

Contributi/7

Schelling, Nietzsche and (Ir)Rationalizing Religion

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F. W. J. Schelling and Friedrich Nietzsche appear for all intents and purposes in opposite philosophical corners, especially when it concerns religion. Nietzsche makes no positive mention of Schelling's thought and yet, there are strong resonances of Schelling in Nietzsche. In this paper, I will show how the later Schelling's criticism of the way his contemporaries approach religion is echoed in Nietzsche's philosophical assessment of religion. This concerns two issues: rationalizing and irrationalizing religion. Schelling and Nietzsche aim both to avoid two extremes, one where religion is the counterfeit double of philosophy and the other wherein religion is the absolute other of philosophy. One could say that they are looking for a non-Hegelian dialectical interaction of philosophy and religion. For Schelling, the first issue is that a rational religion takes away all that is interesting in religion from religion. Schelling's purpose is to provide a philosophical foundation to take religion and revelation seriously in themselves, not as something that could be explained by reason. At the same time, Schelling advocates against those philosophical approaches of religion that make religion absolutely in excess of reason (fideism, irrationalism). This general strategy is mirrored in Nietzsche. For him, the first of these issues comes up in terms of the demythologization of religion, which evacuates from religion its more tantalizing elements through a historical approach to religion. The second issue regards a religion that refuses to interact dialectically with philosophy, which is discussed under the heading of the sovereignty of religion.

Introduction

Besides having their first two birth names in common, one would be hard-pressed to find two philosophers who appear as opposed as Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854) and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900)¹. One is the despiser of Christianity, the hater of metaphysics, the denier

¹This is evidenced by the lack of comparative studies on Schelling's and Nietzsche's philosophy. It took until 1935 for Otto Kein to publish the first comparative study, focusing mostly on Nietzsche's earliest work: O. Kein, *Das Apollinische und Dionysische bei Nietzsche und Schelling*, Berlin 1935. More recently, John Elbert Wilson has repeated a similar undertaking in: J. E. Wilson, *Schelling und Nietzsche. Zur Auslegung der frühen Werke Friedrich Nietzsches*, Berlin 1996. Even more recently, there has been an attempt to put Schelling and Nietzsche in dialogue within Continental thought: D. Jähnig, *Der Weltbezug der Künste: Schelling, Nietzsche*,

of morality and the renouncer of philosophical system and the other is the justifier of Christianity and revelation, the builder of metaphysics, the grounder of moral good and evil and the enthusiast of systematic thought. Through a total of fifteen references in his published and unpublished oeuvre, Nietzsche makes no positive mention of Schelling's thought. For Nietzsche, Schelling is just one more Tübingen theologian of the likes of Fichte and Hegel. One typical reference is in *Ecce Homo*: «Germans are only ever inscribed in the annals of epistemology under equivocal names, they have only ever produced 'unconscious' counterfeiter (– Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Schleiermacher deserve this epithet as much as Kant and Leibniz, they are all just *Schleiermachers* –)»². All these German idealists are nothing but *veiled* theologians to Nietzsche.

Despite Nietzsche's explicit dismissal of Schelling's thought, there are some powerful resonances between their philosophical projects and their respective positions³. I want to explore in this contribution one particularly unlikely one, namely that with regard to their most basic analysis of the essence and function of religion, Schelling and Nietzsche are of the same mind. If two radically different thinkers are of one mind about a certain topic, this would be worth taking seriously. As I will discuss, both aim to avoid two typical mistakes in identifying the essence of religion. On the one hand, one could mitigate the unique nature of religion and thereby reduce religion to one of its others (philosophy, history, science or art). For Schelling, this happens in the so-called *Vernunftreligion* of Kant and Hegel, where religion is not expressive of itself (tautegorical) but of something else (allegorical); for Nietzsche, this happens with the historicization and demythologization of religion, most often when a particular religion is systematized into a sum of historical events. On the other hand, one could overemphasize the unique nature of religion and thereby fail to relate religion dialectically to its others. For Schelling, this happens when revelation and faith are not engaged dialectically with reason, philosophy and art, such as in the thought of Jacobi; for Nietzsche, this happens when religion claims sovereignty and refuses to be incorporated within a grander style or culture.

This means that Schelling and Nietzsche were both looