Therefore, taken as a whole, Goethe's discussion of Spinoza in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* can tell us only of his response to Spinoza's ideas in the entire period before he put pen to paper, and is thus of great value in more general terms'.

<sup>68</sup> HA X 35.

<sup>69</sup> HA X 49.

<sup>70</sup> HA X 76ff.

<sup>71</sup> HA X 78.

<sup>72</sup> HA X 35.

perceives in the writings of Spinoza. Union of mathematical logic and poetic feeling is achieved: and the significance of the term 'Wahlverwandtschaft' for the later Goethe should surely not be overlooked. Goethe is 'drawn' to the doctrines and teachings of Spinoza precisely because these contain and express the antithesis of his own nature: there ensues a fusion of polarized opposites which is fruitful and productive<sup>73</sup>.

*Dichtung und Wahrheit* does not explicitly attest to Goethe's friendship and partnership with Herder as the principal stimulus to his (Goethe's) understanding of Spinoza; yet scholarship acknowledges the influence of Herder, both in introducing the young Goethe to Spinozism, and in encouraging its comprehension and assimilation. Bell's account of the inconsistent chronology of Goethe's account of his reception of Spinoza offers a reconciliation of these discrepancies by postulating a more intense concern with Spinoza on Goethe's part only after his arrival in Weimar, sparked by his disagreement with Bayle, but achieving full significance through repeated and protracted discussions with Herder<sup>74</sup>. Wolfgang Heise's essay on the mutual productivity and co-operation of Goethe and Herder during the early years in Weimar uses Goethe's recognition and recommendation of a cooperative working relationship with Herder as the starting-point for his discussion on the implications of Spinozism, mediated by Herder's reception and discussion, for Goethe's thought. Heise's categorization of Herder's thought as 'ein spinozistisch orientierter Pantheismus' demands, and acquires, the qualification that Herder was 'kein konsequenter Spinozist'<sup>75</sup>: the scholar's (traditionally Marxist<sup>76</sup>) equation of pantheism with materialism is qualified by a recognition of Herder's reconciliation of the ostensible polarities of materialism and idealism in a dialectic contrapuntalism: Spinoza's pantheism does not, for Herder as interpreted by Heise, reduce God to the level of matter, but perceives the idealistic perfectibility of nature in the dynamic

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<sup>73</sup> Bollacher notes in this respect the tendency among some critics to stress the 'personal' affinity with Spinoza on Goethe's part with a corresponding underemphasis on the effects of Spinoza's teaching: 'Das Fragment vom "Ewigen Juden" belegt die Verbindung der Person mit der Lehre Spinozas und dementiert damit die häufige Behauptung, Spinoza habe durch die Harmonie seiner Persönlichkeit, nicht durch seine Lehre auf den jungen Goethe gewirkt', (op. cit., p.63). Goethe's affirmed personal attraction to Spinoza is mentioned here, not to undermine the effect of the doctrine, but to highlight a polarity of a different order, and because of its evident significance for the appraisal of Spinoza Goethe is concerned to portray in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.

<sup>74</sup> Bell, op. cit., pp.150f. See also Bollacher., op. cit., pp.70ff.

<sup>75</sup> Wolfgang Heise, 'Der Entwicklungsgedanke als geschichtsphilosophische Programmatik. Zur Gemeinsamkeit von Herder und Goethe in der frühen Weimarer Zeit', *Goethe: Neue Folge des Jahrbuchs der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, Vol. 93 (1976), pp.116ff., (p.125).

<sup>76</sup> See Bell, op. cit., p.148.

interaction of natural matter and spiritual essence:

Herders Pantheismus ist eine Form der Versöhnung von Materialismus und Idealismus in widersprüchlicher Einheit, bei dominant objectiv-idealistischem Charakter, schon durch die theologischen Momente, die jedoch wiederum eingeschränkt, z.T. aufgehoben werden durch den stark ausgeprägten Sensualismus und den Gesetzmäßigkeits-gedanken.<sup>77</sup>

What Herder and Goethe appreciate in Spinoza is a conception of natural order which is both solid and dynamic, rooted firmly in an apprehension of the physical world, but which transcends material concretion in a synthesis of immanence and transcendence, of materialism and idealism. The natural, dynamic ethic which Herder and Goethe appreciate in Spinoza is far removed from the analytical, mechanical morality of the deist world-view, by which the divine force is abstracted from the material world to operate in transcendent abeyance. Deism and pantheism, as absolute transcendence and absolute immanence, represent one opposition of ostensibly irreconcilable polarities within Goethe's immediate religious tradition: the orthodox Christian doctrine, and the deist world-view, provide another. No synthesis of the polarities of deism and Christianity is possible in terms of the intransigent, established religion in Goethe's society. The deists considered that their conception of a divinely created world in which man operated with the divine principle of morality within him was consonant with the established notion of biblical revelation of God to the world through Christ, but the orthodox Christian Church negated and abrogated the deists' claims to kinship<sup>78</sup>. Goethe's account of his society and its cultural-philosophical temper notes the fundamental opposition of deism and Christianity, and here again affirms a potential conciliation of these two apparently antagonistic world-views. This he bases on his perception, in the history of the Christian tradition, of an uncertain imbalance between what he calls 'historical-positive' deism, as an integral part of the Christian world-view; and the 'pure deism' of enlightened philosophy:

Die christliche Religion schwankte zwischen ihrem eignen Historisch-Positiven und einem reinen Deismus, der, auf der Sittlichkeit gegründet, wiederum die Moral begründen sollte. Die Verschiedenheit der Charaktere und Denkweisen zeigte sich hier in unendlichen Abstufungen, besonders da noch ein Hauptunterschied mit einwirkte, indem die Frage entstand, wie viel Anteil die Vernunft, wie viel die Empfindung an solchen Überzeugungen haben

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<sup>77</sup> Heise, loc. cit., p.126.

<sup>78</sup> See Trunz, HA IX 746f.

könne und dürfe.<sup>79</sup>

It is in this uneasy coexistence of reason and feeling, this polarity of sensuous and rational appreciation, that Goethe perceives a potential harmonization of emotional relationship and rational analysis, of material concretion and supra-rational abstraction, within the totality of the Western religious tradition. If the alternation of traditional polarized tendencies becomes a coordination of opposed forces, the energy which results from the contingent tension points onward and upward to a new, better, and constantly refining function of tradition within tradition. The significance of binary synthesis here is manifest: intransigence is barren; co-existence is static; synthesis in continuous tension is fruitful and positive.

What is apparent from Goethe's account of his understanding of the religious tradition as a whole, then, in the context of late eighteenth-century Germany, is an overall awareness of a cultural dynamism which pivots on a tension of polarized opposites, both within and without the immediately credal context. It is this appreciation of the implicit cultural dialectic which gives Goethe's religious perception its particular significance, and thereby its general relevance. It is in the uneasy coexistence of materialism and transcendentalism, of knowledge and faith, historical specification and rational analysis, that lies, for Goethe, the potential momentum of cultural progress: the fundamental philosophical and theological polarities of the Western tradition are implicitly and inextricably related to one another and dependent upon one another in mutual presupposition. And it is this conception of cultural development through tension which accords Goethe's account of religious movements and credal trends within the immediate context of eighteenth-century Germany its particular and unique inflection. Goethe's understanding of religion is dependent upon his appreciation of the specific intellectual character of the German *Aufklärung* and the broader phenomenon of European Enlightenment; at the same time, his awareness is of a religion which takes account of its historical origins in order to transcend a contextual particularization which would limit its significance and its application to the immediate period in which a particular view and understanding of religion inhered. There is a sense of reversion to original forms in order to heighten the significance of the past in the present (the proverbial notion of 'reculer pour mieux sauter' which is

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<sup>79</sup> HA IX 334.

the hallmark of binary synthesis); and, crucially, of cultural progress through a tension of polarized opposites. Dependence and independence presuppose each other: the implicit dialectic of cultural development determines Goethe's accounts in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* of enlightened philosophy and rational religion in the eighteenth century.

Goethe's explicit appreciation of his immediate cultural context takes account, in fact, of an obvious and definite contradiction: the specifically and peculiarly German tradition has, he perceives, developed from a hybrid collection of influences and borrowings from other historical sources and their literary manifestations:

Die literarische Epoche, in der ich geboren bin, entwickelte sich aus den vorhergehenden durch Widerspruch. Deutschland, so lange von auswärtigen Völkern überschwemmt, von anderen Nationen durchdrungen, in gelehrten und diplomatischen Verhandlungen an fremde Sprachen gewiesen, konnte seine eigene unmöglich ausbilden.<sup>80</sup>

If such eclectic cultural borrowing is of an indiscriminate nature, the primary potential effect is, for Goethe, the ruination of the German language and its corresponding literature by development of:

eine durch fremde Worte, Wortbildungen und Wendungen verunzierte Sprache, und sodann die Wertlosigkeit solcher Schriften, die sich von jenem Fehler frei zu erhalten besorgt waren.<sup>81</sup>

Goethe recognizes, however, that the German cultural tradition is not simply to be equated with a large sponge which soaks in and greedily retains anything and everything that neighbouring and influencing cultures have to offer. There is, historically, a specific and indigenous German tradition, evolving and existing in relation to, but independent of, other Western political and cultural entities: this necessarily determines the nature and extent of external influence. The pre-existing culture, a unique set of historical and linguistic elements, itself derives from impinging influences, and in turn conditions and defines the continuing influence of source cultures upon it. Dependence and independence, within the context of general cultural evolution, coexist and complement one another. German cultural eclecticism is not eclecticism *per se*; borrowed material must be made relevant and meaningful to the assimilating German context. Culture - in all its literary, philosophical, historico-political and rhetorical manifestations - is in the broadest sense a universal process,

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<sup>80</sup> HA IX 258.

<sup>81</sup> HA IX 259.

and the emergence of a specifically German pattern is due, for Goethe, to this ability to assume selected attributes of external cultural influences; which, while implicitly expressing and acknowledging their derivation, exist in a novel context independent of source. German culture does not require its own wholly unrelated and insular language: the concern of the German linguistic tradition is not with the promotion of a language peculiar and dependent solely on German possession and utilization ('seine eigene [Sprache] ausbilden ...'); it is able to select elements from source languages and cultures, and accord these intrinsically alien attributes a novel and particularly German significance and function ('sich zu eigen machen'). This, then, is for Goethe the inherent contradiction of German cultural originality, and indeed a significant motivational factor in the development and sustaining of the particular attitude to European enlightened thought which is the German *Aufklärung*.

As in his accounts of religious movements and theological dogma, here again, Goethe's purpose in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is not to discuss in any objective, analytical depth the leading figures and the philosophical developments of the Enlightenment. Not that he underestimates the significance of the movement, for both his personal intellectual development and the development of European culture in general. What Goethe implies as a specific aim, and presents in his autobiography, is a series of related anecdotes, events and personalities which together form a background against which may be viewed his own intellectual growth, as he perceived it from the vantage-point of his maturity, together with his conception of the developmental pattern of culture in his age. Thus it is that Goethe's account of the influence of the Franco-Roman upon his native German tradition occurs in the contextual setting of his recollection of a collective rebellion against Gallic language and culture in the inherently Gallic society of Straßburg in the early 1770s. It is the arrogance of the prevailing French dismissal of all things German as vulgar and tasteless, coupled with the predilection of the ruling Prussian monarchy for all things French, which prompts Goethe's peer-group to emphasize their own German cultural origins, and provides the impetus for Goethe's sharp and caustic appraisal of contemporary French culture<sup>82</sup>. 'Even Voltaire' does not escape Goethe's critical judgement: his praise for the Frenchman's literary and philosophical achievements is tinged with an affected cynical irony which judges Voltaire *passé*, a now negative

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<sup>82</sup> See HA IX 482f.

influence on a contemporary French culture which seems unable to break the spell of Voltairean achievement and generate new life and vigour into the French cultural scene:

Und eben dieser Voltaire, das Wunder seiner Zeit, war nun selbst bejahrt wie die Literatur, die er beinah ein Jahrhundert hindurch belebt und beherrscht hatte. Neben ihm existierten und vegetierten noch, in mehr oder weniger tätigen und glücklichem Alter, viele Literatoren, die nach und nach verschwanden.<sup>83</sup>

The irony, of course, inheres in the authorial standpoint of the mature Goethe, writing in his own advanced years of the impressions and judgement of his youth, and criticising the lack of dynamic development in a cultural tradition which could not rid itself of the influence of one of its most distinguished 'old men'. Goethe continually sets off his own youthfulness and that of his contemporaries against the rigidity of Voltaire's old age. More specifically, he compares the progressiveness, the vitality of youth with what he describes as 'eitles Bestreben eines abgelehnten Alters'; Voltaire is 'ein altes eigenwilliges Kind'<sup>84</sup> who refuses to grow old gracefully. Voltaire's insistence on the validity of his concept of a deistic godhead becomes, in Goethe's view, ever more hollow and irrelevant in its intransigence, and the mature Goethe asserts that he in his youth lost all respect for the elderly Frenchman and for the philosophical and metaphysical ideas Voltaire promulgated through the vehemence and vengeance of Voltaire's comprehensive refutation of all the doctrines of established Christian worship:

Uns Jünglingen ... ward die parteiische Unredlichkeit Voltaires und die Verbildung so vieler würdigen Gegenstände immer mehr zum Verdruß, und wir bestärkten uns täglich in der Abneigung gegen ihn. Er hatte die Religion und die heiligen Bücher, worauf sie gegründet ist, um den sogenannten Pfaffen zu schaden, niemals genug herabsetzen können, und mir dadurch manche unangenehme Empfindungen erregt.<sup>85</sup>

However, Goethe was acutely if tacitly aware that the detrimental effect of Voltaire's influence lay not so much in the inherent message of his philosophy and his expression of it, as in the reception of his ideas by his contemporaries and successors. For Voltaire's society and his cultural inheritors, unable to reason with him on his own terms, radically altered the tenor of Voltaire's message through simplification and

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<sup>83</sup> HA IX 484.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> HA IX 485.

specious categorization<sup>86</sup>. Ernst Curtius notes that ‘Voltaire is France raised to a higher power’<sup>87</sup>, the product of his world, definable and accountable in terms of his world, yet on a higher and more differentiated level than his immediate society, and inaccessible to its blinkered and limited aspect. Goethe’s judgement of Voltaire in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* concentrates on the personality, rather than the burden of the works; on the after-effects of Voltaire’s message rather than the message itself: Goethe offers a personal impression of Voltaire, not an objective critique of a cultural contribution, and his ironic dismissal of the Frenchman’s literary achievements is by no means an explicit abrogation of Voltairean thought. Goethe’s criticism of Voltaire stems primarily from an assertion of Goethe’s own vitality and growth-potential in comparison with the stagnation of French culture under Voltaire’s dominance, and of the aridity and intransigence of Voltaire’s theistic world-view which denied any validity whatsoever to revealed, positive religion. This is, of course, a post-factum judgement on Goethe’s part: he is implicitly juxtaposing the achievements of his own long life with those of the elderly Voltaire his youthful vigour so summarily dismissed. Once again, the fundamental principle of Goethe’s world-view is one of dynamism, of organic growth and mutual development. Thus it is that Goethe’s judgement of Diderot and the Encyclopaedists, though brief, is particularly telling. His image of the *Encyclopédie*, the self-proclaimed definitive account of French enlightened thought, is of a monstrous piece of machinery of overpowering noise, clatter and clutter, which serves only laboriously to produce something unnecessary, inconsequential, and offensive to the existing goods it is meant to replace:

Wenn wir von den Enzyklopädisten reden hörten, oder einem Band ihres ungeheuren Werks aufschlugen, so war es uns zu Mute, als wenn man zwischen den unzähligen bewegten Spulen und Webstühlen einer großen Fabrik hingeht, und vor lauter Schnarren und Rasseln, vor allen Aug und Sinne verwirrenden Mechanismus, vor lauter Unbegreiflichkeit einer auf das mannigfaltigste in einander greifenden Anstalt, in Betrachtung dessen, was alles dazu gehört, um ein Stück Tuch zu fertigen, sich den eignen Rock selbst verleiden fühlt, den man auf dem Leibe trägt.<sup>88</sup>

A facetious comment on a significant cultural achievement perhaps, and one which points again to the perspective of maturity on the arrogance of youth, rather than

<sup>86</sup> See Cassirer, *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*, op. cit., p.215.

<sup>87</sup> Ernst Robert Curtius, *Essays on European Literature*, translated by Michael Kowal, Princeton, New Jersey, 1973, p.38.

<sup>88</sup> HA IX 487.

offering an objective judgement on the part of the author. Nevertheless, the implication is obvious: dogmatism, even the 'enlightened' dogmatism of the French Encyclopaedists, tends towards barren aridity when rigidly adhered to; mechanism - and Goethe's depiction of the *Encyclopédie* is decidedly mechanistic - is by its own definition inherently fruitless; both are unproductive in terms of cultural progress and - as Goethe's sustained image implies - ultimately offensive to their parent tradition and immediate cultural milieu. Any attempt artificially to impose a particular set of beliefs and convictions necessarily leads to a cultural stasis which produces eventual atrophy and disintegration.

In this way, Goethe expresses his perception of the French Enlightenment as an angry world-view which offends and is distasteful in its comprehensive and unreflecting dismissal of all pre-existent thought. It would be naïve, however, to assume that the Enlightenment as a philosophical movement, and enlightened thought as a means of approaching and evaluating the social and cultural world, signified nothing more to Goethe than a series of untenable fulminations and violent rejections. Goethe's reported reaction to the Enlightenment in France is that of his peer-group: Goethe here identifies his own response, in ironic retrospect, with the collective response of his intellectual friends and colleagues; another distancing device by which Goethe the autobiographical protagonist is not made explicitly responsible for the account and judgements given of his life and experiences. Goethe and his circle deemed themselves 'self-enlightened', well-enough versed in the temper of their contemporary social and philosophical world to rise above and be wholly indifferent to the struggle between the French Enlightenment and its principal adversary, the Catholic Church:

Auf philosophische Weise erleuchtet und gefördert zu werden, hatten wir keinen Trieb noch Hang, über religiöse Gegenstände glaubten wir uns selbst aufgeklärt zu haben, und so war der heftige Streit französischer Philosophen mit dem Pfafftum uns ziemlich gleichgültig.<sup>89</sup>

The arrogance of youth makes a mockery of the ideas propagated by the 'old men' of the French Enlightenment. Holbach's *Système de la Nature*<sup>90</sup>, that most polemical and controversial vehicle of French enlightened thought, is ridiculed as the bitter and

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<sup>89</sup> HA IX 490.

<sup>90</sup> *Système de la Nature, ou des lois du monde physique et du monde moral*. Par M Mirabaud. [The 1st edition (London, 1770) attributed the work to Mirabaud, rather than to its authentic author, Baron P H D d'Holbach.]

prejudiced ramblings of 'ein abgelehnter Greis':

Wir lachten [den Verfasser] aus: denn wir glaubten bemerkt zu haben, daß von alten Leuten eigentlich an der Welt nichts geschätzt werde, und so schien uns jenes Buch, als die rechte Quintessenz der Greisenheit, unschmackhaft, ja abgeschmackt.<sup>91</sup>

Goethe intimates a primary group-response of disillusionment with Holbach's work: the title promises much, the contents disappoint (again, the implicit ironic comment of maturity on the arrogance of youth which is prepared summarily to dismiss the work without any sustained and objective consideration of it is not to be overlooked in context):

Keiner von uns hatte das Buch hinausgelesen, denn wir fanden uns in der Erwartung getäuscht, in der wir es aufgeschlagen hatten.<sup>92</sup>

However, implicit in Goethe's account is a more significant and more telling reaction to Holbach's *Systeme* than the simple boredom and dismissal of his youthful prejudices. He claims indifference, but admits simultaneously, by careful and conscious use of language, to have been shaken and disturbed by Holbach's polemic:

Wir begriffen nicht, wie ein solches Buch gefährlich sein könnte. Es kam uns so grau, so cimmericisch vor, daß wir Mühe hatten, seine Gegenwart auszuhalten, daß wir davor wie vor einem Gespenste schauderten.<sup>93</sup>

Again, the force of Goethe's individual and personal response is attenuated through the attribution of this reaction to the peer-group: Holbach's work is received and reviewed by a plural entity of young critics, and Goethe assigns the group's response this place in his autobiography. The grammatical plural here again also fulfils the rhetorical function of distancing the author from his text, and hence from his own response. Goethe's inability to bear the presence of the book as a physical object is itself a physical, almost a pathological reaction, which he aptly encapsulates in the verb *schaudern*; a term, and a concept, which for the mature author of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is full of meaning and implication. Goethe is appalled not only by the content, but by the very existence of such a text, and feels perhaps compelled to dismiss the work in such disparaging terms in order to mitigate his particular interest, albeit born of abhorrence, in Holbach's work. To read, consider and reject the thesis is an acceptable intellectual response; to personify the book as an object of human

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<sup>91</sup> HA IX 490.

<sup>92</sup> HA IX 491.

<sup>93</sup> HA IX 490.

morbidity and dread, without proper consideration of its message, is suspiciously defensive. Something in this purely materialistic conception of nature and morality is disturbing to Goethe; something in Holbach's justification of existence in terms of atheistic humanism touches a raw nerve. Goethe may purport to have dismissed the writings of the French Enlightenment as quintessentially senile, arid and moribund, but he cannot and will not, as author of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, deny the significantly deeper and more far-reaching effect of enlightened philosophy in general upon him. His criticisms are dually personal: of the character and mode of communication of the principal Enlighteners, and of the response elicited by these in him. Objectively and intellectually, the ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment necessarily form a part of Goethe's cultural self-education and self-awareness so integral and integrated as, for him, to be self-explanatory, immanent in his chosen medium and necessitating no further discussion. And yet, what is apparent from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as a post-factum autobiographical account is an almost gleeful refutation of Voltaire's anti-biblical polemic<sup>94</sup>; antipathy toward the vehemence in character and nature of French Encyclopaedism<sup>95</sup>; and distaste for the 'triste, atheistische Halbnacht' of Holbach's materialism<sup>96</sup>. The experienced eye of maturity and the enthusiastic vigour of youth combine to produce a vehicle for ostensibly contradictory thoughts, impressions and judgements, through which the true burden of Goethe's meaning must be dimly perceived, brought to conceptual clarity, and apprehended.

Goethe's explicit account of the German Enlightenment, its contextual setting in the history of culture and its role in the development of his own intellectual awareness, is even more cursory and understated than his discussion of contemporary French culture. Again he provides an ostensibly objective and impersonal appraisal of the principal personalities and works of the German eighteenth century. He mentions Gottsched's *Kritische Dichtkunst*, useful because it provided Goethe and his contemporaries with a historical<sup>al</sup> perspective through which they were able to view the development of the poetic genre as a valid art-form<sup>97</sup>; he alludes fleetingly to the dispute between Gottsched and the Swiss pair, Bodmer and Breitinger<sup>98</sup>, and in so

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<sup>94</sup> HA IX 485.

<sup>95</sup> HA IX 487.

<sup>96</sup> HA IX 491.

<sup>97</sup> Johann Christian Gottsched, *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst, durchgehends mit Exempeln unserer besten Dichter erläutert*, Leipzig, 1740. (See HA IX 262).

<sup>98</sup> HA IX 262.

doing cites the names, but nothing of the substance, of Gellert, Lichtwer, and Lessing; Georg Schlosser is in fact described personally, being a close personal acquaintance, but his most significant contemporary work, his parodistic imitation of Pope's *Essay on Man*, is mentioned but obliquely. The principal public dispute of eighteenth-century German aesthetics - whether German art should look to English or Franco-classical models for inspiration in form and direction - is, for Goethe, quite beside the point: what he perceives is, as has been discussed, the need not to imitate an extraneous cultural form, but to integrate relevant borrowed material to the pre-existent historical and cultural tradition, and form thereby a dynamic and original German cultural tradition. Thus it may be that his discussion of the leading figures and principal debates of the eighteenth-century German cultural scene does not play an ostensibly major role within the broad context of Goethe's autobiography, because his concern is with a higher, more significant and more refined notion of cultural synthesis and appreciative development.

Goethe's judgements and observations about his cultural context in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* are generally related from the standpoint of personal experience: the relationship of the individual to his culture and the influence of culture on the individual is the beginning and end of Goethe's historico-cultural appreciation. His attitude to the reader is almost playful and teasing: one isolated allusion may carry the weight of a serious and far-reaching pronouncement; Goethe piles layer upon layer of significance and implication onto an oblique and cursory reference to a contemporary philosophical, social or literary notion. The opposition of freedom and necessity, for instance, is an accepted commonplace of Goethe's philosophical world:

Unser Leben ist, wie das Ganze in dem wir erhalten sind, auf eine unbegreifliche Weise aus Freiheit und Notwendigkeit zusammengesetzt.<sup>99</sup>

Goethe, however, takes this fundamental polarity as the starting-point in his discussion of his turning away from French language and culture; and in so doing he alludes to something considerably more significant than general antipathy toward an ageing and retrograde cultural model. From the vantage-point of authorial maturity and experience, Goethe refers to the intellectual climate of his youth which insisted that life's primary task was the conscious and aware acceptance of the absolutes of human existence (the polarity of freedom and necessity being one such absolute). What is advocated is no fatalistic submission to external factors over which the human being

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<sup>99</sup> HA IX 478.

exercises no control, but the application of these absolutes truths to the amelioration and deeper understanding of the human condition:

Das *Was* liegt in uns, das *Wie* hängt selten von uns ab, nach dem *Warum* dürfen wir nicht fragen, und deshalb verweist man uns mit Recht aufs *Quia*<sup>100</sup>

That Goethe employs the latin term *Quia* in place of the German *Weil* belies the apparent insignificance of this little sentence in context. The foreign word is here incongruous; the term is not a commonplace borrowing, and the indigenous German word seems more contextually appropriate, by virtue of its grammatical and rhetorical similarities to the other significant elements in the phrase. Goethe is here emphasizing the notion of causation, drawing particular attention to this specific concept by very subtle use of the medium of language. What he is referring to here is not merely a justification of his rejection of French language and culture in preference to the German: Goethe is here introducing the whole notion of *a posteriori* teleological reasoning, the definition of all natural phenomena in terms of purpose, the justification of cause in terms of effect, which was the dominant trend of eighteenth-century German rational philosophy, and which the great thinkers of the *Aufklärung* were concerned to transcend.

Voltaire gave ridiculous embodiment to the extreme rationalism of eighteenth-century German teleology in the character of the loquacious Dr Pangloss in the *conte philosophique*, *Candide*. Pangloss states categorically that the human nose possesses the shape it does in order that spectacles may comfortably sit upon it.<sup>100a</sup> For Goethe, it is Kant who pulls German philosophy from this morass of specious *a posteriori* reasoning, who revitalizes the arid lifelessness of theological rationalism, by founding a new critique of reason upon which a valid and vital German philosophy may base itself:

Kant ... ist auch derjenige, dessen Lehre sich fortwirkend erwiesen hat, und die in unsere deutsche Kultur am tiefsten eingedrungen ist ... Die Unterscheidung des Subjekts vom Objekt, und ferner die Ansicht, daß jedes Geschöpf um sein selbst willen existiert und nicht etwa der Korkbaum gewachsen ist, damit wir unsere Flaschen propfen können, dieses hatte Kant mit mir gemein, und ich freute mich, ihm hierin zu begegnen.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. <sup>100a</sup> *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. cit., Vol. 21, p. 138.

<sup>101</sup> Conversation with Eckermann, 11 iv 1827 (GA XXIV 248). See also *Erster Entwurf einer allgemeinen Einleitung in die vergleichende Anatomie*, in: *Goethe. Die Schriften zur Naturwissenschaft*, ed. Dorothea Kuhn, Weimar, 1977, (I,9): 'So ist auch jedes Geschöpf Zweck ihrer selbst...'

Thus can the most ostensibly throwaway remark of Goethe's convey a wealth and depth of meaning and implication which transcend the immediately autobiographical context. His awareness of the tradition in which he is working, and of the wider tradition which fostered it, is implicit and integrated. In fact, the commonplaces of Goethe's philosophical and cultural environment are for him so necessary and so integral that explicit allusion would detract from the force of his argument. What is commonplace is so and must remain so, as a foundation and corner-stone for consequent cultural progress. Goethe's account of his cultural context must therefore be viewed and appraised in conjunction with an awareness of what the notion of 'tradition' meant to him; what Goethe understood by 'traditional material'; how, why and to what extent he used the substance of his general cultural inheritance - the commonplace notions of his intellectual age, the ideas, concepts and thoughts of his predecessors, the very medium of language - in his own oeuvre. For in Goethe's theory of tradition, if the existence of such a notion may be assumed, lies the core of his appreciation of religion as a cultural entity, and hence leads to an ultimate clarification of his understanding of the process of secularization.

Hans Reiss, in his editorial introduction to the collection *Goethe und die Tradition*, asserts that Goethe developed no explicit theory of tradition, that his various utterances on the notion of tradition as an objective cultural phenomenon were eclectic and unsystematic:

er entwickelte weder eine Theorie der Tradition noch entwarf er genaue Kriterien, wonach man die Güte einer Tradition beurteilen sollte. Seine gelegentlichen Äußerungen zur Frage der Tradition sind unsystematischer Art.<sup>102</sup>

As was observed with reference to Goethe's putative failure to provide a systematic account of his religious convictions, however, a lack of obvious unified systematization does not necessarily imply a lack of inner coherence. Goethe's apparent failure to provide a systematic account of his attitude to and use of tradition does not necessitate the judgement of his understanding of tradition as something unanalyzable and essentially incoherent. For Ernst Curtius, writing over twenty years before Reiss, in the historico-cultural context of a Europe, and more particularly a German-speaking Europe, still attempting to recover from and come to terms with the

<sup>102</sup> Hans Reiss (ed.), *Goethe und die Tradition*, Frankfurt am Main, 1972, p.16.

ravages of the previous decades, there is a specific and crucial Goethean theory of tradition which has remained unappraised and unappreciated:

Goethes Lehre von der Überlieferung ist, soviel ich sehe, nie gewürdigt worden. Es könnte sein, daß sie in der heutigen Verworrenheit das wichtigste Stück seiner Botschaft wäre.<sup>103</sup>

This theory of tradition, of a systematic use of inherited material in a novel context, is not, as Reiss remarks, explicitly and specifically worked out by Goethe. It is rather, as is implied by Curtius, implicit in his oeuvre as a whole. What is required is a recognition, appraisal and bringing forth of the nature and implications of a specifically Goethean understanding of the process of cultural tradition and its function, within the broader context of his consequent reciprocal contribution to that cultural tradition.

One of the fundamental tenets of any positive theory of tradition is the ultimately metaphysical postulate that the past has a function in the present. Curtius introduces the notion of cyclical recurrence in the pattern of cultural progress by referring, ironically, to the repeated attempts within the history of European culture to deny that very history itself, to draw an unbreachable line across the continuum of cultural progress by which the continuum itself is abrogated and a wholly new, unique and original beginning proclaimed. What Curtius refers to as 'schriftstürmender Wut', or 'graphoclastic rage'<sup>104</sup>, is the absolute rejection of all pre-existing culture which prompted, throughout the course of European cultural history, such disparate events as the iconoclastic riots of medieval uprisings; the political and literary sansculottism of the radical Enlightenment; the desperate attempt of the post-war German *Kahlschlag* literary movement to found a new German culture which owed no debt to the tradition which, in the opinion of the exponents of this tradition, had let itself and them down so badly. The *Kahlschläger* failed because the premises of their movement, though noble, were naïve and untenable: cultural tradition is an integral and ultimately definitive factor of the German language which was their medium. The attempt of the radical Enlighteners to abolish their tradition and rebuild afresh failed because no physical object, and by extension no cultural notion, can be created entirely anew. Re-creation is by definition the reformation of existing materials, the

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<sup>103</sup> Ernst Robert Curtius, *Kritische Essays zur europäischen Literatur*, Bern, 1950. See pp.59ff.: 'Goethe - Grundzüge seiner Welt' (p.68). Trans. cit. pp.73ff.: 'Fundamental features of Goethe's world', p.82.

<sup>104</sup> Curtius, op. cit., p.68; trans. cit., p.82.

reformulation of existing words, images and ideas. Tradition, the foundation and perpetuation of culture as a living process, is not to be denied, cannot be rejected, but demands growth and dynamic development.

For Rudolf Bultmann, tradition is primarily a recollection, a repetition of the cultural past:

Unter Tradition verstehen wir zunächst die weitergegebene Erinnerung an die Vergangenheit.<sup>105</sup>

This is, however, as Bultmann acknowledges, a wholly inadequate simplification. The mere recollection of past data of cultural entities, established philosophical notions, literary images and ideas, leads, inevitably, to a kind of cultural stasis and fixity by which no development is encouraged, no originality inspired, no growth forthcoming. Such an 'erstarrte Tradition'<sup>106</sup> renders culture fixed, static, cliché; and what fails to grow and develop eventually atrophies out of existence. For Curtius, it is Goethe's awareness of the dangers of such cultural ossification that lends his theory of tradition its particular and vital significance:

Das Heilmittel konnte nur in einem neuen Ergreifen der Überlieferung liegen. In Goethes Jugend hatten die Original-genies einer verknöcherten Überlieferung den Kampf angesagt. Tradition und Originalität schienen sich auszuschließen. Aber es gibt einen Ausgleich zwischen ihnen.<sup>107</sup>

Past and present, old and new, beginning and end, form some of the metaphysical antinomies which structure and govern all reasoned thinking. They are, as pairs of opposites, logically exclusive but mutually implicit: there is no end which does not necessarily imply a beginning, no present moment which is not pre-conditioned by a past, nothing new which does not contain within it a corresponding notion of something old. Inheritance and originality function in culture as another such pair of conceptually exclusive and implicit concepts. The *Ausgleich* between inheritance and originality, to which Curtius refers, implies more than an unstable balance achieved between two more or less equal constituent parts. At the core of Goethe's understanding and treatment of his tradition lies an awareness of the part he himself has to play in its apprehension and assimilation, in its furtherance and continuity. There is no valid inheritance without a valid assimilating mind operating within its

<sup>105</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, 'Reflexionen zum Thema Geschichte und Tradition', in *Weltbewohner und Weimaraner*, Zürich, Stuttgart, 1960, p.10.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>107</sup> Curtius, op. cit., p.68.

tradition. Inheritance and originality coexist and complement one another, being implicitly linked, not as a pair of static concepts, but as simultaneously existent and mutually necessary factors in the dynamic process of culture.

Reiss maintains that the essence of creative freedom lies in the ability to evaluate and to profit from traditional material:

Es gilt hier, die schöpferische Freiheit nicht zu verlieren, die uns erlaubt, das Überlieferte zu verwerten ... Es geht also darum, eine Tradition zu nutzen.<sup>108</sup>

Curtius's notion of an *Ausgleich* between cultural inheritance and creative individuality would imply, however, that tradition is inherent and necessarily present in all cultural creation, and that its 'calling forth' is not, surely, an exploitation, but a completion. The re-evaluation of existing material advocated by Reiss cannot be objectively calculative, but is an active encouragement of the dynamism of cultural evolution. For historical continuity and the development of culture depend on the active acknowledgement of the past's function in the present:

wie es keine Tradition ohne Geschichte, wenn anders Tradition nicht nur in der Weitergabe und unreflektierten Übernahme alter Ordnungen und Vorstellungen besteht, sondern wenn es zur Tradition gehört, daß sie wesenhaft variabel, lebendig ist, das heißt aber, wenn sie selbst geschichtlich ist. Geschichte bringt Tradition hervor, und Tradition stiftet die Kontinuität der Geschichte.<sup>109</sup>

It is the synthesis of discrete traditional elements in a contemporary cultural context which validates and justifies that present context, and promises a future significance which is itself a synthesis of polarized opposites. Inheritance and creation, tradition and originality, 'Vergangenheit und Gegenwart wie Thesis und Antithesis aufeinander bezogen'<sup>110</sup>, past and present are mutually dependent and, in their integration, point onward and upward to a constantly developing, self-refining process of cultural evolution.

This is, then, an outline of the theory of the function of tradition in culture which details the peculiar and unique significance of Goethe's attitude to and treatment of the specific tradition of religion. For a significant factor in Goethe's particular contribution to the consideration and reconsideration of religion as a cultural entity in

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<sup>108</sup> Reiss, op. cit., p.18.

<sup>109</sup> Bultmann, op. cit, p.14.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.13.

the eighteenth century is his awareness that nothing is new, but that everything, including religion, exists to be re-created. Purely original creation is, for Goethe, a vain and impossible notion<sup>111</sup>: originality lies, for Goethe, in the concrete assimilation of existing ideas, accepted commonplaces and defined areas of thought, in a novel manner and fresh context. The continuity of tradition depends on the consideration of all elements of culture - including religious creed and dogma, Church history, theological debate, the language of religious teaching and reverence - as pure matter, as raw material to be reformed and refined into something new and original on the continuum of culture<sup>112</sup>. This function is the generation of cultural progress as a continuum, depending on the reformulation of basic inherited material into a new entity in the present, which is itself basic inheritable material for future reformulation.

In this synthesis of old and new, of past and present, in the simultaneous combination of what has gone before and anticipation and determination of what is to come, lies the key to Goethe's conception of the function of secularization as a cultural process which is both a temporalization and a desacralization. The temporalizing of traditional religious material is the recollection of the past in the present which points toward a future universality and generality; the desacralizing of religious elements through a novel contextualization is itself a corresponding *resacralization*, a re-enactment of religion and a re-evaluation of its original function which is of validity and worth independent of source. Secularization is thus a manifestation of cultural dynamism; a cycle of organic inception and fruition which determines the very existence, and the developmental pattern, of cultural civilization. Goethe's autobiographical writings bear testimony to the immediate philosophical and theological context in which he lived and worked, to the wider tradition which fostered it, and, most significantly, to the potential function of the past remembered in the present moment in culture for the future momentum of cultural progress. The synthesis of existing polarities is, as we have seen, a recurrent factor in his discussion of historical religion; and, in the context of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, of reason and faith, of human-centred and God-centred world-views, of the realms of the

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<sup>111</sup> See, as one example among many, his poetic depiction of the necessary awareness of a debt to tradition in the epigram from the *Zahme Xenien*, 'Gern wär' ich Überlieferung los/Und ganz original ...' (HA I 310).

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Goethe's conversation with Eckermann, 2 v 1824: 'Die Religion ... steht in demselbigen Verhältnis zur Kunst wie jedes andere höhere Lebensinteresse auch. Sie ist bloß als Stoff zu betrachten, der mit allen übrigen Lebenstoffen gleiche Rechte hat' (GA XXIV 115).

sacral and the secular. This would evidence a concern with the logically acceptable premises of a synthesis of polarized opposites. but Goethe expresses his interest in the forms and content of 'original Christianity' in a way which implies that sense of recourse to previous forms in order to progress into the future which is the hallmark of binary synthesis. His 'theory of tradition', his appreciation of the significance of the past for and in the present, is not explicitly evaluated, but is implicit in the very language and form of his account of his age, and of his own role within his broader cultural tradition:

Ein Gefühl aber, das bei mir gewaltig überhand nahm, war die Empfindung der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in Eins, eine Anschauung, die etwas Gespenstermäßiges in die Gegenwart brachte.<sup>113</sup>

Goethe's awareness of the potential and necessary synthesis of past and present occurs to him as an almost tangible, sensible experience: an inchoate emotional response is engendered by this fusion of tradition and creation; something indeterminate and yet specific, something ethereal and yet existent, is called up from the past to function independently in the present. Thus it is that Goethe's account of his own life is underpinned by the determining experiences of his childhood, youth and early manhood; that his autobiography is largely a general account of his world; that this account of his contemporary age never loses touch with the broader tradition which preceded, nurtured and determined it; and that the form of his account betrays this. The cultural background of the events and personalities described is a latent feature of Goethe's depiction: assimilation of this background depends on the subject-object relation by which the subject-reader perceives the background in the object of the text. Goethe's account of his objective background is channelled by his subjective perception and re-presented for perception by the reader in the objective form of his depiction. He 'secularizes' in his re-presentation of historical material. Secularization as a *Verzeitlichung* is this re-enactment of the past in the present to create something independent and yet derived; secularization as a *Verweltlichung* is the redeployment of existing cultural entities, specifically religious entities, in a fresh, ostensibly worldly context, by which the original meaning is not lost but heightened, the primary sense not abolished but completed. All culture, including *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as a literary text, is necessarily a derivation and a repetition, a constant process of recollection, re-enactment and re-creation. Religious material is essentially material

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<sup>113</sup> HA X 32.

existent within the cultural tradition in general; religion has a place and function on the broad continuum of culture. The secularization of religious material means primarily that the basic entity undergoes, through re-situation, a transfer of function. Concomitantly, there operates that aspect of redeployment whereby the re-located religious entity enjoys a novel context, a novel meaning, a novel appreciation which transcends, but does not negate, the original meaning. Goethe's use of the material of his inherited religious tradition is, in these terms, both a secularization and a corresponding sacralization. It is with this in mind that we now proceed to analyze some of the key 'religious' passages in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. The significance of potential synthesis for the religious tradition and Goethe's account thereof is, I hope, evident. But if it is a process of binary synthesis which informs Goethe's treatment of sacral material in a secular context, then his secularized texts will contain some intimation of a feeling of faith, of the sense and import of ancient historical religious feeling, and this sacral import in a secular context will in some sense be open to perception and appreciation by the reader.

Great poetry carries beliefs into its language in such a way that it can achieve a communication transcending the bounds of those beliefs. But we must learn how to read it.<sup>1</sup>

#### CHAPTER IV

##### GOETHE'S MODE OF SECULARIZATION: THE RECREATION OF RELIGIOUS FAITH

The critical assertion that Goethe was indebted to the philosophical and cultural tradition in which he operated is, primarily, a statement of the obvious. Obvious because, in the first instance, 'no man is an Island, entire of itself', and Donne's 'Continent' applies no less to the activity and productivity of humanity than to humanity itself. The artist does not work in a cultural vacuum, a hermetically sealed and antiseptic bubble which is clinically free from potential contamination through any conceivable contact with the world outside. Artistic creation is no spontaneous parthenogenesis; it is necessarily communicative and hence contaminative. The artist interacts with his or her world, and the ensuing artistic product is the assimilation and the objectification of this interaction. Indebtedness to tradition and interplay with the prevailing environment are the accepted facts of cultural life.

And yet critics are generally agreed in acknowledging that Goethe was a special and unique artist; that his writings display a massive and awe-inspiring originality which cannot be confined to a few peripheral novel ideas, but is integral to and inherent in the corpus of his works. Neither the works of creative artistry, nor the scientific writings, nor the manifold autobiographical and epistolary texts from Goethe are to be dismissed as mere reiterations of known and accepted truths, Goethe's account of his world reduced to an undifferentiated reflection of contemporary reality. Goethe is held somehow to achieve originality in his treatment of derived material, to create something new out of a body of old and accepted cultural notions and entities. Indeed, it is precisely in his statements of the obvious, in his reiterations of the accepted and the commonplace, that the full force of Goethe's originality and his unique contribution to his cultural tradition are held to be perceived. Ernst Robert

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<sup>1</sup> David Daiches, *Goethe and the Poets*, op. cit., p.219.

Curtius proclaims Goethe's 'Originalität auf dem festen Grund der Überlieferung'<sup>2</sup>: Goethe's artistic creativity is founded firmly on derived and unoriginal material. Founded on cultural inheritance, certainly, but not reducible to and explicable in terms of mere derivation and repetition. Curtius praises the exemplary phenomenon of the artist with the strength and courage:

sein originelles Wesen selbstständig auszubilden und das vielfach Aufgenommene *nach seiner Weise* zu bearbeiten.<sup>3</sup>

Something of the artist must be brought to bear in the statement of the obvious and the reiteration of the accepted: if these are not to remain among the ranks of the cliché, outworn, unconsidered, then they have to be re-said and re-stated in a way which encourages reconsideration; shedding, as it were, new light on old truths. And it is the way in which Goethe states the obvious, his manipulation of accepted commonplaces in the medium of language, which allows what is now acknowledged to be the characteristically Goethean articulation of old truths in a way which encourages their rethinking. It is the *manner* of the reformulation of traditional material which renders original what is undisputably derived, which gives new voice to old songs; in the *manner* of Goethe's articulation of established commonplace cultural notions that the tension between derivation and originality is apparently resolved. In short, Goethe treats unoriginal themes originally, and a search for his particular contribution to his cultural heritage, as the introduction to Stephenson's *Goethe's Wisdom Literature* makes plain, must concern itself with the nature and function of his reformulations of accepted truths.

The notion that it is Goethe's characteristic treatment of borrowed and derived material which renders his writings unique, peculiar to him, and worthy of the appellation of originality is not, of course, a novel critical approach. It is this notion which informs Erich Trunz's reference to Goethe's 'Umarbeitungen' of contemporary and classical formal dictates in his own neo-classical poetry, and which, more recently, forms the basis of Stephenson's study of the relationship of form and content in Goethe's *Sprüche in Reimen*<sup>4</sup>. It is, moreover, a notion which has found

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<sup>2</sup> *Kritische Essays zur europäischen Literatur*, op. cit., p.68.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. (My italics).

<sup>4</sup> *Goethe's Wisdom Literature*, op. cit., pp.14 and 19. Reference is to Trunz's 'Anmerkungen' to Goethe's poetry in HA I, and to Wolfgang Preisendanz, *Die Spruchform in der Lyrik des alten Goethe und ihre Vorgeschichte seit Opitz*, Heidelberger Forschung, Heft 1, Heidelberg, 1962, where the author refers to the 'inextricable interfusion of form and meaning' that results from the 'transformation of borrowed material into poetry'.

particular favour with those seeking to explain Goethe's attitude to religion.

Religious material is most obviously derived: it is obviously not directly attributable to Goethe, nor to any other writer of ostensibly non-religious texts. This lack of explicit religious authority need not, however, deny these texts a religious function. Goethe did not invent religion, but he does use its attributes inventively, making frequent explicit and implicit reference to material of religious and biblical origin in his works: this, as has been seen, is what critics tend to refer to as Goethe's 'secularization'. Paul Stöcklein's discussion of the derived religious content of many of Goethe's maxims speaks of a 'Neuformulierung'<sup>5</sup> of religious material in his wisdom literature seemingly synonymous with what Trunz called Goethe's 'Umarbeitung' of formal conceits in poetry. Stöcklein asserts that all the various strands of thought present and functioning in the body of material that constitutes Goethe's maxims culminate and fuse together in one single intention, which for Stöcklein is inherently and definitively 'religious'. Indeed, Stöcklein views Goethe's self-expression in terms of religious formulations, his use of biblical language, as an inner *compulsion*:

Die wissenschaftstheoretischen, die naturwissenschaftlichen, die ethischen, die kunsttheoretischen und die eigentlichst philosophischen Aphorismen, sie kommen alle am Ende in einem Punkt zusammen; sie gipfeln in einem bestimmten religiösen Absehen. Von allen Seiten her kommt der Denker auf einem Gebiet zu sprechen, in dem er, schon äußerlich, biblische Formulierungen zu benutzen *sich gedrängt fühlt*.<sup>6</sup>

Stöcklein's account would seem to imply that this use of religious language is due as much to a willingness to comply with external expectations, conditions and demands as to inner motivation on the part of the writer. That Goethe employs religious language in his maxims is manifest and obvious: to suppose that this is in deference to contemporary taste surely belittles both the author and his public, and by-passes the important issue that the significance of the religious content of the maxims lies not in the fact that this is derived, but in the nature, and more specifically, in the function, of its reformulation. Stephenson notes that the intentional function of Goethe's maxims, which Stöcklein considers 'purely religious', is quite irreconcilable with the apparently contradictory view of the maxims, as a body of literature, as 'purely poetic':

<sup>5</sup> Paul Stöcklein, *Wege zum späten Goethe*, Hamburg, 1960, p.284.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.283. (My italics).

Knowledge of the political and cultural history of the time reveals a clear intention on Goethe's part, in at least some of his maxims and aphorisms, to get across a *message*, an intention which is obviously not consonant with the view of the whole of his wisdom literature as 'pure poetry'.<sup>7</sup>

Neither term, 'purely religious' or 'purely poetic', caters adequately for the function of Goethe's reformulation of religious material in his maxims. The critical inadequacy of the approach to Goethe's writings which ignores his formulation *in situ* in order to hunt and pin down the source of his material is equally apparent in a reading of his works which dismisses the derived content of his thought by concentrating on the speciously 'poetic' aspects of his formulation. And this is of especial relevance to the nature and overall import of Goethe's treatment of his religious tradition in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.

The intention of Goethe's autobiography cannot be described as 'purely religious': religion is, however, one of the fundamental elements of historical culture which provide the objective historical and cultural background to the work. Moreover, autobiography is by no means an obviously 'poetic' genre. 'Knowledge of the political and cultural history of the time' is both the foundation and the intention of the work, which itself explicitly intends 'to get across a message'. There is no 'poetry' without foundation in experience and derived culture: conversely, there can be no relation of experience that is not channelled by the differing consciousness of the artist. That the experiences related in the autobiography have been 'felt' and 'lived' is accepted: but it is, as Wilkinson suggests in a different context, in the *formulation* of experience in the autobiographical text that the transition from deed to thought, the transformation of life into art, occurs. It is the communication of lived experience through the medium of language that renders life 'poetic' and gives poetry the illusion of 'life'; the expression of the sentience of life itself in sensuous language of phonetic sound and physical structure which transcends the inherent abstraction of language's semantic message to articulate experience as it was, and is, lived. These linguistic features exist formally in the structure of the text: they have a manifest presence within the physical body of the text. Their function is, however, less easily apprehended. They operate inchoately on the inchoate psyche of the percipient reader, appealing, through the sensuous links they draw between what is semantically *said*, and what is *felt* by the reader as s/he receives this message, to the inner sentient life of the

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<sup>7</sup> Stephenson, *Goethe's Wisdom Literature*, op. cit., p.20.

individual. The sounds which are evoked, and the visible appearance of the words on the page (the 'sound-look' of language), operate as a 'veil' drawn across the surface of the discursive, rhetorical structure, revealing the dim, confused and incoherent realities of sensuous and emotional life. It is in the binary relationship between discursive content and the poetic 'veil' that a linguistic structure operates *aesthetically*. Stephenson noted that this particular kind of linguistic patterning is:

what Goethe aptly called the 'veil of poetry' (*der Dichtung Schleier*), which, like all veils, by interposing itself between the object and the observer, hides a good deal while, at the same time, heightening what is revealed.<sup>8</sup>

These features are inherent in the text itself, they are products of the process of artistic creation derived, as Goethe's poetic coining of the term suggests, as a sort of legacy - or testament - from the 'truths' of lived experience: 'Der Dichtung Schleier aus der Hand der Wahrheit'<sup>9</sup>.

The very title of Goethe's autobiography implies this inter-relationship. The 'truth' inheres in the 'poetry' and the 'poetry' in the 'truth', in mutual presupposition and interdependence. The inchoate realities of life-experience are articulated in and through the visible and phonetic manifestation of the literary text: sentient feeling, which cannot adequately be expressed in terms of semantic abstraction, is communicated through the sensuous body of language.

The 'Dichtung' of Goethe's autobiography cannot, therefore, be accounted for merely as the mature assimilation of early experience. It is in the poetic formulation of derived material that Goethe's acknowledged originality inheres; in his highly stylised articulation of the paradoxically concomitant constituent elements of 'truth' and 'poetry' that he re-objectifies his differentiated experience of his contemporary world and the tradition which shaped it. By according this autobiographical work the appellation 'poetic', Goethe calls into question all barriers between the genres of prose and poetry, and makes explicit the implication that inherently poetic functions are in operation in the transformation of ostensibly prosaic material, drawn from life itself, into meaningful art. The autobiography, like the body of Goethe's wisdom literature, is neither pure invention nor pure derivation; it is derived experience differentiated by the mind of the artist and given its most subtle expression in his formal manipulation of his linguistic medium. It is, then, in the binary relationship of 'truth' and 'poetry'

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.161.

<sup>9</sup> HA I 152.

that the mode of secularization in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* which I argue for may be seen to operate: as a 'veil' of sounds and looks in the linguistic structure of the text, which interacts with the discursive content to instigate a particular kind of response in the reader.

Any consideration of Goethe's deployment of religious material in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* will need, therefore, to offer an account of the significance of his mode of secularization as a means of preserving this most crucial aspect of his derived tradition while transforming the unoriginal religious material into something highly original. For while there are manifold references to traditional religion in the pages of Goethe's autobiography - in explicit reference to cults and trends of his age, the position of the Church, the writer's uneasy relationship with both orthodox and unorthodox religious groups - the significance of Goethe's secularization runs deeper than is expressed by a mere acknowledgement of his reflection of contemporary religious trends. The mode of Goethe's secularization incorporates both this reflection of religion in his age and in his environment, and the significance of the manner of its manifestation in the literary text. An enquiry into Goethe's mode of secularization needs to investigate the aesthetic import of religion in art by examining the formal conditions of Goethe's reiteration of known religious truths and analysing the functional aspects of his linguistic medium in his literary transmutation of experienced reality.

Before embarking on a formal analysis of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, I propose to consider aspects of Goethe's mode of secularization operational in another context, with a view to placing in perspective the prevalent and relevant linguistic and semantic features which are brought to bear in Goethe's artistic treatment of his derived religious tradition. An analysis of one of Goethe's late philosophical aphorisms will, I hope, indicate the significant inter-relationship of derived culture and its reformulation by elucidating the nature of Goethe's secularization of religious materials and motifs, and their mode, in an ostensibly non-religious literary context.

Den teleologischen Beweis vom Dasein Gottes hat die kritische Vernunft beseitigt; wir lassen es uns gefallen. Was aber nicht als Beweis gilt, soll uns als Gefühl gelten, und wir rufen daher von der Brontotheologie bis zur Niphotheologie alle dergleichen fromme Bemühungen wieder heran. Sollten wir im Blitz, Donner und Sturm nicht die Nähe einer übergewaltigen Macht, in Blütenduft und lauem Luftsäuseln nicht ein liebevoll sich annäherndes Wesen empfinden dürfen?<sup>10</sup>

Here Goethe treats, in the form of a philosophical reflection, perhaps the most fundamental question of the entire tradition of Western metaphysics; that of the existence of God. He iterates thus in this context the fundamentally commonplace tension between rational ‘proof’ and supra-rational ‘faith’; between apprehension of the deity as an absolute, existent reality, and approximation of God in human consciousness; which has characterized theological debate since the very beginnings of theology. The semantic burden of Goethe’s aphorism is that Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy, here alluded to metonymically as ‘die kritische Vernunft’ (the relevance of which for Goethe’s contemporary world as he saw it was discussed in the previous chapter) has transcended the crude teleology of previous theological rationalism. But Goethe also contends that alongside the abstract philosophical notion of absolute ‘proof’ through rational deduction, there exists the significant sensuous element of ‘feeling’, which no amount of abstract reasoning and speculation can effectively deal with. Goethe’s aphorism thus places itself and its rhetorical locutor firmly within the broad tradition of Western philosophy, and accords the philosophical temper of Goethe’s contemporary world - in its abrogation of Leibnizian teleology, the subsequent pre-eminence of Kantian critical reason, and the indeterminate but significant role of feeling therein - a significant and recognizable place on this wider, general, philosophical continuum. Moreover, the tension between rational proof and sensuous experience is a pivotal aspect of this wider tradition: Goethe is here giving expression to the significance of this tension for his immediate, post-Enlightenment philosophical milieu, according his expression of received thought a contemporary relevance while simultaneously communicating the origins of the thought itself within its more general cultural history. This compatibility of reason and feeling which characterizes Goethe’s post-Kantian philosophical world is but a contemporary realization of an ancient epistemological problem; and the primary theological concerns of the eighteenth century are seen in this way as recurrent manifestations on a

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<sup>10</sup> HA XII 365f., §9; Hecker §808.

continuum, through Western culture, of theological and metaphysical speculation.

The thought itself, however, as the most recent available edition of Goethe's maxims points out, is 'so common that it is scarcely necessary to trace it to one special passage: it is implicit in Thomas Aquinas and in Kant'<sup>11</sup>. If Goethe intended more in this aphorism than a mere reiteration of commonplace truths and a repetition of the accepted philosophical concerns of his day, then consideration of the significance of the aphorism must not stop at an appreciation of the semantic burden of his expressed thought and its recognizable place in the history of Western philosophy. Clearly, there is another, parallel message - secondary in appearance but by no means in importance - inherent in Goethe's formulation of the thought.

Goethe's use of certain key-terms at once confirms this putative extension of the aphorism's ostensible burden, and an analysis of their place and function within the text indicates the import and significance of his 'poetic' formulation of the 'truths' of his philosophical tradition. 'Gefühl', for Goethe, is and implies far more than one pole in a tension of opposites which is a *topos* of his contemporary world. 'Gefühl' in the eighteenth century, as Wilkinson and Willoughby have observed<sup>12</sup>, implies the whole continuum from tactile sensory perception to reasoning that T S Eliot called 'felt-thought'; a highly ambivalent process combining rational deduction rooted in feeling and emotional attributes within the thinking process. Thus in Goethe's reference to 'feeling' here we already meet an implicit progression from the Kantian notion of *a priori* moral feeling to which he alludes, which was discussed in the previous chapter of this study. It is feeling in this combinative sense of rational and sensuous perception which Herder commanded the poet to express in the 'dead letter' of his linguistic medium:

du sollst deine Empfindungen aufs Blatt mahlen, ... du sollst deine ganze lebendige Seele in todte Buchstaben hinmahlen.<sup>13</sup>

It is precisely this that Goethe does in the linguistic body of his aphorism: the significance of the concept of 'feeling' in the eighteenth century is, alongside the objective expression of the notion of feeling in the semantic context, itself to be *felt* in the aesthetic formulation of the phrase. The syntactic rhythm of the locution 'Was aber nicht als Beweis gilt, soll uns als Gefühl gelten', conveys, through the patterning of

<sup>11</sup> Goethe's *Maximen und Reflexionen*. A Selection, ed. Stephenson, ed. cit., p.161.

<sup>12</sup> See WW, pp.lxvii and 308, and Stephenson, *Goethe's Wisdom Literature*, op. cit., p.157.

<sup>13</sup> 'Über die neuere deutsche Litteratur', *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Suphan, (ed. cit.), Vol. 1, p.395.

hard consonantal sounds which give the formulation a palpable, tangible *plasticity* - an appreciation of feeling as the basis for thought, of sensuous life as the determinant of rational speculation. This is what Herder articulated in his convocation to join the developing child in the tactile environment of the playroom:

Kommt aber in die Spielkammer des Kindes, und sehet, wie der kleine Erfahrungsmensch faßt, greift, nimmt, wägt, tastet, mißt mit Händen und Füßen, um sich überall die schweren, ersten und nothwendigen Begriffe von Körpern, Gestalten, Größe, Raum, Entfernung u. dgl. treu und sicher zu verschaffen.<sup>14</sup>

Goethe expresses the inherent worth and validity of 'feeling' in the syntactic proximity of 'Gefühl' and 'gelten', compounded by the alliterative repetition of 'ge', and the chain of liquid 'l' sounds which link aurally and visually the concepts of feeling and validity, and the compulsion of their governing verb 'sollen'. He perceives a depth and wealth of feeling which exists and functions where reason is powerless: what makes Goethe stand out from the general philosophical consensus of his age is not only his appreciation of the role of the sensuous drive in the inherent tension between reason and feeling, but his formulation - and communication - of this intuition through exploitation of the material body of his linguistic medium. Physical contact with the deity, whose proximity is affirmed, is advocated and validated in language that is itself palpable in its sensuous sonority: the sounds exist to be perceived, their implication *felt*.

In his deployment of the terms 'Brontotheologie' and 'Niphotheologie', Goethe displays an apparent conversance with some of the more obscure, uncommon, theological terminology. The concepts he mentions are, however, not merely obscure, but deliberately obfuscatory and esoteric: Goethe's use of them is almost certainly, given the context and overall burden of the aphorism, an attempt to ridicule extreme theological rationalism which would search to prove definitively the existence of God in terms of natural and meteorological phenomena, and accord its conceptualizations a specious justification in complicated, pompously classical terminology. 'Brontotheologie', from the Greek βροντε, would imply the recognition and apprehension of God in thunder; 'Niphotheologie', from the Greek νιφος, would seek a corresponding apprehension of God in snow. Neither concept is a standard,

<sup>14</sup> 'Plastik', *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. cit., Vol. VIII, p.7f.

recognized theological term: in fact, both are conspicuous by their absence from standard works of historical theological reference<sup>15</sup>. The terms are thus both highly unusual and hence striking, but are used here by Goethe, with certain irony, as though they were so commonplace as to merit no elucidation or explanation whatsoever. Goethe's contemporary world would almost certainly not be conversant with this terminology: as rhetor, Goethe is drawing deliberate attention to the ridiculous extremism of exaggerated theological rationalism, and mocking thereby the pious practice which issues in these weird and obscurantist religious concepts. For the reference to 'alle dergleichen fromme Bemühungen' is in the first instance a dismissive comment on such manifestations of religious faith in word and action, from ridiculous extreme to ridiculous extreme, throughout the general history of pious practice.

There is, however, a force to be reckoned with in Goethe's use of the word 'fromm', an extremely positive term for him which is not to be equated with the arid emptiness of merely formal piety. The implicit warmth and value of the term for Goethe is here underlined by the alliterative 'm' sounds, the comforting labial nasal consonant, and their plosive equivalent in the initial 'b' of 'Bemühungen', which link aurally and hence sensuously the conceptually adherent notions of 'piety' and 'activity'. Semantically, Goethe represents a dismissal of religious practice which is manifested in pseudo-rational justifications: sensuously, through the material body of his language, he articulates the genuine worth of actively emotional faith.

Moreover, these sensuously validated pious practices are here enveloped by the describing verbal phrase 'wieder heranzurufen'. The primary meaning of the verb implies a repeated alternation of rational deduction and sensuous apprehension which furthers thereby a constant and cyclical process; a spiral of philosophy instigated by feeling, then transcended by feeling which in turn transcends itself, in a combination and coordination of sensual and rational forces. For 'wieder heranzurufen' is an active, transitive verb suggesting more than arid memory-recall; it implies a recollection of the past in the present that is a re-living and a re-enactment; a calling to mind which is an active and dynamic process. The past, by virtue of being recalled, functions anew in

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<sup>15</sup> See for example *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Zweite, neubearbeitete Auflage, herausgegeben von Dr. Michael Hamburger, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1930 (10 vols.); *Kirchenlexikon oder Encyclopädie der katholischen Kirche und ihrer Hilfswissenschaft* (Wetzer und Welte), zweite Auflage, begonnen von Joseph Cardinal Hergenröther, fortgesetzt von Dr. Franz Kaulen, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1883 (12 vols.); *Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, herausgegeben von D. Albert Hanke, Leipzig, 1904 (24 vols.).

the present: 'wieder heranzurufen' conveys this sense of the haunting presence of the past *represented*, that is, re-manifested. Remembrance is of itself an active mental process: what Goethe here conveys is a transcendence of merely mechanistic, logically justified and rationally validated thought-processes through the additional operative presence of sensuous communication, a *feeling* in the sense of emotional engagement, which renders the act of remembrance dynamic and alive in the percipient. Goethe the rhetorical spokesman is thus exploiting the semantic burden of his expressed thought to place the aphorism, and the message it conveys, on a temporal continuum of action and re-enactment, of expression and reformulation, of recollection which renews and recreates.

Secularization is thus taking place on several sub-strata and super-strata in relation to the basic burden of Goethe's aphorism. Primarily, secularization is apparent in the discussion of a fundamentally religious notion in the non-religious - here literary-epigrammatic - context of the *Maximen und Reflexionen*. Parallel to this runs, moreover, the inherent appreciation of religious entities as part of a body of general historico-cultural material; here represented in the reference to strange, inventive religious theories which combine the terminologies of ancient classicism, orthodox Christianity, and eighteenth-century theological rationalism. Most relevant to an enquiry into Goethe's mode of secularization is, however, the allusion to the process of recollection and re-enactment by which cultural entities, abstracted from the general body of historico-cultural material, come into existence when they are re-applied anew: the *representation* of the past in a present context gives embodied life, in and through the inherent power of language to articulate dynamic feeling, to concepts which are past, over, and hence, ostensibly, dead. Goethe's mode of secularization is thus manifest in this active re-materialization of inherited culture through the constant reworking of historical religious commonplaces. By bringing the past back into the present, by articulating its concepts in a particular, significant manner, the process of cultural secularization assures the continued validity and function of historical material in general and religious material in particular. And Goethe describes this process in a terminology that is itself redolent of significance for our understanding of secularization: 'wieder heranzurufen' is an uncommon verbal structure, afforded prominence by this very unusualness, which means, on the semantic level, memory-recall, and implies a great deal more besides. In his use of the verbal concept of

‘wieder heranzurufen’, Goethe makes allusion to a fundamental aspect of orthodox Christian exegesis: the Eucharistic liturgy pivots around the active ‘calling to mind’ of the presence of Christ at the Last Supper which is formally re-enacted in the sacrament of Christian communion according to the prescriptive dictates of the apostle Paul<sup>16</sup>. In an essay entitled ‘The Eucharist as Anamnesis’<sup>17</sup>, M H Sykes discusses the inherent validity of remembering in this context, remembering not as a passive mental process, but as a conscious act of memorial, which in turn ought to lead to positive action on the part of the remembering individual as the vital power of the remembered personality is channelled into the remembering individual’s contemporary world<sup>18</sup>. Pauline *anamnesis* brings Christ into the present in the Eucharist: it demands the physical re-manifestation and representation of Christ in a memorial act which accords memory of him an active function, within the collective consciousness of the recollecting individuals, in the remembering present. Christ is present as an actual, vital force in the act of remembering which recalls His past presence into actuality.

Active personal involvement in the Passion of Christ through re-enactive remembrance, and encouragement to positive action on this basis, are particular significances given within the Christian tradition to a fundamentally pre-Christian notion: *anamnesis* is recognized in the history of philosophy as a primarily Platonic concept of recollection, being a distinctive mode of apprehension of the ‘truths’ of human experiential knowledge<sup>19</sup>. What Goethe’s use of ‘wieder heranzurufen’ indicates here is that the Eucharist, the fundament and linch-pin of the orthodox Christian faith, is itself founded on the secular notion of Platonic *anamnesis*. Goethe’s aphorism thus articulates that this calling-up of the past to function in the present is itself a recurrent cultural notion: the Christian tradition has sacralized into its doctrines a pre-existent,

<sup>16</sup> I Cor. 11:25. Paul’s use here of the Greek *αναμνησις* acquires the nominally agreed English translation of ‘memorial’ (‘Do this as a memorial of me’) in the text of the *New English Bible*, and the German ‘zu meinem Gedächtnis’ in the Lutheran translation. That the term ‘has been subjected to centuries of discussion’ (*The New English Bible Companion to the New Testament*, Oxford, 1971, p.559), is due largely to the incapacity of the translations given to render the continuous present verbal tense of the original Greek, perhaps most adequately expressed in the modern German translation by Jörg Zink, Stuttgart, 1965, ‘zum Gedenken an mich’.

<sup>17</sup> M H Sykes, ‘The Eucharist as Anamnesis’, *The Expository Times*, Vol. LXXI, Edinburgh, 1959-60, pp.115-118.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117: ‘The celebration of the Eucharist as a “memorial” is the releasing of Christ’s power and personality afresh. He is vitally alive once more in the presence of his disciples ... To remember Christ in this way is thus to experience a peculiarly intimate relationship with Him which must inevitably lead to action, both on the part of Christ and on the part of His worshippers’.

<sup>19</sup> See Norman Gulley, ‘Plato’s Theory of Recollection’, *Classical Quarterly*, N S 4, Oxford, 1954, pp.194-213.

and thus inherently secular, notion, which Goethe now secularizes into the content of his aphorism. Christianity has derived a fundamental aspect of its doctrine from the pre-Christian tradition, and Goethe's account of the position of Christianity in his contemporary world makes implicit reference to these pre-Christian origins. Goethe's mode of secularization thus transcends the notion of a unidirectional passage from Church to State to anticipate a broad-based cultural programme where all sources and all aspects of cultural history combine in the present moment, which, by virtue of this inherent combination of things past, accords a vital function to the past in the vitality of the present. The 'wieder heranzurufen' of Goethe's formulation itself recalls, in the secular context of his literary epigram, this most central issue of the Christian faith, bringing a crucially Christian point to bear in his discussion of the outward exigencies of religious practice. His consideration of religious concepts is in a language redolent of latent religious significance: the mode of Goethe's secularization adds an 'extra dimension' of the inherent secularity of fundamental sacral concepts to his epigrammatic discussion of religious topics.

The final sentence of Goethe's aphorism is also expressed in language of theological derivation: it reveals linguistic and conceptual references to the Old Testament story of the flight and divine encouragement of the prophet Elijah in the wilderness<sup>20</sup>. The apposition of the natural phenomena of violent thunderstorm and gentle breeze, of strength, might and power on the one hand, and sweet, gentle embalmment on the other, is of course a common cultural concern based on appreciation of the natural world, a concern which has acquired religious force through inclusion in the Hebrew text. In the Old Testament passage, the active presence of God is to be perceived and apprehended in the violent turbulences of nature and in the 'stilles, sanftes Säuseln', the paradoxical sound of silence, which succeeds them. The burden of Goethe's thought is that through both of these natural extremes some objective existence, an indeterminate 'something', is to make its presence 'felt'. Here the 'extra dimension' of Goethe's formulation is to be perceived not only in his re-secularization of a sacral notion that is implicitly and originally cultural: what is significant is that Goethe's articulation of sentient experience is *itself* made *felt*, tangibly and sonorously functioning in and through the material fabric of

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<sup>20</sup> See I Kings 19:11-12: 'For the Lord was passing by: a great and strong wind came rending mountains and shattering rocks before him, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a low, murmuring sound'.

his linguistic medium. The natural elements 'Blitz, Donner und Sturm' are placed together conceptually and syntactically: they form one tripartite syntactic entity in the structure of the sentence. Their issue, the force that is to proceed out of the 'Blitz, Donner und Sturm', is also a corresponding tripartite semantic structure, 'die Nähe einer übergewaltigen Macht'. Complement adjective and noun are here linked by a vocal assonance which compounds the conceptual consonance of 'Gewalt' and 'Macht': similarly, 'Nähe' is bound, by virtue of its middle vowel, visually if not aurally with the other two phrastic elements. Most significantly, the conceptual violence of 'Blitz, Donner und Sturm' is articulated in the rhetorical brutality of the language which describes the force which ensues: the mutated 'ü' and 'ä' represent linguistically a harsher, sharper vocal sound; the rhythmical alliteration of 'ge' in 'übergewaltiger' articulates an almost percussive beat; 'Macht' is itself a short, sharp thrust of linguistic force. The rhythmical cadences of the second part of the sentence link two more sets of tripartite phrastic elements: 'Blütenduft und lauem Luftsäuseln', and 'ein liebevoll sich annäherndes Wesen', each comprise three rhythmically emphasized elements. In the first set, the semantic significance is compounded by a linguistic formulation which communicates the inherent sentience of the concepts described. The notions here alluded to are of immediate sensory appeal - sight, scent, taste, touch, and hearing are all involved in the perception of 'Blütenduft und lauem Luftsäuseln' - and the rhetorical structure of the phrase articulates and communicates this synaesthetic appeal to the senses. The onomatopoeia of 'säuseln' gives perceptive linguistic form to the sound which is thereby both described and evoked; alliterative repetition of liquid 'l' sounds links all the semantic elements in an articulation of general embalming gentleness; 'lau' and 'säuseln' compound this alliteration with a visual and tonal similarity provided by their shared diphthong, hinting at a fusion of tactile warmth and aural comfort; the semantic closeness of 'Duft' and 'Luft' which, enhanced by their innate rhyme, has made of the pair a commonplace of the German poetic language, is there to be felt in the tactile and sonorous rhythms and rhymes of the phrase which conceal the obviousness of the connection by making of one a nominal suffix and of the other a prefix; this connection is again compounded by the overall chain of 'u' sounds which links all the elements in the phrase, drawing even the relatively insignificant 'und' into the significant aesthetic structure. The 'liebevoll sich annäherndes Wesen' which is to make its presence felt in the natural gentleness

described is itself 'felt' in the fabric of the phrase: the 'l' sounds soothe and caress, in sentient correspondence with the semantic import of personal, emotional warmth; assonance and consonance of 'es' and 'n' link the conceptually contingent elements in 'annäherndes Wesen'. Moreover, the 'liebevoll sich annäherndes Wesen' which is to ensue from the apprehension of gentle nature is linked rhetorically, through the figure of polyptoton, as well as conceptually, with the 'Nähe einer übergewaltiger Macht' which issues from nature's turbulence. The semantic import of the nominal 'Nähe' and the verbal-progressive 'sich-annähernd' is represented in the very structure of the phrase. The state of being close, and the action of moving closer, enclose and embrace all the elements of might and power, natural calm and sweetness, human warmth and emotion, which are involved in the approximation and apprehension of this unfathomable inchoate existence that is to make its presence felt in the combination and coordination of all these elements of the natural world. In short, the notion of God being proximate and all-embracing is expressed in and through the language, and the reader is invited to feel this for himself in his appreciation of the text.

There is, therefore, an inherently sensuous appeal in the language of Goethe's articulation of violent meteorological phenomena and in his expression of gentle, caressing and comforting nature. All the perceptive senses are engaged in alternation and combination in Goethe's communication of human apprehension of the natural world, and the inchoate 'something' which manifests itself through these phenomena is itself articulated, made palpable and apprehensible, in the very language of Goethe's formulation. Goethe's aphorism thus operates as what Stephenson has described and analysed as an 'aesthetic symbol'<sup>21</sup>, articulating the inner, emotional life of the perceiving individual, communicating the felt-life of inchoate sentience through the inherent sentience of its linguistic fabric. This communication is there to be perceived by the reader at a level of perception between the apprehensible levels of the appearance of language on the page and the sounds its symbols represent on the one hand, and the conceptual meaning these convey on the other. Such aesthetic structures exist objectively only when they are perceived by the individual subject, and can only be perceived when they are have a meaning for, and strike a chord in, him or her<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> See Stephenson, *Goethe's Wisdom Literature*, op. cit., p.157 and passim.

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid.*, p.161: 'Since an aesthetic structure lies, as it were, *between* the sound-look and semantic levels of language, it can only be discerned if their coordination does, in fact, serve as a symbol of felt-thought alive in the *percipient*. An aesthetic rule is only "there" if it is perceived, and it will only be perceived if it is meaningful'. (Stephenson's italics).

They are the dim realities of human emotional life given aesthetic form by the 'veil of poetry' which articulates and communicates them. The rhetorical attenuations in the initial and final phrases both govern the tentative action of *feeling* ('Sollten wir ... *empfinden* dürfen?'): the aphorism as an aesthetic symbol articulates this feeling, for the percipient who feels, in the sensuous representation of its words and letters.

The mode of Goethe's secularization is thus to be perceived in his aesthetic transmutation of the language of culture, and the symbols, ideas and notions represented therein, into the form of his literary art, which articulates primal feeling at the same time as it expresses logical meaning. The language, symbolism and philosophy of Goethe's inherited religious tradition - the mythology of the Old Testament, its history, prophecy and doctrine; the Christian eschatology and exegesis in the new mythology of the New Testament - as part of the general culture of Western tradition as a coherent whole, are integrated into the aesthetic symbol he creates, to be perceived and relived by the perceiving individual. Secularization is the re-materialization of religious culture into literary culture: Goethe's mode of secularization makes of these notions a functioning aesthetic symbol which communicates the inherent life and dynamism of religious experience in and through the ostensibly 'dead' letter of language, by offering a semblance of the living truths of real experience portrayed therein.

Crucial factors and elements of Goethe's mode of secularization are, evidently, present and functioning in this philosophical aphorism. It deals in a literary context - the body of wisdom literature that constitutes Goethe's *Maximen und Reflexionen* - with the most essential religious question - that of the existence of God - in such a way as to view this perennial problem against the contemporary seasonal blossoming of eighteenth-century theological rationalism. Above all, this essential religious matter, in its essentially non-religious context, operates, in its redolence of religious nuances and significances, sensuously and hence apprehensively on the psyche of the percipient. Goethe's aphorism functions as a re-secularization of sacral notions which are necessarily, in their elemental essence, secular. Sacrality and secularity co-exist in the maxim as they have co-existed throughout the history of cultural evolution in all its ostensibly sacral and secular manifestations. There is nothing inherently sacral in the media of the sacral message (the Bible exists primarily as a book, theology is a

metaphysical science); nothing that is uni-dimensionally secular, to the exclusion of all religious overtones and undertones, in the existence and function of culturally accepted sacral elements in a new, ostensibly non-sacral, context. Goethe's aphorism blurs the contours of sacrality and secularity - as it blurs the contours of prose and poetry in articulating human sensibilities through the fabric of its medium - in a mode of secularization which presents a religious theme in a non-religious context, alludes to the inherently secular origins of the sacral material exploited, and expresses the sacral theme in such a way as to articulate its essence in language of vital immediacy. Sacrality and secularity, and past and present, are mutually implicit opposites in the fabric of Goethe's aphorism: they are irreconcilable yet mutually interdependent opposites in the evolution of culture and the significant role of religious faith therein. What is apparent in Goethe's mode of secularization in this context is that office of all art which Wilkinson and Willoughby recognized as Schiller's concept of art as adumbrated in the *Ästhetische Briefe*:

Art which takes as its material the ideas and values of our cultural life, and - with superb irreverence for the authority of the contexts from which they are drawn - transmutes them into forms which challenge us to reshape even our most cherished attitudes in the light of a newly-stretched imagination.<sup>23</sup>

Goethe's use, in the secular context of his wisdom literature, of material that is recognizably religious in a way which points to the essentially non-religious character of the materials' origins, is clearly in the mould of that cultural model represented conceptually by what Wilkinson and Willoughby, in their analysis of Schiller's philosophy and its presentation, have termed the 'binary-type synthesis'. Such an abstract concept should not cloud appreciation of the process at work in culture as one of dynamic growth, of improvement and constant refinement, which is always on the basis of the fundamental concepts: though transcended, they are never wholly abolished. The constituent elements of the basic polarities are not annulled, but enhanced, in an infinite process of aspiration and progression through reversion to primary cultural entities. It is this necessary co-existence of the primary polarized opposites of sacrality and secularity that Goethe expresses in the maxim under discussion. A sacral message is communicated in the secular form of Goethe's language: the secular origin of primary sacral concepts is simultaneously alluded to. The two ostensibly irreconcilable realms are revealed as mutually interdependent

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<sup>23</sup> WW, p.lxxxvii.

factors in the continuation of cultural evolution, and the role of religious faith therein is enhanced through fusion with its apparently antagonistic opposite. Goethe encapsulates this fusion of sacral and secular realms in the fabric of his maxim and articulates the significance of the synthesis, as a means of transcending the arid alternation of a separation of religious and worldly realms, in a linguistic form which, through its sensuous dynamism, functions as a paradigm of cultural growth and aspiration. Goethe's maxim bridges two worlds, and the bridging material he uses is not merely fabricated by him, but is composed of pre-existent and primordial factors in the development of culture as a general whole. Cultural dynamism - the evolutionary progress of culture from the historical finiteness of the past, through the re-materialization of the past in the present, towards a refined and itself progressive future - necessitates the promotion of factors already present in the cultural world, the 'self-renewal characteristic of all growth'<sup>24</sup> that demands originality which inheres in tradition, creation based firmly on experience, poetic formulation of the fundamental truths of human existence. The model of the binary synthesis, which represents in conceptual form the actual factors which constitute the dynamism of human cultural life, includes the notion of a return - to one of the limited concepts at the base of the triangular representation - that is in reality a progress: the entity at the apex includes this limited concept in a higher form, either of itself, or in conjunction with its polarized opposite. The fundamental notions which constitute the basic matter of historical culture are, through the process of their reformulation and re-contextualization, both affirmed and annulled, abolished and preserved, in a progression which resorts to original notions in order to move forward on that basis: as a negation and an annulment which simultaneously demand the continued function of what is progressively abolished. It is artistic creation in the Schillerian sense of a 'positive destruction'<sup>25</sup> that is apparent in Goethe's mode of secularization of the primordial notions of religious culture. It is a process of 'organic transformation'<sup>26</sup> by which the raw material of cultural history is reduced to its constituent parts, which are held in abeyance as culture progresses, then subjected to a novel, and newly functioning, process of organization. It is a synthesis of the mutually implicit but historically irreconcilable polarities of past and present which furthers and nurtures

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> AB XXII 5, WW pp.154f.: 'Darin also besteht das eigentliche Kunstgeheimnis des Meisters, *dass er den Stoff durch die Form vertilgt*'. (Schiller's italics).

<sup>26</sup> WW, p.267.

their simultaneous preservation, abolition, and transcendence. The relevance of this to Goethe's mode of secularization lies in the potential synthesis of sacral and secular realms of history and historical culture in the creation of a functioning aesthetic symbol of primordial cultural notions in a vitally active reformulation. The aphorism analyzed above, as an aesthetic symbol, functions as a cultural paradigm of this conceptual process of simultaneous negation, affirmation and transcendence. Elements from pre-existent cultural traditions are re-materialized in a form which both clouds and clarifies their origins, and in so doing implies something more besides, an implicit, functioning significance inhering in the individual perception of the integral parts of the medium and its message as a dynamic whole.

The material content of the aphorism and its function in context demand an understanding of the passing of time as a process of forward movement through backward awareness; of progression through regressive recognition and re-appraisal; of a cultural present which appreciates its past and, in so doing, founds and directs its future. Recognition of the historical origins of Goethe's cultural material implies the simultaneous appreciation of a transcendence of historical contingency, a pointing onwards toward a greater, extraneous yet implicit significance. The Platonic origins of the Christian Eucharist, the atmospheric calm which succeeds meteorological tempestuousness, as inherent parts of the secular world rendered sacral by their integration into the Hebrew and Christian traditions, are there to be appreciated in the burden of Goethe's maxim. But their appreciation is also a sensible apprehension occasioned by the form in which the message is couched. The necessary dynamic growth of cultural progress through regression to pre-existent elements is represented dynamically in the vitality of a linguistic form which contains and expresses, echoes and encourages, the sentient life of the living individual. Goethe's mode of secularization represents the cultural co-existence of sacrality and secularity, like past and present, on a continuum of cultural development pointing onward and upward, through a transcendence of linguistic form, to portray the dynamism of felt life itself.

Now, there are obvious differences between the treatment of religion in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and the use of religious material in Goethe's philosophical maxims. In his wisdom literature, Goethe communicates what has been seen to be

primarily derived and commonplace thought<sup>27</sup>: religion is part of a received cultural tradition, and its doctrines, its external trappings and its inherent message are reiterated, in aphoristic form, as accepted cultural notions. Goethe may refer to God in his maxims as an inherent entity of historical culture, an acknowledged notional concept in human consciousness, without having to define his own understanding and appreciation of the deity<sup>28</sup>. He may allude to the pantheistic revelation of God in nature<sup>29</sup>, to the position of the Christian Church vis-à-vis of the Judaic tradition<sup>30</sup>, to the primary axioms of Christianity itself<sup>31</sup>, as integers in the totality of his cultural world, as traditional elements of received knowledge, without directly indicating his own views or elucidating any explicitly personal standpoint. Religion in the maxims is recognized as part of Goethe's cultural tradition, and treated accordingly. Religion in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* has, on the other hand, a perceived bearing on the persona of the author. The autobiography relates inherited tradition and the contemporary world as they operate on the developing psyche of the experiencing individual. Goethe's account of religion in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* presents the religious tradition as an integral part of the process of his upbringing and education, as an existent, functioning cultural entity in the world he experienced and the experience of which he describes. The common denominator of both portrayals of religion is in its existence as an elemental part of cultural tradition experienced by the individual - in the routines of social life, in the cultural milieu he encounters and absorbs - which is differentiated by his appreciating psyche and represented to the world in manifest literary form. And Goethe's mode of secularization, which breaks the conventional barriers of sacrality and secularity to present an aesthetic symbol of functioning religious experience, is no less in operation in the lengthy prose of his autobiography than in the pithiness of his philosophical maxims. A study of some representative passages of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* will, it is hoped, corroborate the argument for Goethe's mode of secularization as a dissolution of notional barriers into a synthesis of contrary forces,

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<sup>27</sup> Stephenson notes in *Goethe's Wisdom Literature*, op. cit., pp.15ff., the growing, if grudging, awareness this century of the unoriginal and derivative nature of much of Goethe's thought expressed in the *Maximen und Reflexionen*. Harald Fricke, for example, has recently taken some of Stephenson's points explicitly to heart in delineating the 'banality' of much of Goethe's material in the *Maximen und Reflexionen*, and of the significance of the rhetorical form of its reformulation. See Fricke, *Aphorismus*, Stuttgart, 1984, pp.8 & 111.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, HA XII 372, §50, 51; Hecker §813, 814.

<sup>29</sup> eg. HA XII 365, §2,3; Hecker §810, 811.

<sup>30</sup> eg. HA XII 377, §83; Hecker §818.

<sup>31</sup> eg. HA XII 372, §56; Hecker §858.

as both the preservation of antithetical oppositions and their transcendence in new propositions, as a recollection of the historical past which functions dynamically in the actuality of the cultural present, as an articulation in the letter of prose of the sentient vitality of experiential religious life.

As it is Goethe's depiction of the Roman Catholic sacraments in Book Seven which has prompted some critics to call for a stylistic analysis of the religious passages in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, it is with this passage that I shall test the theory in the first instance. As was emphasized with reference to the aphorism analyzed above, the sacramentalism of established religious practice manifests in tangible and visible form the transcendence of the material world through a paradoxical re-materialization of a spiritual ideal. In the sacrament of the Christian Eucharist, the pains of Christ are evoked and re-enacted in order that their liberation be both represented and fulfilled. Spiritual release is the objective for the participant in this dramatic re-enactment of pain: it is in the re-presentation of the sufferings of Christ that their transcendence is proposed and their significance universalized. Pain and death are materially symbolized in order that their spiritual over-coming may be forwarded and brought to fruition. Goethe perceives of Christian sacramentalism in terms of a union of inner faith and outer manifestation which both recalls and anticipates his account of the function of poetic art in synthesizing the realms of inner emotionalism and its formal externalization:

[Der Christ] muß gewohnt sein, die innere Religion des Herzens und die der äußeren Kirche als vollkommen *eins* anzusehen, als das große allgemeine Sakrament.<sup>32</sup>

The repeated juxtaposition of sensory-material and spiritual-abstract realms of perception in Goethe's account of the nature and function of the Christian sacrament conveys, in the fabric of his narrative, the close inter-relation of the material and the spiritual in the representative Eucharist, as the re-materialization of a numinous ideal with an actual and manifest existence and function:

Die Sakramente sind das Höchste der Religion, das sinnliche Symbol einer außerordentlichen göttlichen Gunst und Gnade. In dem Abendmahle sollen die irdischen Lippen ein göttliches Wesen verkörpert empfangen und unter der Form irdischer Nahrung einer himmlischen teilhaftig werden.

Here Goethe presents an apparently objective account of a received truism of religious

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<sup>32</sup> HA IX 289f.

practice. Material pain and want, which can of course be alleviated and satisfied to a certain extent in terms of and within the matrix of the world itself, are utterly transfigured and abolished in the spiritual nourishment of the Eucharistic sacrament, through this phenomenal, experiential act which transcends its material self in its symbolism of something above and beyond the phenomenal world. This is the conceptual message of Goethe's text, the 'religious' import of his discourse in prose. But his formulation operates simultaneously at a different level of consciousness and perception. Linguistic consonance links the syntactic elements of Goethe's phrase in a felt corroboration of its semantic meaning: 'Sakramente'; 'Höchste'; 'sinnliche Symbol'; 'außerordentlich'; 'Gunst', are all bound up with one another by virtue of their initial or medial 's' sounds. The symbolic force of sacrament as an earthly approximation of the numinous is reflected in the form of Goethe's description; itself a linguistic symbol of the symbolism to which it conceptually refers. The alternation of 'irdisch'; 'göttlich'; 'irdisch'; 'himmlisch' in the second sentence reflects syntactically the interweaving of abstract noumenon and concrete phenomenon which is the essence of the Eucharistic sacrament here described: Goethe's depiction of Catholic sacramentalism conveys a deep sense of felt experience, communicated to and shared by the reader of his text. Spiritual communion with Christ in the re-enactment of the Last Supper:

ist kein gemeines Essen und Trinken, was befriedigt, es ist eine  
Himmelsspeise, die nach himmlischem Tranke durstig macht.

Food and drink, in the phenomenal world, offer material comfort and satisfaction. But the intensified satisfaction afforded by this particular symbolic meal inheres in the union of its physical and spiritual aspects, in its encapsulation in the material objects of bread and wine of the liberating notion of spiritual freedom. Goethe's use of the polyptoton 'Himmelsspeise'/'himmlischem' integrates the notion of the spiritual into the material body of the phrase and makes manifest its role in the physical act depicted. The spiritual realm is, moreover, within the context of Goethe's depiction, the inner element of a rhetorical chiasmus enclosed within the outer arms, provided by the further polyptoton 'Trinken'/'Tranke', of acts of physical nourishment: it is in and through the material that the power of the spiritual is released. Goethe's manipulation of his linguistic medium both articulates and evokes this liberation of the spiritual from the material through their co-existence and fusion in the act of communion. Thus the

conceptual import of the passage is here coordinate with the linguistic formulation, and Goethe's account of the symbolic essence of Christianity itself operates, in this fusion of meaning and form, as an aesthetic symbol, and thus as a pertinent example of Schillerian 'schöner Vortrag', or aesthetic discourse, in the representation of received religion in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.

This transcendence of the merely material and the purely spiritual, through their fusion in a physical enactment that affords both material and spiritual satisfaction, is, as we have seen, the manifestation in a Christian context of the cultural process of a synthesis of opposing entities, which together found a novel cultural proposition which both preserves and abolishes its constituent parts. But the significant point to be drawn from this formulation is that the freedom of the spirit which inheres in the sacramental union of the material and the spiritual is crucially similar to the manifest freedom promoted by the synthesis of historical objective culture and its contemporary re-contextualization which functions throughout Goethe's writings, as the re-manifestation of the past in the present which transcends historical contingency and the new literary form in an anticipation of future cultural significance. The union of past and present, which is the hallmark of Goethe's mode of secularization, is in operation in his depiction of the sentient reality of spiritual experience through the fusion, in literary form, of the polarities of matter and spirit. And the 'something else besides' that results from such a fusion is in traditional Christian terms that sense of spiritual liberation provided by Christian hope. There are, therefore, implicit links between the 'spiritual freedom' accorded by participation in the Christian sacraments, and the 'aesthetic freedom' born of the evocation of coordinated rational and emotional drives in the subject who perceives the text which presents this as a functioning aesthetic symbol.

In this respect, Goethe's account of his growing awareness of the relevance and function of the past in the present, mentioned in the previous chapter as evidence of Goethe's eminently *sensuous* attitude to tradition, merits some reconsideration here. It is surely not without significance that this admission occurs in a passage where Goethe is dealing with his erstwhile inability to enter into fruitful and positive exchanges with his contemporaries regarding his religious views. For it reveals linguistic and conceptual links with that notion of a transcendence of physical barriers which is the corner-stone of the Christian faith:

Ein Gefühl aber, das bei mir gewaltig überhand nahm, und sich nicht wundersam genug äußern könnte, war die Empfindung der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in Eins: eine Anschauung, die etwas Gespenstermäßiges in die Gegenwart brachte.<sup>33</sup>

‘Gefühl’ and ‘Empfindung’ are used interchangeably in this context in a conceptual emphasis of the inherent sentience of the phenomenon Goethe is describing. What is of especial significance in his description is, however, the confirmation *and heightening* of his conceptual meaning by its coordination with the rhetorical form of his account: the text functions aesthetically, in that the feeling described by Goethe is itself articulated and evoked in the fabric of his linguistic matrix. The ‘Gefühl’ assails him in a manner that is ‘gewaltig’: the conceptual meaning of a violent sentient experience is itself experienced in the sonorous initial consonance of the two terms. This sense of the physical experience of feeling continues throughout the relevant passage, as the concepts of presence, in the two-fold reference to ‘Gegenwart’, and the strange, ensuing impulse, ‘etwas Gespenstermäßiges’, are in the same way pulled into the rhetorical fabric which articulates the strong, impulsive force of feeling which is conceptually described. The fusion of past and present into a single sentient unity is a physical experience which is felt by the author who describes his experience, and by the reader who perceives, and thus in turn also experiences, this feeling in the sentience of the language in which it is depicted. Goethe’s account of this interaction of past and present, in a real experience of it, functions here too as an aesthetic symbol communicating the living realities of vital sensation.

This ‘Empfindung der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in Eins’, then, is the sensory perception of the historical past within the cultural present that is the foundation and linch-pin of the understanding and appreciation of cultural tradition Goethe is concerned to convey: a sentient re-manifestation of traditional notions abstracted from the material body of history in a contemporary cultural form which both preserves and abolishes the past in the present. In the significant element of feeling, the received matter of historical culture is both presented for appreciation and understanding, and transcended: sentience is here at play, but functions only when the percipient is able to allow himself to be affected. Fully meaningful appreciation of the conception of tradition offered here by Goethe evidently depends on the perceptive faculties in his reader, who is invited, not only to note the conceptual message, but

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<sup>33</sup> HA X 32.

actively to engage in the dynamic, aspiring and continuing role of the past in the present. What this sentient experience of the two in fusion produces is that strange quantity, 'etwas Gespenstermäßiges': something that is perceived without having an objective, physical existence<sup>34</sup>, an abstract entity which is both illusive (in terms of physical existence) and experientially valid (it exists insofar as it is perceived to exist). In this illusory sensation which inheres in the fusion of past and present, is to be felt Goethe's conception of the ongoing synthesis of polarized opposites which forms and promotes a third entity that is both the transcendence and the preservation of the other two. Moreover, its function in the present depends on its being actively *brought into* the present: this process of mental recollection of an abstract notion, which then functions in a fusion of its material origin and its notional abstraction with an apparent physical presence and an effect in sensory perception, echoes the function of the process of 'wieder heranzurufen'; that spiritual recollection of an actual, physical presence which functions both physically and spiritually and transcends, through synthesis, the exclusive nature of both realms of appreciation. What this 'ghost-like' and illusory quality represents, then, is the synthesis of the spiritual and the physical, the abstract and the concrete, the sacral and the worldly, into a transcendent third entity which preserves both elements of the polarity in whose tension it inheres, and annuls them in its aspiration, through regression to original forms, toward a higher sense, function, and import.

The 'etwas Gespenstermäßiges' produced by a synthesis of past and present perceived in this way acquires a specifically religious significance in Goethe's account in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* of the quality of faith occurring in the recourse to the intensity of feeling of early Christianity which is the foundation and aspiration of the Pietist religion:

Seit meiner Annäherung an die Brüdergemeine hatte meine Neigung zu dieser Gesellschaft, die sich unter der Siegesfahne Christi versammelte, immer zugenommen. Jede positive Religion hat ihren größten Reiz, wenn sie im Werden begriffen ist; deswegen ist es so angenehm, sich in die Zeiten der Apostel zu denken, wo sich alles noch frisch und unmittelbar geistig darstellt, und die Brüdergemeine hatte hierin etwas Magisches, daß sie jenen ersten Zustand fortzusetzen, ja zu verewigen schien. Sie knüpfte ihren Ursprung an die frühesten Zeiten an, sie war niemals fertig geworden, sie hatte sich nur in unbemerkten Ranken durch die rohe Welt hindurchgewunden; nun schlug ein

<sup>34</sup> Trunz notes Goethe's use of the term 'Gespenst' in the *Farbenlehre* to describe 'etwas, was man sieht und was doch nicht da ist' (HA X 582).

einzelnes Auge, unter dem Schutz eines frommen vorzüglichen Mannes, Wurzel, um sich abermals aus unmerklichen, zufällig scheinenden Anfängen weit über die Welt auszubreiten.<sup>35</sup>

This, ostensibly, is Goethe's account in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* of the phenomenon of 'positive religion' as he experienced and appreciated it: this is the conceptual import of his message. But the passage also operates on a different level: here, too, is an example of aesthetic discourse in the interactive fusing of form and meaning. In the continuation and reformulation of traditional Christianity is contained the essence of Pietist mysticism and attraction, and Goethe's formulation encapsulates in the fabric of his linguistic medium a hint of the tangible reality, the spiritual immediacy, of individual religious experience which he objectively perceives as the principal value of Pietist practice. Goethe as commentator acknowledges this attraction and this worth; Goethe as individual rejects the fundamentals of this unorthodox sect, as he rejected the dogmas of institutionalized Christianity, and is in turn rejected by the leaders of the sect itself; Goethe as manipulator of his artistic medium conveys a sense of the worth and attraction of positive religion in the fabric of his formulation. The appearance of eternally functioning religious feeling in the workings of Pietist faith derives from a recourse to original forms, to the very nature of the early Church, which thus continue to function in and act upon the present world: religious worship in the present is accorded a sense and a validity which is justified in the past, and which at the same time points forward, for the adherents of this type of faith, to an unassailable and eternal religious future. Through this regression to the primal and original religious world the sense and import of the early Church are both preserved and transcended: past and present fuse in an anticipation and direction of the future of religious faith. And this synthesis of original forms and contemporary spirituality is itself re-manifested in the form of Goethe's account, which freezes in the temporal, phenomenal abeyance and physical re-materialization of literary contextualization the spiritual notions with which it deals. The alliterative link between 'Religion' and 'Reiz' compounds Goethe's conceptual discussion of the attraction of this type of religion, transmuting his objective appraisal of positive religion into something felt and tangible; a subjective experience inherent in his formulation and implicit in his account. Thus the nature and function of objective, historical religion is inextricably fused, in the material body of Goethe's maxim, with its appreciation in terms of

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<sup>35</sup> HA X 42f.

sentient reaction. Goethe's own temporal manifestation of spiritual notions echoes the nature of Pietism's appropriation of the essence of positive religion: 'im Werden begriffen' expresses the nominalization and objectification of the progressive implications of the action of 'becoming' in phenomenal, palpable, and hence manipulable form, thus materializing the significance of ongoing religious forms in an assimilative, functional perception of their evolutionary progress. To imagine oneself back in the nurture and caring body of the early Church is 'angenehm'; a positive and personal sensuous reaction inhering in the fusion of reality, through the natural freshness, and spirituality, in the unaffected and unmediated sacrality, of this pre-existent and progressive religious form. And the result of this fusion is also depicted as 'etwas Magisches': there is something inherently mystical in the manifestations of Pietism, which stems directly from their resemblance to, and re-enactment of, the fundamentals of the earliest Christian Church. And, moreover, it is this illusory quality, this undefinable 'something', which *apparently* - appearance being itself a fusion of the phenomenal world and its perception - externalizes and eternalizes the nature and function of original religious forms. The process of recourse to essential religion is described in the physical act of 'anknüpfen'. Here, the conceptual concretion of the process is aesthetically evoked in the vocal chain which concretely links the notions of 'latching on' ('anknüpfen'), 'originality' ('Ursprung'), and 'primariness' ('frühest'): Goethe's literary representation of the metaphorically physical act of 'buttoning onto the past' renders its sensuous apprehension perceptible in the physical sensuousness of his language. The phenomenal world is, however, transcended in the infinite evolution of this projection of finite forms, 'sie war niemals fertig geworden'. The effects of this recourse to the past remain abstract as long as they go unnoticed and remain unperceived, but enmesh themselves physically in the very fabric of the world, 'in unbemerkten Ranken durch die rohe Welt hindurchgewunden'. Goethe's representation of the process in the concretion of his imagery renders it open to perception, open to re-interpretation in terms of the present world in which its significance and significant function are renewed, and operates thus as a re-enactment of the manifest materialization of the workings of traditional religion through their perception in the world of his text. His use of an unequivocally mixed metaphor, 'nun schlug ein einzelnes Auge ... Wurzel', fuses the abstraction of metaphorical association and the concretion of sense in an image of the concrete apprehension of

abstract religious faith, by which the arbitrary appearance of the exigencies of religious faith and its historical manifestations transcend the physical world in a progression and continuation of the nature, function and power of faith itself. The secularization of past religious forms to function actively in the present is, for Goethe, an ongoing religious experience: the relocation of essential religion does not render impotent the power of primal faith, but, on the contrary, increases its scope and significance in the projection of an active, inherent force. Past and present combine to produce a novel, functioning cultural form: sacrality and secularity fuse in the inception and projection of an inchoate, but real, religious feeling. Goethe's mode of secularization is such that this essential feeling is present in the palpable, tangible form of his language: through his mode of secularization the very essence of the religious faith he describes is open to perception, apprehension and re-liberation.

If the argument for a mode of secularization which fuses form and meaning to offer a new perspective on Goethe's treatment of the religious tradition in his autobiography is to be truly persuasive, then it must surely be applied to what has been acknowledged as *the* crucial religious passage in the work, that perplexingly diffuse account of Goethe's conception and development of 'his own religion' which he places in a pivotal position (it is 'crucial', then, in terms of a 'crux') at the end of Book 8 of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*<sup>36</sup>.

Most commentators point to the Gnostic elements of the religious conception detailed by Goethe in these pages, and this notion deserves some brief consideration here. Γνωσις, as 'understanding' or 'knowledge', is, according to the theological historian H Daniel-Rops, a philosophy which is founded on 'man's effort to grasp the divine'<sup>37</sup>. Gnosticism as a philosophical system has been described as the aspiration towards a point where knowledge and faith combine (Daniel-Rops speaks of an 'intimate mingling'), a blurring of the contours of self-surrendering ecstasy and intellectual speculation. Cerebral understanding is thus linked with physical seizure, with precisely that paradoxical holding and encapsulation of the ineffable which informs Goethe's mode of secularization. For Daniel-Rops:

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<sup>36</sup> See Trunz, HA IX 736: 'Und dann gipfelt das [religiöse] Motiv in einem religiösen Ausschnitt, der einerseits die Beziehung zu einer jahrhundertealten Überlieferung, andererseits die persönliche geistige Eigenart sehen läßt. Er steht im Zusammenhang der anderen großen - über das ganze Werk verteilten - religiösen Parteien und ist als Buchschluß an eine betonte Stelle gerückt'.

<sup>37</sup> H Daniel-Rops, *The Church of the Apostles and Martyrs*, New York, 1960, p.297.

Gnosticism is this complex mixture of Christian ideals and heterogenous speculations, which resulted in a world of aberrant reflections.<sup>38</sup>

Or, as Goethe put it, with affected simplicity in understatement, 'so erbaute ich mir eine Welt, die seltsam genug aussah'<sup>39</sup>.

Despite acknowledging its significance for an understanding of Goethe's 'religion', critical references to this recognized crux passage are curiously short on analytical depth. Kurt Jahn, for example, refers briefly to it as the product of Goethe's reading of Gnostic literature at the time of writing, and thus as an example of the philosophical outlook of the mature author occluding the predominantly Pietistic leanings of the protagonist<sup>40</sup>. Erich Trunz's commentary in the *Hamburger Ausgabe* points too to the derivativeness of the analysis, and suggests sources of information from which Goethe may have drawn. Trunz alludes to a kind of originality in Goethe's expression, but here again, no coherent account is offered of precisely what it is that might constitute Goethe's 'originality in derivativeness', or its import. That Trunz notes a 'Klarheit und künstlerische Abrundung des Bildes'<sup>41</sup> on Goethe's part is interesting, for these two and a half pages of the Hamburg edition are packed with some of the densest explicit philosophical arguments to occur in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Indeed, if there is an 'artistic rounding off' of the world-view here discussed, then its 'clarity' is surely all the more difficult to perceive, and must refer to the forms of expression used rather than to the thoughts themselves. Derek Bowman delineates this passage as evidence of 'Goethe's early cabbalistic world-view and his later realization of the burden placed on his shoulders by the "Naturgabe" of poetry'<sup>42</sup>. For Bowman, the passage is a clear example, too, of Goethe's concern to 'work things out for himself', and is also evidenced as another telling example of Goethe's habit of writing on matters religious with a profusion of concessives, subjunctives and modal verbs; and of what Bowman somewhat dismissively describes as Goethe's 'high-handed knowingness which he reserves for stating his own youthful views'<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> HA IX 350.

<sup>40</sup> Jahn, *Goethes Dichtung und Wahrheit*, op. cit., pp.264f.: 'sodaß sich aus der allgemeinen Religion der individuellen entwickelt, die in seinem Leben übrigens in weit höherem Grade die pietistische Bekenntnisform angenommen hat, als es seine Darstellung eigentlich zugibt, die aus der mystischen Richtung seiner damaligen Lektüre ein gnostisches System zusammenbaut'.

<sup>41</sup> HA IX 761.

<sup>42</sup> *Life into Autobiography*, op. cit., p.59.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.52.

Goethe does indeed introduce this account of his youthful quest for a religious standpoint with a tone of playful enjoyment and exuberance in religious speculation (for Bowman, “the old man’s disclaimer”; or an indication that what follows is not necessarily the view of the author!<sup>44</sup>):

Ich studierte fleißig die verschiedenen Meinungen, und da ich oft genug hatte sagen hören, jeder Mensch habe am Ende doch seine eigene Religion, so kam mir nichts natürlicher vor, als daß ich mir auch meine eigene bilden könne, und dieses tat ich mit vieler Behaglichkeit.<sup>45</sup>

However, this tone does not apparently continue into the speculative passage itself, which commences not with the modal subjunctive ‘ich möchte’, as stated by Bowman<sup>46</sup>, but, as Trunz insists in the *Hamburger Ausgabe*, with the indicative imperfect ‘ich mochte’. Trunz’s interpretation of ‘mochte’ in the sense of ‘könnte mit dem Anklang von “ich tat es gern”’<sup>47</sup> would confirm the mature Goethe’s starting-point as an affirmation of youthful exuberance; this attitude is expressed not in terms of concessive tentativeness, however, but as a statement of descriptive fact. There is no linguistic expression of an unwillingness on Goethe’s part to commit himself to any specific theological viewpoint here: what Goethe presents is a dense account of a world-view interweaving complicated and convoluted strands of thought in a particular way and for a particular effect. It is the following purpose - why the mature Goethe chose the structures, terms and phrases he did to represent the religious quest of the young man - which is to form the focus of this analysis of the passage in terms of the relationship between thought and expression, and between sentient experience and material form.

Bowman is wrong about the location of this passage in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*: it concludes Book 8, not Book 7 as he states. However, his commentary is informed by some major insights which merit further analysis; notably the implication that the text is somehow ‘poetic’ (for Bowman, this poetry inheres in the formative hand of the mature Goethe moulding the exuberant and extravagant thoughts of the young man) and, furthermore, that Goethe’s account is somehow *dynamic* :

He has made the old static cosmology dynamic ... Where the old pansophist writers regarded the fall and salvation as historical fact he feels them as a constantly recurring process in each man’s life. This process expresses the

<sup>44</sup> *Life into Autobiography*, op. cit., p.64.

<sup>45</sup> HA IX 350.

<sup>46</sup> *Life into Autobiography*, op. cit., p.52.

<sup>47</sup> HA IX 760.

rhythm of the universe beating in each man's breast.<sup>48</sup>

Bowman seeks corroboration of Goethe's poetic gift, this 'burden', as he puts it, in a poem: he cites 'Im Atemholen sind zweierlei Gnaden'<sup>49</sup>. That he hesitates to corroborate his own insight into the poetic functions of Goethe's religious considerations here may lie in a failure to appreciate the fundamental difference between 'poetry proper' and 'aesthetic discourse', or 'schöner Vortrag'. I hope to show that the rhythms of life as intimated by Bowman are indeed there to be perceived in the autobiographical text itself. Detailed analysis of this passage should reveal precisely *how* Goethe dynamizes a received world-view, how the recognized 'artistry' functions in presenting an underlying message to be perceived and appreciated by the reader, how a sacral import is communicated in a secular form, and how the past - the concerns of the youthful Goethe with his religious tradition - is re-presented by the mature author in a manner which communicates with actual relevance and vital insistence.

Goethe is embarked here on the (very human) concern to conceptualize God, and the image he derives for himself, with unashamed relish, is strange and unequivocally personal. The conception for which he is striving is timeless, rooted in an eternal past and projecting into an eternal future:

Ich mochte mir wohl eine Gottheit vorstellen, die sich von Ewigkeit her selbst produziert; da sich aber Produktion nicht ohne Mannigfaltigkeit denken läßt, so mußte sie sich notwendig sogleich als ein Zweites erscheinen, welches wir unter den Namen des Sohns anerkennen; diese beiden mußten nun den Akt des Hervorbringens fortsetzen, und erschienen sich selbst wieder im Dritten, welches nun ebenso bestehend lebendig und ewig als das Ganze war.

Here is Goethe's conceptual presentation of the Christian Trinity: the Godhead is involved in an eternal process of reproduction, which, as a natural process, leads inevitably to multiplicity. Thus the Godhead must reproduce itself in another form, which the Christian tradition recognizes as 'the Son'. But the compulsive process of reproduction and multiplicity cannot stop there, and is continued by the two together to produce a third entity. The first two appear in the concept of the third: the third is as vital and as eternal as the whole.

The history of theological speculation is full of attempts to rationalize and prove the intellectual validity of the Christian tradition. For the early Church, many of

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<sup>48</sup> *Life into Autobiography*, op. cit., p.64.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* See HA II 10.

these gave rise to prominent heresies, which, as some commentators have pointed out, formed much of Goethe's reading material at the time of writing. The Arian heresy, springing from the noble idea of a sublime and ineffable God, states that God the Father and Christ the Son are distinct beings; the Son had a state of existence prior to his appearance on earth, *but does not spring from eternity*. Athanasius, on the other hand, with the Council of Nicaea behind him, stated that the Son is 'of the same substance' as the Father<sup>50</sup>. Goethe's allusion here to an eternal process of production and reproduction is in fact a contradiction of the Arian heresy: since the multiplicity process inheres in an eternal past and projects towards an eternal future, the Godhead cannot be given temporal precedence or qualitative superiority over the Son. However, any human attempt to analyze the process, to render it rationally acceptable, is an attempt to fix the process in language and hence, inevitably, leads to an artificial depiction of primacy and predominance. Goethe's use of linguistic concepts and structures is particularly telling in this regard.

The logical, linear progression through the text is from the Godhead, to the second entity (the Son), to the third entity, which claims equalness with 'the whole'. The polyptoton 'Ewigkeit'/'ewig', however, contradicts the conceptual message that one entity logically precedes another, by rooting the entire process in a cycle of eternity. Furthermore, the notion that God appeared 'notwendig sogleich' in the second entity intimates that, although the linear nature of human conceptualization demands that something be given primacy, the process by which Christ comes from God is not a simple linear progression of cause and effect: the entity which we conceive as 'the Son' inheres directly in the 'Godhead' and has equal, simultaneous existence therewith. Moreover, 'Gottheit' and 'Mannigfaltigkeit' comprise two arms of a chiasmus embracing the polyptoton of 'produziert' and 'Produktion': the core notion of production is what the semantically primal 'Godhead' and subsequent 'multiplicity' have in common, and is, indeed, what results from their interaction. The syntax expresses the logical view that production leads to multiplicity: the structure of Goethe's aesthetic formulation conveys the inseparability of God and the reproduction of God by linking the two concepts in a cycle around the notion of production. Thus

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<sup>50</sup> Daniel-Rops, op. cit., pp.463ff., summarizes the arguments of Arius, Athanasius, and the other major figures of 4th century Christianity, and highlights the exact point at which the Arian heresy occurs: 'Arius does not distinguish between the person and the nature; Jesus, the Christ, the Son, is not like God the Father; He is not His equal; He is not of the same essence as God. This opened an abyss between God and Christ, the abyss which separates the finite from the infinite' (p.463).

the concepts of God and multiplicity may be perceived as having equal primacy, functioning together in a reproductive capacity.

The concepts of eternity, reproduction, necessity and dynamism are interlinked throughout this long sentence to underline the semantic message of their natural interaction. But the chain of verbs Goethe uses, which express the human activity involved in understanding the process, are verbs of static conceptualization: 'vorstellen', 'denken lassen', 'anerkennen'. Beginning and End are inconceivable in this timeless process: the Christian conception of the relationship between God and Christ is a historical attempt to encapsulate the notion of constant divine reproduction and multiplicity by concentrating on one part of the process. Thus the Christian notion of God the Father with Christ as His Son is just one aspect, frozen in religious tradition, of a constantly moving process of divine reproduction and remanifestation. Semantically, Goethe reiterates this process, and the human activities involved in conceptualizing it: aesthetically, he conveys the simultaneity and equal inter-relationship of God, Christ and their continuing progression.

Binary synthesis is operating at many levels in this sentence. Goethe exploits the linguistic form of his account to convey messages which sometimes corroborate, sometimes contradict, the semantic import. When form simply reinforces meaning, the human activity involved in appreciating the message is logical. If, however, form and semantic meaning fuse to yield yet another meaning - as in poetry - then the message is communicated at a level above and beyond the logical, at a point where human feeling is involved. The reader may well understand the conceptual import of the message, but if he is left with some inchoate sense of perceived comprehension, then Goethe's depiction of the Christian Trinity is far more than a formula for rational understanding: it is a communication of real, that is, *felt*, comprehension.

Furthermore, the process of reproduction cannot logically stop at a third manifestation, and continues to produce what theological history recognizes as Lucifer, a being likewise deriving from and equal to God:

Hiermit war jedoch der Kreis der Gottheit geschlossen, und es wäre ihnen selbst nicht möglich gewesen, abermals ein ihnen völlig Gleiches hervorzubringen. Da jedoch der Produktionstrieb immer fortging, so erschufen sie ein Viertes, das aber schon in sich ein Widerspruch hegte, indem es, wie sie, unbedingt und doch zugleich in ihnen enthalten und durch sie begrenzt sein sollte. Diese war nun Luzifer, welchem von nun an die ganze Schöpfungskraft übertragen war, und von dem alles übrige Sein ausgehen

sollte.

God, Christ, the Spirit, Lucifer and the power of creation: concepts sufficient to themselves, having equal primacy and enjoying equal significance. Their inter-relationship has been described by theologian J K S Reid as a 'trinitarian triune triplex'<sup>51</sup>: I suggest that what Goethe is presenting here is the notion of a thesis projecting an antithesis, and that these two function together to produce a synthesis containing and expressing one or both of the antithetical terms; itself projecting an antithesis with which it enters a synthesis, continuing the process of reproduction and unity in multiplicity which Goethe called 'Steigerung'. Through use of binary synthesis, then, Goethe conceptualizes the relationship between eternity and temporality, between God and the world, between the spiritual and the secular: and in turn the binary synthesis of semantic message and aesthetic form reiterates this relationship.

Moreover, Goethe's account of the fall of Lucifer also contains a warning about the dangers of unchecked progression of one entity at the expense of others, which is significantly evocative of the process of 'Steigerung' without appropriate 'Spezifikation':

Er bewies sogleich seine unendliche Tätigkeit, indem er die sämtlichen Engel erschuf, alle wieder nach seinem Gleichnis, unbedingt, aber in ihm enthalten und durch ihn begrenzt. Umgeben von einer solchen Glorie vergaß er seines höheren Ursprungs und glaubte ihn in sich selbst zu finden, und aus diesem ersten Undank entsprang alles, was uns nicht mit dem Sinne und den Absichten der Gottheit übereinzustimmen scheint. Je mehr er sich nun in sich selbst konzentrierte, je unwohler mußte es ihm werden, sowie allen den Geistern, denen er die süße Erhebung zu ihrem Ursprung verkümmerte. Und so ereignete sich das, was uns unter der Form des Abfalls der Engel bezeichnet wird.

Thus Goethe explains the genesis of the antithesis of goodness through the concentration of one entity on itself, attempting to function alone and unchecked. It is this antithetical opposition, says Goethe, which produces the schism of matter and spirit:

Aus dieser Konzentration der ganzen Schöpfung, denn sie war von Luzifer ausgegangen und mußte ihm folgen, entsprang nun alles das, was wir unter der Gestalt der Materie gewahr werden, was wir als schwer, fest und finster vorstellen.

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<sup>51</sup> See Reid, *Christian Apologetics*, London, 1969, pp.65f.

Matter transpires from the unfruitful tension of spirit in itself: matter has the same essence as spirit, the same origins as spirit, and results from one engendered aspect of the Godhead attempting to function alone and unspecified. From this attempt at unidirectional progress (that is, without recourse to and mutual subordination with the other reproduced entities), transpires evil, a loss of purity through betrayal of essence, a lost connection with eternity and a binding fixation in time:

Da nun das ganze Unheil, wenn wir es so nennen dürfen, bloß durch die einseitige Richtung Luzifers entstand; so fehlte freilich dieser Schöpfung die bessere Hälfte; denn alles, was durch Konzentration gewonnen wird, besaß sie, aber es fehlte ihr alles, was durch Expansion allein bewirkt werden kann; und so hätte die sämtliche Schöpfung durch immerwährende Konzentration sich selbst aufreiben, sich mit ihrem Vater Luzifer vernichten und alle ihre Ansprüche an eine gleiche Ewigkeit mit der Gottheit verlieren können.

Goethe's use of two borrowed Latin words both rhetorically underlines, and aesthetically expresses a unity in, his conceptual opposition of concentration and static possession on the one hand, and expansion and dynamic functioning on the other; and an intimation of the purity of that which has been lost is expressed in the inherent assonance of the phrase 'eine gleiche Ewigkeit mit der Gottheit'. Thus the material form of Goethe's text iterates the inherent sense of his message: matter and spirit are of the same essence, but must function together, in a process of reciprocal subordination, in order to preserve the very rhythms of life itself:

Sie [die Elohim] gaben dem unendlichen Sein die Fähigkeit, sich auszudehnen, sich gegen sie zu bewegen; der eigentliche Puls des Lebens war wieder hergestellt, und Luzifer selbst konnte sich dieser Einwirkung nicht entziehen. Diese ist die Epoche, wo dasjenige hervortrat, was wir als Licht kennen, und wo dasjenige begann, was wir mit dem Worte Schöpfung zu bezeichnen pflegen.

But the concept of 'creation', like those of production, multiplicity and eternity, runs throughout this passage, and Goethe's apparent attempt to chronologize the process is contradicted by the form of his account. Repeatedly, man's concern to understand the process is referred to in terms of conceptual recognition ('kennen', 'bezeichnen'), and Goethe's affected distancing of himself from his account through recourse to the rhetorical plural, which for some commentators is but another indicator of his unwillingness to commit himself to a particular religious standpoint, is surely here far more a pointer to his awareness that *any* attempt to conceptualize the immaterial is a

false and inadequate freezing of the ineffable in form, of the eternal in time.

The paragraph with which Goethe concludes this account of a religious world-view commences, not only with an asserted ease in understanding which can only be interpreted as ironic understatement, but with a reiteration of the concepts of 'eternity' and 'necessity' with which the passage itself starts:

Man sieht leicht, wie hier die Erlösung nicht allein von Ewigkeit her beschlossen, sondern als ewig notwendig gedacht wird, ja daß sie durch die ganze Zeit des Werdens und Seins sich immer wieder erneuern muß.

The cycle is complete, and yet continues, and the rhetorical structure of Goethe's account underlines his conceptual message of a natural, dynamic process which now issues in the central Christian notion of redemption. Goethe's text is itself an example of the constant and continuous process of being and becoming: his summary refers to his starting point, containing and expressing all that has been achieved therein, where the process of creation, of spirit and matter, God and the world, the sacral and the secular, is described as one of eternal return, of mutually subordinating polarities functioning together in progressive refinement. But the aesthetic features of Goethe's formulations operate at a level above and beyond the merely conceptual, heightening the reader's perception of the process, and actually, by inviting participation in the text and its message, subtly confirming the validity of the process leading to redemption. The congruity of sound-look and meaning in the phrase 'ewig notwendig' offers a palpable experience of that inexorable, unremitting progression towards redemption. The chain of vocal and consonantal sounds linking 'Zeit', 'Werden', 'Sein' and 'wieder' expresses the interactive fusion of time, development, being and recurrence. Goethe may introduce redemption with a logical account of the notion's historical origins on the continuum, but his expression conveys a sense, a palpable experience, of human involvement in this very process.

And so Goethe concludes:

... genug, wenn nur anerkannt wird, daß wir uns in einem Zustand befinden, der, wenn er uns auch niederzuziehen und zu drücken scheint, dennoch Gelegenheit gibt, ja zur Pflicht macht, uns zu erheben und die Absichten der Gottheit dadurch zu erfüllen, daß wir, indem wir von einer Seite uns zu verselbsten genötigt sind, von den andern in regelmäßigen Pulsen uns zu entselbstigen nicht versäumen.

From 'verselbsten' to 'entselbstigen', the underlying unity of which is conveyed by

polyptoton, from eternal divinity through reproduction and multiplicity to the manifestation of God in Man, the rhythms of life are there to be perceived and are themselves present in the text which discusses them. Goethe's passage reverberates with 'regelmäßigen Pulsen' in the rhythmical beatings of the words he uses; his account of dynamic recurrence itself recurs dynamically throughout; the conceptual message and its rhetorical form are operating together on the perceptive psyche of the reader. They may be appreciated in separation: as a statement about a youthful quest for religious enlightenment, or as an example of the poetic abilities of the mature Goethe. But it is surely in terms of the mutual functioning of meaning and form that the full import of Goethe's message is to be appreciated: the sacral tradition and the secular medium are interwoven in such a way that the reader may actually *feel* that dynamism which is under discussion, and intimate some sense of the essential inter-relationship of spirit and matter which is depicted. The reader who experiences these rhythms of the universe is himself projected into the continuum of production, multiplicity and eternity: the force of Goethe's message, concessively impersonal as it is, invites active participation in, and genuine comprehension of, the sense of its import.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the significance of binary synthesis in presenting for renewed and enhanced appreciation the religious feeling which informs and directs faith itself in Goethe's treatment of aspects of his religious tradition. Aspects as discrete as the central sacrament of Roman Catholicism, the mystical reverence of Pietism, and the abstract theologizing of the Gnostic world-view. Goethe's representation in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* of his childhood concern with ancient biblical tradition, culminating in his reformulation of the Genesis story will, I hope, confirm the argument in a predominantly Old Testament context, and will also serve to illustrate the quality of linguistic 'play' which is crucial to an understanding of the recreational aspect of Goethe's attitude to religion.

From the previous chapter, which analyzed Goethe's explicit account of his social and intellectual milieu in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, it emerged that scholarship has long been aware of the need to view the substance of Goethe's account in terms of the linguistic and stylistic form in which he couched it. The events, deeds, and personalities related and described by Goethe are mediated by the time which has

lapsed from the immediacy of experience to the point of biographical reflection upon them; by the accumulative experience of those intervening years; by the assimilating mind of the reflecting individual; and by the creative and formative impulse of the author apparent in the style and tone of his story-telling. Goethe's narrative reveals a constant authorial irony by which the author is repeatedly dissociated nominally from the account, to provide what becomes, in parts, a speciously and ironically impersonal autobiography. Goethe is playing an elaborate game with his reader, but not just out of any merely gratuitous sense of fun. The personae he evokes with calculated impersonality are integers in the totality of his own self: they are not, however, within the fabric of the narrative, to be identified wholly with the creative personality of the author. His authorial stance is necessarily impersonal and detached in order that his account may seem to stand and function alone, speciously independent of the ultimate source and point of reference that is Goethe himself. This affected detachment is, of course, a typically Goethean ploy with earnest intent. Goethe's game has a very serious instructive and constructive function. It is a stylistic affectation in which Goethe's more serious over-riding message is inherent in the humour of the account; the subtle, quietly pervasive humour of ironic detachment which exists to be perceived by the reader who, by the very act of perceiving the authorial detachment, involves himself in the fabric of Goethe's message, and is himself drawn into the game. And it is a game which is at its most subtle, and hence its most potentially penetrating, when the mature and distanced Goethe is discussing the religious education and milieu of his youth and their repercussions<sup>52</sup>. Religion is, traditionally, a serious topic, and Goethe's depiction and account in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* of the influence of religion upon him reveals a light humorous touch whose gentle pervasiveness is directly proportional to the inherent weightiness of the topic. Goethe's earliest formal biblical education was on the basis of a subterfuge: the learning of Hebrew in order, ostensibly, better to study the text of the Old Testament, but actually, he confesses, to satisfy his interest in Yiddish<sup>53</sup>. The peculiar accents and gurgling sounds of the Hebrew language provide the young Goethe temporarily with a sort of childish

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<sup>52</sup> Goethe's use of irony and affected humour when discussing matters religious in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* has been noted by scholars. See Jahn, *Goethes Dichtung und Wahrheit*, op. cit., pp.262ff.; Bowman, *Life into Autobiography*, op. cit., pp. 52f. and passim; Cooper, op. cit., p.171.

<sup>53</sup> HA IX 126: 'Ich verschwieg ihm die Absicht auf das Judendeutsch, und sprach von besserem Verständnis des Grundtexts'.

amusement, but he soon tires of what he terms 'diese schalen Späße'<sup>54</sup>, and enters into a protracted bantering exchange with his tutor, whom he seeks to divert from grammatical tuition in order 'auf den Sinn der Sache loszugehen'<sup>55</sup>, attempting to outmatch and outplay him by citing improbabilities and unrealities in the Old Testament text, and demanding their logical explanation. The tutor's chuckling conclusion that Goethe is a 'foolish' little boy - "Er närrischer Kerl! Er närrischer Junge!"<sup>56</sup> - points not to any inherent stupidity in the enquiring mind, but implies the ironic interchange of foolishness and seriousness, naïvety and ingenuity, through which the essential sense is brought to the fore and an elevated form of knowledge through play furthered.

This bantering sense of educative fun is present, in varying degrees of obviousness and subtlety, throughout Goethe's account of his religious upbringing and its continuing significance. His natural language is, he asserts, full of the biblical allusions and colourful religious imagery of his native upper German dialect, and it is these 'Anspielungen auf biblische Kernstellen'<sup>57</sup> that Goethe is particularly advised to eradicate from his speech in order to conform to the dictates of correct social discourse. He notes, however, that these 'plays' on words and images are the life-blood of language and hence of thought, and that their denial leads to a truncated and suffocated form of self-expression<sup>58</sup>. The irony of authorial manipulation allows Goethe to further his game, and the play with words and allusions, to depict a prank perpetrated by some contemporaries, who sought to imitate Christ by appropriating and riding a donkey. Goethe notes with light but terse irony the lack of success of the ploy: 'Nachahmer fand er doch keinen und wenig Gesellen'<sup>59</sup>. Biblical allusions are a social discursive taboo but nonetheless find expression in practical jokes: humour and religion, in the youthful society depicted by the mature Goethe, are implicitly linked, and the significance of the ludatory impulse brought out, be it in objective deed or in linguistic practice.

A more elaborate practical joke is enacted in the convoluted Goethean humour in which, after describing the extent to which he had to curb his idiomatic dialect,

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<sup>54</sup> HA IX 127.

<sup>55</sup> HA IX 128.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> HA IX 251.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., f.: 'Ich fühlte mich in meinem Innern paralysiert und wußte kaum mehr, wie ich mich über die gemeinsten Dinge zu äußern hatte'.

<sup>59</sup> HA IX 253.

Goethe accounts for his social intercourse in Leipzig in terms of a biblical image, which he exploits to describe and evoke the contemporary influence of the prominent figure of Johann Christoph Gottsched:

Das Gottschedische Gewässer hatte die deutsche Welt mit einer wahren Sündflut überschwemmt, welche sogar über die höchsten Berge hinaufzusteigen drohte.<sup>60</sup>

Goethe does not have to make explicit his sceptical attitude towards the theories of Gottsched and their considerable influence: the image of a 'Sündflut' which threatens even the most inaccessible and intransigent points of intellectual society, lightened by the preceding discussion of the necessary avoidance of such imagery, suffices to make his point; and, moreover, to indicate the inadequacy and untenability of the linguistic fetters which would deny him such a means of expression. His allusion to 'das Gottschedische Gewässer' is an easy and natural secularization of a primary biblical event in an ironic play on language, source, and influence, in which alliteration, play on the sounds and cadences of language, itself plays a significant part. Humour is, for Goethe, second nature, an irreplaceably effective means of portraying 'the most serious things'. A member of his adolescent society reveals a predilection in speech for:

eine Kapuzinade, fratzenhafter als je, vielleicht gerade darum, weil er die ernsthaftesten Dinge zu sagen gedachte. Er führte nämlich mit Sprüchen aus der Bibel, die nicht zur Sache paßten, mit Gleichnissen, die nicht trafen, mit Anspielungen, die nichts erläuterten, den Satz aus.<sup>61</sup>

Humour is never absent from this ebullient society, from ribald puns on names (Horn was a particular victim<sup>62</sup>), through play with comic masks and affected physical handicaps<sup>63</sup>, to playful but telling parodies of contemporary poetic norms. Here the inherent seriousness of the practice of literary parody is brought out by an observation by Goethe on the dangers and pitfalls of widespread and indiscriminate literary imitation:

Es ist nicht wunderbar, aber es erregt doch Verwunderung, wenn man bei Betrachtung einer Literatur, besonders der deutschen, beobachtet, wie eine ganze Nation von einem einmal gegebenen und in einer gewissen Form mit Glück behandelten Gegenstand nicht wieder loskommen kann, sondern ihn

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<sup>60</sup> HA IX 254.

<sup>61</sup> HA IX 236.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.: 'Horn, dessen Name schon zu allerlei Scherzen Anlaß gab ...'.

<sup>63</sup> HA IX 237.

auf alle Weise wiederholt haben will; da denn zuletzt, unter den angehäuften Nachahmungen, das Original selbst verdeckt und erstickt wird.<sup>64</sup>

Goethe's passage warns against indiscriminate reiteration and repetition, and describes the pull of cultural inheritance which encourages derivation and repetition, in a linguistic form which ironically makes manifest the writer's ability to transcend inheritance in his application of his craft to the unoriginal material with which he is dealing. Goethe makes use of the rhetorical figure of polyptoton ('wunderbar'/'Verwunderung') to hint at the manifold potentiality of this craft, the exploitation of the myriad nuances of words and letters. He exploits alliterative repetition of initial plosive 'b' consonants to create the illusion, within the text, of a natural, rhythmical drum-beat which emphasises, in its appeal to sensory perception, the conceptual significance of his message ('Wenn man bei Betrachtung einer Literatur, besonders der deutschen, beobachtet ...'). He repeats the prefix 'ein' to stress, again through the sense of beating rhythm which sensuously confirms the conceptual message, the singularity of the object under discussion, despite the plurality of its potential manifestations ('von einem einmal gegebenen und in einer gewissen Form behandelten Gegenstand'); alliterating again on the initial 'ge' sounds of 'gegebenen', 'gewissen', and 'Gegenstand'; of which the first and third examples are themselves linked formally, by the association of the medial 'be' in 'gegebenen', with the preceding chain of plosives, facilitating thereby the rhetorical connection of 'gegeben' with the 'Gegenstand' to which it is conceptually applied. Alliteration further links elements in the phrase 'auf alle Weise wiederholt haben will', and compounds the semantic linking of 'verdeckt' and 'erstickt' with a sonorous similarity which enhances their conceptual import by articulating, in crisp consonantal evocation, the linguistic strangulation that is described. The significance of these rhetorical links and chains is only perceived in terms of their meaning for the percipient: the double irony of Goethe's articulation in context is that imitation need never be mere repetition if the artist exploits the natural material fabric of his medium to express a given message, and that this transcendence of derivation will only be appreciated by those open to its perception. What Goethe's presentation suggests, then, is not only that no given cultural object or theme is exempt from artistic treatment and re-manipulation in a novel cultural context, but that through this process, the creative artistic mind can and must apply itself to the most recalcitrant cultural notions

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<sup>64</sup> HA IX 238.

and, in their reformulation, bring forth the inherent worth of the original object in such a way as not only to reiterate and retain, but to enhance, embellish, and increase in value and significance:

Denn der innere Gehalt des bearbeiteten Gegenstands ist der Anfang und das Ende der Kunst. Man wird zwar nicht leugnen, daß das Genie, das ausgebildete Kunsttalent, durch Behandlung aus allem alles machen und den widerspenstigsten Stoff bezwingen könne. Genau besehen, entsteht aber alsdann immer mehr ein Kunststück als ein Kunstwerk, welches auf einem würdigen Gegenstande ruhen soll, damit uns zuletzt die Behandlung, durch Geschick, Mühe und Fleiß, die Würde des Stoffes nur desto glücklicher und herrlicher entgegenbringe.<sup>65</sup>

The process of indiscriminate cultural repetition, which Goethe has ostensibly berated in his account of the potential suffocation of original sense under a welter of imitation, is here mutated to refer to a very necessary cultural process, allusion to which was already present in the form of the criticism of contemporary artistic practice quoted above, by which the creative genius of the artist is required to be in play in order to bring forth the inherent sense of the received cultural object or notion. This 'innere Gehalt' is, Goethe maintains, 'der Anfang und das Ende der Kunst' (itself a reformulation and novel contextualization of the concept of Alpha and Omega which has become an integral part of the Christian tradition): beginning, in that the artist reverts to a given object; ending, in the sense of an infinite projection which results from a fusion of the past entity with the present form, into a new proposition which is both the past retained and the present created, transcending thereby the particularity of past and present in an infinite plurality and universality, 'durch Behandlung aus allem alles machen'. The resultant process is one of progressive refinement through regressive appreciation: the inherent value of the original material is brought forth and enhanced. The relevance of the concept of binary synthesis here is apparent in Goethe's presentation of cultural progression as a reversion to original norms in order to reiterate them in a novel cultural context, and in so doing to repeat the past in the present in an aesthetic re-representation which both transcends historical contingency and present re-contextualization, projecting the inherent values of the past improved and enhanced into the cultural future.

Goethe's reiteration of the Genesis story<sup>66</sup> manifests his mode of secularization

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<sup>65</sup> HA IX 280.

<sup>66</sup> HA IX 129ff.

in the artistic reworking of a received cultural notion which reveals both historical particularization and universalizing generalization. The events he describes - the banishment of first man, the ensuing nomadic existence and the principal figures which emerge and dominate therein - are accepted traditional and cultural accounts: the contemporary relevance and significance of these historical notions is brought out in Goethe's re-manifestation thereof in the pages of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. The biblical story is autobiographically justified in that it ensues from the young Goethe's interest in Hebrew and the subsequent appeal of the story to his boyish quest after food for his imagination<sup>67</sup>: its significance transcends the author's account of his own life in its overall relevance to the contemporary society he describes and, by extension, to all civilizations which have this biblical narrative as an integral part of their cultural foundation. Use of the historical present tense throughout the account affects immediacy of the past events described: the past is artificially but effectively brought into the present of Goethe's narrative. Goethe as rhetor here most emphatically distances himself, through rhetorical artifice, from his account, and simultaneously draws the reader into its narrative fabric by use of the rhetorical device of identification of author and reader as a plural percipient entity<sup>68</sup>. His narrative here is particularly redolent of a subtle, ironic humour which also serves to distance the author from his material<sup>69</sup>. Most significant, however, are the little moral asides and social observations with which Goethe peppers his pseudo-biblical narrative. His reference to the cohesiveness and indivisibility of family relationships<sup>70</sup> inheres in the biblical tale, but is apocryphal to it, and is part of the contemporary message, of, perhaps, part personal and part general significance, that Goethe perceives and reveals in the ancient account. On this basis, too, he finds occasion to mention some of the principal theological concerns of his day, in a passage<sup>71</sup> which discusses the relative merits and the interdependence of natural and revealed religions. Implicit in Goethe's paraphrastic

<sup>67</sup> HA IX 130: 'eine lebhaftere Vorstellung in meiner Einbildungskraft vorging'.

<sup>68</sup> See for example: 'in denen bisher unsere Einbildungskraft verweilt', *ibid.*, p.134; 'Bleiben wir aber bei den Opfer stehen', *ibid.*, p.136.

<sup>69</sup> See for example: 'Vom Euphrat aus, nicht ohne göttlichen Fingerzeig, wandert Abraham gegen Westen', *ibid.*, p.130. Humour is of course not the only factor operative in this passage. Derek Bowman refers to it as 'a mature, rationalist exposition of the rise of religion', and perceives it to have been written in a 'bold, enlightened tone' (*Life into Autobiography*, *op. cit.*, p.63). Bowman's acknowledgement of Goethe's use of irony and attenuation when discussing matters religious has been noted: here, however, he seems to have missed the joke.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.132: 'Familien halten zusammen; sie vereinigen sich'.

<sup>71</sup> HA IX 134, ll.15ff.

relocation of the Genesis story is the relevance of historical culture to the contemporary world; the re-manifestation of past cultural notions, mediated by the perceptive psyche of the individual and the formative hand of the artist; in a present context which both reveals this relevance and imparts something of the original values reiterated. Goethe's re-presentation in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* of some aspects of the first book of Moses (note that Goethe avoids discussion of the best-known events of the Genesis story - the six days of Creation, Adam and Eve, the Fall, Noah's Ark - in order, perhaps, better to distil the essence of his contemporary message from the multifarious phenomena of received accounts of ancient biblical civilization) is a recollection of the past in the present which, by means of its reversion to ancient cultural forms, founds and directs the progression of cultural evolution. His artistic treatment brings out the inherent value of the original form, 'die Würde des Stoffes', in a manner which refines and enhances, making explicit the relevance of the past to the present in a manifest revelation of the necessity of present recourse to the past, and offering a cultural paradigm of transcendence through reversion; of the fusion of past and present, derivation and re-manifestation, in a novel, functional and aspiring cultural proposition.

This new cultural proposition, which inheres in the fusion of historical cultural matter, through its transcendence in notional tradition, with a re-materialization in the cultural present that evokes both the absolute concretion of history and the abstraction of its inherent notions, is both material - a re-manifestation in literary form - and spiritual: the present form is itself transcended through the contemporary and projected significance of the evocation of past notions. The present re-materialization is both the original matter and its traditional significance, both concrete and abstract, both material and spiritual. Goethe's mode of secularization, as the re-materialization of religious history and its spiritual significance, itself transcends the notional barriers of abstraction and concretion in a manifest literary form which in turn transcends itself, being a material form with an abstract significance that is itself implicitly material: the evocation and depiction of life in and through the apparently lifeless formalism of language. And it is precisely this fusion of abstraction and concretion, of the phenomenal world of material appearance and the spiritual world of notions and moral ideals, that Goethe refers to in his discussion of theoretical and critical trends in the cultural world of his youth:

Nun zur Kritik! und zwar vorerst zu den theoretischen Versuchen. Wir holen nicht zu weit aus, wenn wir sagen, daß damals das Ideelle sich aus der Welt in die Religion geflüchtet hatte, ja sogar in der Sittenlehre kaum zum Vorschein kam; von einem höchsten Prinzip der Kunst hatte niemand eine Ahnung.<sup>72</sup>

This 'highest principle' intimates a potential synthesis of worldly and religious ideals: for Goethe, a synthesis of the spiritual and the material, the religious and the worldly, the inner realm of the emotions and the outer world of phenomenal appearance, is not only possible, but partakes of the ultimate nature and function of art. This 'highest principle of art' is in fact crucially akin to what Goethe later (in terms of his autobiographical narration) calls the function of 'true poetry':

Die wahre Poesie kündigt sich dadurch an, daß sie, als ein weltliches Evangelium, durch innere Heiterkeit, durch äußeres Behagen, uns von den irdischen Lasten zu befreien weiß, die auf uns drücken.<sup>73</sup>

Goethe's terms here are particularly telling and particularly relevant to an enquiry into his mode of secularization. For the synthesis of material form and spiritual notion affords a transcendence of the concrete finiteness of earthly existence in a liberation from the pains of the world through 'true poetry' functioning as what Goethe calls a 'worldly gospel': an explicit secularization of an inherently sacral notion. Sacral and secular realms are therefore to combine and inter-relate in the formation and effectation of a new order, affording spiritual comfort and material well-being through the received and perceived poetic formulations. 'True poetry', then, frees the percipient from the burdens of earthly life: the Christian terminology of liberation from the pains of this existence through aspiration towards the spiritual purity of the next is here secularized into the aesthetic freedom which inheres in the manifestation of the spiritual in the material, the encapsulation and simultaneous liberation of the numinous in the phenomenon of poetic language. What we have here, then, is a candid conceptualization from Goethe of what is the function of art in the representation of religion. 'Die wahre Poesie' is open to perception 'als ein weltliches Evangelium': not, then, as 'poetry proper', where meaning is coordinate with form, but in the binary process of a mutual subordination of conceptual and poetic relations whereby the percipient actually experiences the conceptual message which is conveyed. It is aesthetic discourse in this sense which informs the passages from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* analyzed above; aesthetic discourse in this sense which accounts for

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<sup>72</sup> HA IX 261f.

<sup>73</sup> HA IX 580.

Goethe's representation and perpetuation of the feeling of faith in his discussion of his religious tradition.

As a final example of the nature and import of Goethe's concern to breath new life into received accounts of religious tradition in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, I shall consider the critical account offered of an emphatically Christian work by one of Goethe's contemporaries, Klopstock's *Messias*<sup>74</sup>. Here the substrata of temporal secularization are obvious: Goethe is ostensibly offering a review of Klopstock's epic account of the received biblical narratives relating the story of Christ. Moreover, a careful reading of this passage reveals Goethe's underlying concern to involve the reader in a very particular appreciation of this cultural element by encapsulating in the fabric of his text those aspects of human felt-life which are here conceptually described. In short, Goethe conceptualizes in his text the accomplishment of Klopstock in his *Messias* in recounting a sacral story in a secular form, through which the original message acquires renewed sacralization. But Goethe goes farther than this: he produces an account of Klopstock's own work in which, by means of binary synthesis, the sacral elements are re-presented for renewed appreciation and assimilation in the secular world.

This particular passage is instinct with those rhetorical forms and devices which Derek Bowman delineates as typical of Goethe's treatment of religion in general: concessives and subjunctives, the grammatical mood of doubt, and a subtle, pervasive but indubitably distancing irony<sup>75</sup>. The formative hand of the author is omnipresent in the text, and the significance of his chosen formulations is not to be underestimated.

Der Messias, ein Name, der unendliche Eigenschaften bezeichnet, sollte durch ihn [Klopstock] aufs neue verherrlicht werden. Der Erlöser sollte der Held sein, den er [Klopstock] durch irdische Gemeinheit und Leiden, zu den höchsten himmlischen Triumphen zu begleiten gedachte.

The name itself connotes eternity and endlessness: Klopstock's use thereof encourages a renewed glorification of the name. Paradoxically - or more correctly, perhaps, with a logic all of its own - the glory of the Eternal is (or as Goethe puts it, *should be*) increased through its temporalization and concretion in the name itself. The

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<sup>74</sup> HA IX 398f.

<sup>75</sup> Bowman, *Life into Autobiography*, op. cit., p.52.

'Redeemer' is portrayed by Klopstock as a hero - the intrinsically sacral notion of redemption assumes the secular mantle of a literary-cultural construct - who is accompanied by Klopstock on a journey through earthly pain and suffering to the 'highest heavenly triumph'. The irony of Klopstock's poetic journey is not lost on Goethe, who is here concerned to present his own readers with an intimation of what 'accompaniment', as a physical experience, actually means. For while Klopstock's work describes the essence of the Christian message, Goethe's curt account of it *expresses* this essence. Between the appositions of the 'Redeemer' and the 'hero', 'earthly suffering' and 'heavenly triumph', Goethe weaves an intricate web of sounds and meanings which convey to the reader a *sense* of that very process of ultimate salvation through regression which Klopstock relates. 'Gemeinheit' and 'Leiden' are linked by assonance: their conceptual similarity underlined by a sound-look congruity. Klopstock's concern was to accompany his 'hero' on this journey: Goethe's portrayal goes farther in expressing this proximity by continuing the chain of assonance to 'begleiten' and, indeed, emphasizing the point by exploiting the general rhetorical similarity of 'Leiden' and 'begleiten'. Not only is the authorial intent described: the *effect* on the reader is conveyed; the reader is drawn into the fabric of the text and hence into the journey through pain to triumphant redemption. Klopstock's proximity to his redemptive hero is transmuted into a particular, individual approximation of the Messiah through a personal assimilation of the ultimate religious journey which is conveyed in the sounds and look of Goethe's text<sup>76</sup>.

Klopstock, says Goethe, puts his entire world-view of a continuum from the divine through the realm of angels to the human into this work:

Alles, was Göttliches, Englisches, Menschliches in der jungen Seele lag, ward hier in Anspruch genommen. Er, an der Bibel erzogen und durch ihre Kraft genährt, lebt nun mit Erzvätern, Propheten und Vorläufer als Gegenwärtigen; doch alle sind seit Jahrhunderten nur dazu berufen, einen lichten Kreis um den *einen* zu ziehn, dessen Erniedrigung sie mit Staunen beschauen, und an dessen Verherrlichung sie glorreich teilnehmen sollen.

Goethe notes that Klopstock is recounting his personal experience in his present world of the religious tradition in which he was educated. But, as Goethe's account implies, this is just one aspect of a gradual temporal process - a *secular* process operative 'seit

<sup>76</sup> Eric A Blackall's account of Klopstock in *The Emergence of German as a Literary Language 1700-1775* (Second Edition, Ithaca and London, 1978) notes Goethe's criticism of a lack of plasticity in Klopstock's language, which for Goethe is tantamount to a lack of poetry (see pp.337 and 343): a shortcoming which Goethe is here concerned to point out in the prose of his own autobiography!

Jahrhundertern' - by which the glory of God is increased through adulation of one central 'object' (Goethe prefers to use the masculine objective pronoun here rather than name Christ explicitly), through observation of the earthly debasement of this 'object' and, in turn, through taking part in its/His ultimate glorification. This is Klopstock's conceptual message, which is again conveyed by Goethe to be perceived and felt by the reader. The apposition of 'Erniedrigung' and 'Verherrlichung' is expressed in the grammatical structure of the sentence, through repetition of the relative pronoun 'dessen', and underlined by the figure of homeoteleuton, together with the quatro-syllabic rhythm of both terms. Klopstock's depiction of the Christian notion of ultimate glorification through debasement is expressed by Goethe in a linguistic structure which conveys the notion that 'Erniedrigung' and 'Verherrlichung' exist separately, *and equally*, since the achievement of their potential depends on their functioning together in reciprocal subordination. Moreover, consonance and assonance implicitly link the notion of 'Verherrlichung' and that of its achievement, 'glorreich teilnehmen'. Goethe takes this gradual, secular process - part of the received Christian tradition - and secularizes it by transmuting Klopstock's account of detached observation and wonderment into active experience in and through the text. What Goethe expresses is not just the drawing of a circle of light around the Messiah, but the wonderment that is felt in contemplating the light; not just a basking in reflected glory, but an intimated experience of ultimate glorification. Goethe takes that sacral notion of ultimate salvation and redemption which is central to the Christian message and secularizes it by means of a fusion of form and meaning which transcends that material in its appeal to human feeling. This is no simple résumé of a literary account of a religious story: it is the re-presentation of a crucial sacral notion - *the* crucial notion of the Christian tradition - which invites renewed appreciation and comprehension by the reader of the secular text.

As a literary rival whose review has its own specific purpose, Goethe is, of course, unwilling to leave Klopstock's *Messias* without some indication of Goethe's own ability to transcend the significance of the work in even such a short account. That this transcendence has been a conscious intention on Goethe's part, and that he is aware of, and invites his readership to appreciate, the overriding significance of his own account, is conveyed with typically subtle, but nonetheless tantalizingly cutting, irony:

Der himmlische Friede, welchen Klopstock bei Konzeption und Ausführung dieses Gedichtes empfunden, teilt sich noch jetzt einem jeden mit, der die ersten zehn Gesänge liest, ohne die Forderung bei sich laut werden zu lassen, auf die eine fortrückende Bildung nicht gerne Verzicht tut.

Klopstock, says Goethe, had personal sentient experience of the process he describes, and its effects on him are marked and lasting. He has experienced the personal sacralization afforded by contemplation of the light of the Messiah, by participating in the earthly sufferings of Christ. It is left to the reader to decide whether Goethe's account of Klopstock's personal experience of Christianity is tinged with admiration or tainted with cynicism:

Die Würde des Gegenstandes erhöhte dem Dichter das Gefühl eigener Persönlichkeit ... So erwarb sich Klopstock das völlige Recht, sich als eine geheiligte Person anzusehen, und so befließ er sich auch in seinem Tun der aufmerksamsten Reinigkeit.

For it is Goethe who *articulates* in a few hundred words the essence of this pre-eminent sacral message. Klopstock felt: Goethe re-presents this feeling to be felt anew, dynamized and revitalized through his exploitation of those deceptively simple, but tremendously important, sonorous and visible rhetorical links which are inherent in his linguistic medium, and which operate on the psyche of the reader to convey the experience described. The sacral is secularized in a mode of secularization which contains, expresses and re-presents in vital form those elements of religious culture which are central to our enhanced understanding and appreciation of our world.

Thus the manifold accounts in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* of Goethe's religious tradition evidently offer insight into Goethe's intention to communicate the essence of that very tradition, not only in the concepts to which he refers, not only in the words he uses, but in the fusion of sound and concept for which Stephenson's analysis of 'schöner Vortrag' has argued. Appreciation of the religious world-view offered by Goethe in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* depends on the reader's ability and propensity to perceive the functions of the text in terms of a reciprocal subordination of the material of the conceptual message (*Stoff*) and the manner of its presentation (*Gestalt*), to produce the *Gehalt* of a sensed import which represents, in the secular fabric of the text, the very essence of that particular form of feeling we call faith. Goethe's intention in discussing frequently, but not, at first sight, cogently, in *Dichtung und*

*Wahrheit* the fundamental religious questions which informed his contemporary world and his own assimilation thereof, is to be perceived in the mutual subordination of conceptual and poetic relations, of meaning and form, of semantics and aesthetics.

The manner of Goethe's depiction of religion in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, therefore, makes manifest the ongoing function of active religious faith in the letter of his text. Goethe's literary embodiment of the notions, ideals, and symbols of religion as a cultural entity reflects his concern to uphold the constituent elements of his cultural tradition by affording these a vital significance in the novel cultural form he creates, and this he does by making of the notions of his cultural religious past a sentient reality of actively functioning faith in the cultural present of his text. The apprehension and assimilation of Goethe's religious message in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* depends on the active engagement of the reader in the perception of Goethe's communication of the vital immediacy of sentient experience in and through his linguistic medium. It is a communication which is active because it demands participation, and because it is dynamic: the ongoing and productive appreciation of the vitality of real experience incites and promotes a real, experiential response. Above all, it is an activity that is *re-creational* because it is *recreational*: the recourse to original cultural models, which for Goethe is necessary for any valid and tenable cultural development, is implicitly and etymologically linked to the notion of a 'pleasure principle' which imbues all his religious experiences and which characterizes their autobiographical reproduction. The sense of fun, the playful impulse, which are explicitly referred to in Goethe's account of his early biblical and catechetical education, are implicit in serious mode in his depiction of religious experience throughout the autobiography. Plays on words do more than reveal the author's capacity to manipulate language and meaning: the rhetorical links which are forged in the fabric of the text operate sensuously on the psyche of the percipient, articulating internal emotions which are otherwise inexpressible. When Goethe 'plays' with his language, manipulates his medium, exploiting the sounds and the look and the relations between the two, he conveys a sense of the plasticity of his medium, and makes use of it as a sentient body, in a way which may be without obvious conceptual meaning, but is never insignificant. It is the sort of 'play' that informs Herder's *Plastik*, that the child grows and develops only in tangible contact with his world, that only by active manipulation of the physical universe is spiritual growth initiated and

encouraged. Likewise, for Schiller, in the physical world it is in aesthetic 'play' that the true self is manifest, and the inner world which is concealed by artifice and semblance shines through unwittingly in the realm of recreational experience and manipulation. In Goethe's playful manipulation of the plasticity of language the essential and inherent sense of his textual message shines through. The formal appearance of Goethe's text is its 'veil of poetry'; his manipulation of the sound-look of language exploits formal aspects which may appear fortuitous, but are never gratuitous in their offering of a semblance of life itself, in their significance of a realm of apprehension and experience outwith the immediate form of the text, a realm which is approached only through engagement of the physical perceptive senses:

Die höchste Aufgabe einer jeden Kunst ist, durch den Schein die Täuschung einer höheren Wirklichkeit zu geben.<sup>77</sup>

What the above analysis of selected passages from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* shows, then, is that the significant recreational motif, the seriousness in play, which is the recognized hallmark of art, functions in Goethe's extended discursive prose as it does in his aphorisms and *Sprüche*. Goethe 'plays' as external manipulator, but is engaged in drawing the reader into the game, inviting him to 'let go' of the artifices of rhetorical communication and give in to the sheer pleasure in sound and look which transcend the form and apparent function of rhetoric. In the realm of aesthetic discourse, writer and reader enter into a game of language and communication where the insight into feeling accords sensuous experience the settled security of conviction, where enjoyment of bodily form opens the reader to that sense of freedom in form that is the precondition and the resultant force of aesthetic play in discursive communication. The reader who senses 'manifest freedom' in the physical form of a writer's language is engaged in a game of mutual perception and experience of feeling, with the writer, through the text. The re-creation which is, in this instance, the reformulation of known truths in new language, is just such a game: as a re-creation and a recreation, it reveals and opens to perception an inherent and essential sense which transcends manifest form, creating and sustaining a sense of freedom and liberation from the encumbering effects of the physical world.

Goethe's reformulation of commonplace religious truths and accepted ideas is playful, but it is far from flippant. His over-riding concern to maintain the traditions

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<sup>77</sup> HA IX 488.

he inherited is irreconcilable with any disregard for their inherent validity. His mode of secularization does not denigrate the concepts he secularizes: it enhances them in a perceptible fusion of historical form and present formulation, of sacral notion and secular medium, which supersedes both in its intuition and projection of an immanent and transcendent significance. Goethe's mode of secularization manifests this intuition: it is significant of a religious faith which bases its present function on historical forms; which is to be experienced in and through the letter of his reformulation; which is maintained and enhanced by a re-contextualization of historical form which carries forward its future significance and function. Goethe's manifest aesthetic play with the accepted truths of cultural religion is a re-creation in the sense of a refreshment and a reinvigoration: a regression to original forms to express the ongoing functional vitality of that which is ostensibly past and over; a re-manifestation of historically finite notions in an infinite semblance of sentient life. Goethe's mode of secularization is both the preservation and the revitalization of the essential feeling of religion, the element of faith which no rational analysis can effectively master, which no conceptual account of religion can effectively convey. This is precisely what Goethe expresses in the distinction he offers between felt faith and rational knowledge in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*:

Beim Glauben, sagte ich, komme alles darauf an, *daß* man glaube; *was* man glaube, sei völlig gleichgültig. Der Glaube sei ein großes Gefühl von Sicherheit für die Gegenwart und Zukunft, und diese Sicherheit entspringe aus dem Vertrauen auf ein übergroßes, übermächtiges und unerforschliches Wesen.<sup>78</sup>

Faith is 'ein großes Gefühl' that is settled and secure, and it attains this security by understanding, through experience, of that 'übergroßes Wesen' we call God. Goethe's definition of faith here makes manifest this settled conviction by expressing the certainty of secure feeling - this confidence in the present and confident expectation of the future - in the material fabric of his text.

Goethe's mode of secularization in representing his received religious tradition in his autobiography articulates this 'great feeling' by exploiting the sensuous basis of language to convey a spiritual message through a material form. If the reader closes *Dichtung und Wahrheit* with a sense, however inchoate, of having experienced something of the sacral, of having felt an approximation of something above and

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<sup>78</sup> HA X 23.

beyond his rational comprehension, then Goethe has succeeded in articulating the central issues of human conviction, of recreating the sacral force and message through the interactive, functional fusion of message with medium. Goethe's treatment of religion in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* offers an intensely dynamic articulation of the vital essence of inherited religious faith.

“Der Künstler müßte ihm vielleicht noch etwas geben.” (...)

“Und das wäre?”

“Das Göttliche, das wir freilich nicht kennen würden, wenn es der Mensch nicht fühlte und selbst hervorbrächte.”<sup>1</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The idea for this thesis was initially generated when it was pointed out to me that there still remained considerable scholarly disagreement on how to view and adduce Goethe's attitude to religion. For at the same time, I was becoming aware that the concept of aesthetic freedom - central to Weimar Classicism - which inheres in the contemplation of the fusion of form and feeling in an artistic object, is remarkably similar in kind and function to the notion of the perfectibility of human spiritual life in the felt approximation of the divine principle which is the essence of religious faith, certainly within the Christian tradition. It became apparent, then, that the answer to the problem of Goethe's attitude to religion might lie, not in the conceptual meaning of his manifold religious utterances per se - which have, as we have seen, been the principal cause of scholarly disagreement by virtue of their evident lack of conceptual coherence - but in a perception of the nature and function of his reformulation of the discrete elements of his inherited religious tradition. Proceeding from this starting-point, it emerged that the binary-type synthesis offered the most pertinent theoretical model with which to approach the evident 'problem' of Goethe's 'religion', since this type of synthesis, when applied to textual interpretation, suggests a particular kind of fusion of conceptual and sensuous messages, reliant on the perceptive needs and capacities of the reader, appreciation of which leads to active, felt involvement in the text and its import. Goethe presents a bequest, or testament, to posterity in his autobiography: I have argued that in the reformulations of religious tradition in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* there is an intimation of the very essence of that tradition, which is human felt conviction in the existence and ongoing function of the divine principle, and that perception of this inheres in appreciation of his aesthetic representation of faith through the fusion of conceptual meaning and sensuous form in his text. It is the office of the poet to express feelings; that of the historian to present the events and

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<sup>1</sup> Goethe, 'Der Sammler und die Seinigen', HA XII 84.

movements of political, cultural and philosophical tradition. *Dichtung und Wahrheit* offers both, and was chosen as the focus for this search for a fusion of form and meaning in Goethe's religious utterances principally because it is here that Goethe most explicitly expresses his account of his world, and hence gives form to the essence of the religious tradition he received.

I have called this communication of the essence of religious faith in the context of the written word 'Goethe's mode of secularization'. 'Secularization' is a word much in use in critical accounts of Goethe's attitude to religion, but the etymological and epistemological definition I offer of the concept reveals the particular potential of secularization - and the relevance of the binary-type synthesis to the secularization process - as a heuristic for approaching Goethe's attitude to religion through his representations thereof. Fundamental to the definition of secularization I have proposed is the potential synthesis of the polarity of sacral and secular realms, of noumenon and phenomenon, of matter and spirit. Concomitantly, secularization expresses the potential synthesis of past and present, through precisely that process conceptualized in the notion of 'reculer pour mieux sauter', of regression in order to progress, of refinement for the future through recourse to the past. I have argued that Goethe's representation of his religious tradition in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* expresses the binary fusion of these polarities of sacral and secular and past and present in the synthesis of another polarity, that of form and feeling, of human conviction, or faith, and literary contextualization. The reader of Goethe's autobiography is presented with an account of the author's early life, and the events which informed his social, philosophical, cultural and religious education, mediated by the experience of maturity. But the obvious polarity of past and present here has a corollary: the conceptual message of Goethe's account is presented in a linguistic form which has a concurrent, sometimes confirmative and sometimes contradictory, function. This mutual subordination of form and meaning is expressed in the binary process of aesthetic discourse, and if the conceptual message of Goethe's accounts of his religious tradition is perceived in and through the light of aesthetic patterning in the linguistic form of his accounts, then Goethe as religious historian has expressed the very essence of that tradition, and the reader is invited to feel the conviction of faith in a sacral principle in the secular matrix of Goethe's text. Therefore, Goethe's 'testament' may be understood both as a legacy bequeathed to posterity, and in that

sense of a 'covenant' which the etymology of the term implies and the Judaeo-Christian Bible proclaims: the 'testament' of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* encapsulates in itself the essence of the secularization process.

For Goethe's concern to preserve and revitalize his religious heritage in representing it for posterity is in turn the re-manifestation of a process of preservation and revitalization which is inherent and operational in the historical manifestations of religion itself: the Christian gospels proclaim a message of simultaneous continuity with and transcendence of the tradition out of which they came into being. Goethe's mode of secularization in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* takes its place on a spiral of manifestation and transcendence, of maintenance and reinvigoration, which conditions and promotes the nature and ongoing function of faith in the world. As it is the essential feeling of early faith which, for Goethe, founds and directs the future potential of religious belief, so it is the primal sacral message of fundamental Christianity which expresses the inherent sentience of real, religious experience which is to be promoted, enhanced and revitalized, in the secular textual context of the literary medium. Thus Goethe's mode of secularization, if it indeed functions of a perpetuation and enhancement of the essence of religious faith, must reveal an integral binding with the form and substance of the initial proclamation it reproclaims.

The relationship between originality and derivativeness is, of course, central to my analysis of Goethe's use of religious material, and hence to the definition of secularization I propose. But the mode of secularization Goethe adopts is itself not original to him, and is in fact deeply rooted in the religious tradition it is Goethe's concern to perpetuate. Of course, all religious creeds, theologies and world-views are attempts to encapsulate in terms open to human understanding the essence of the numinous principle which informs them, and in this respect, all religions are attempts to secularize the sacral. But the Christian religion, which, in all its various sectarian and cultic manifestations, held the most deep-seated and lasting influence over Goethe, and proposes the kind of faith that Goethe's reformulations present, depends implicitly and inherently on the interrelationship of spiritual and material realms which Goethe's mode of secularization proposes. The Christian religion proclaims Christ as the physical manifestation of a non-physical force; the actions He perpetrates alleviate physical suffering and promote spiritual enhancement by means of the transcendent reality with which He communicates, with which He is the means of communication,

and of which He, Himself, is the *epiphany*, the manifestation of the divine. The sublime significance of the Christian model is encapsulated in the dual function of Christ as both temporal and spiritual, natural and supra-natural, secular and sacral, by which the natural world is both preserved and transcended in the perception and understanding - initially reflected, ultimately sublimely clear - of the proclaimed message. The force of the deity comes into phenomenal existence: God is made Man through woman. The actions of Christ as a historical figure, as presented in the Bible which transmits them to tradition, are real in their own terms, and symbolic of something else: in the events of Christ's life are fused together the realms of physical phenomenon and abstract significance which characterized his coming into existence. The words of Christ are aural manifestations, in essentially concrete imagery, which intimate the functional power of the divine. Physical entity and abstract significance again fuse together in the formation of a novel proposition: the essentially metaphorical character of language is to be superseded, the irreconcilable polarities of abstraction and concretion dissolved, in the ultimate attainment of perfect understanding, the fusion of physical and spiritual realms of existence and appreciation.

Christ, then, is both secular - a historically defined character rooted in physical time and place - and sacral: his birth and death, and the events of His life, are, according to the Christian tradition, divinely inspired, divinely ordained, and divinely perpetrated. The antagonistic polarities of sacrality and secularity co-exist and co-function in the historical personality of Christ. He transcends the world by being rooted within it; and the ultimate transcendence of earthly life He proclaims and promotes is itself determined by the synthesis of incarnate and numinous realities incorporated, expressed and projected in and through Him.

Moreover, this synthesis of temporal and eternal worlds which is the essence of the Christian message and its propagation is also determined by the notion of a progression - towards spiritual purity - that is promoted by an initial and active regression. The power of Christ is unleashed in the world through the assumption of mundane form, and in the humblest possible human incarnation: the evangelistic accounts of the Advent of the Messiah proclaim not a conquering king, but a helpless, hapless, and essentially humble child. Furthermore, it is axiomatic of the Christian message that man must regress to his child-like origins in order to progress to 'the

Kingdom of Heaven'; to attain spiritual purity in a re-acquisition of the innocent, untarnished and unaffected human purity of childhood. Throughout the evangelistic accounts of the life and gospel of Christ are repeated references to the notion that 'many who are first shall be last and the last first': divine glory is based not on earthly glory but in essential humility and purity, and it is in regression to and acceptance of the undifferentiated innocence of a child-like state of being that ultimate transcendence of earthly life and attainment of enlightened spiritual purity is to be achieved. The notions of a fusion of sacral principle and secular matrix and of regression in order to progress enhanced which inform Goethe's mode of secularization are central to the Christian tradition itself.

It is in recognition of the inherent derivativeness of Goethe's conception of secularization that the wider significance of the concept for his oeuvre as a whole is anticipated. It is widely accepted, for example, that the Goethean notion of 'Entsagung' has much in common with Christian humility, but is there not scope for a reconsideration of Goethe's 'Entsagung' in terms of his potential communication of the human feeling involved in the act of renunciation? Is there, perhaps, even a case to be made for the religious implications, and their corresponding secularization, of that perplexing quality, 'das Ewig-Weibliche'? For the Christian notion of 'grace', the undeserved but willingly given mercy of God, also implies an elegance in form or manner, the contemplation of which accords not only pleasure, but a sense of freedom from the bounds and strictures of the physical world. This would certainly seem to be a plausible implication of Schiller's letter to Goethe of 17th August 1795:

Ich finde in der christlichen Religion virtualiter die Anlage zu dem Höchsten und Edelsten, und die verschiedenen Erscheinungen derselben im Leben scheinen mir bloß deswegen so widrig und abgeschmackt, weil sie verfehlt Darstellungen dieses Höchsten sind. Hält man sich an den eigentlichen Charakterzug des Christentums, der es von allen monotheistischen Religionen unterscheidet, so liegt er in nichts anderm als in der Aufhebung des Gesetzes oder des Kantischen Imperativs, an dessen Stelle das Christentum eine freie Neigung gesetzt haben will. Es ist also in seiner reinen Form Darstellung *schöner* Sittlichkeit oder der Menschwerdung des Heiligen, und in diesem Sinn die einzige *ästhetische* Religion; daher ich es mir auch erkläre, warum diese Religion bei der weiblichen Natur so viel Glück gemacht, und nur in Weibern noch in einer gewissen erträglichen Form angetroffen wird.<sup>2</sup>

Schiller's comments anticipate and underpin Goethe's own conception of an aesthetic

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<sup>2</sup> GA XX 98f.

ideal which is inherently feminine, appealing not only to the higher idealism of beauty found in women in general, but to that of femininity as the highest perceptible form of appreciation and furtherance of beauty in form that is open to all reasoning and feeling human beings. I would suggest that a study of the relationship between femininity and Christianity, in terms of secularization in the sense I have suggested, in Goethe's use of the notion of 'das Ewig-Weibliche', is potentially very enlightening indeed.

As we have seen, Goethe's conception of the Christian tradition represented and reformulated some aspects of that tradition which were themselves abstracted from pre-existent traditions: Platonic, Gnostic and Judaic elements, for example, are all encapsulated in the religious tradition which Goethe re-presents. The mode of secularization he offers is dynamic in itself, and presents a view of cultural progression through regression which points to a continual process of self-reflexive growth and development. It is, then, perhaps not as surprising as it at first sight appears that I find corroboration of what I believe to be Goethe's mode of secularization from a novelist working firmly within the tradition of the erstwhile German Democratic Republic, in a novel set in ancient Greece:

Nie sah ich wie hier, daß man die Kulturschichten nicht voneinander abheben kann, daß sie einander durchdringen, daß durch den heutigen Kult der frühere durchscheint, durch diesen der noch frühere. Daß es kaum Dauernhafteres gibt als die Rituale, die der Erzähler nach Bedarf umzudeuten hat. Vor der säkularisierten Erzählung die Heiligenlegende, vor dieser das Heroenepos, vor diesem der Mythos. Die Erfahrung von Zeittiefe an einem Ort, der fremder kaum sein könnte.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, the aesthetic appreciation, noted above, which German eighteenth-century figures expressed for the Bible-as-text, indicates that Goethe's mode of secularization is itself, *as a technique*, traditional. That, at least, would account for his judgement that the *beauty* of the biblical accounts increased as the interaction between self, text, environment, and history progressed:

Ich bin überzeugt, daß die Bibel immer schöner wird, je mehr man sie versteht, das heißt, je mehr man einsieht und anschaut, daß jedes Wort, das wir allgemein auffassen und im besondern auf uns anwenden, nach gewissen Umständen, nach Zeit- und Ortverhältnissen einen eignen, besondern, unmittelbar individuellen Bezug gehabt hat.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Christa Wolf, *Kassandra. Erzählung und Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Kassandra*, Berlin und Weimar, 1983, p.88.

<sup>4</sup> HA XII 374, §65; Hecker §672.

If my argument has done anything to place Goethe more firmly in this perpetually self-renewing tradition, and to chip away at the misleading image of him as *Heide*, then that would be the most fruitful of any of its possible repercussions. For his significance in the future may well be grounded in his insistence on the reality of the spiritual life, rooted though he held it must be in time-dependent contingency:

Dann ist Vergangenheit beständig,  
Das Künftige voraus lebendig,  
Der Augenblick ist Ewigkeit.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 'Vermächtnis', HA I 370.

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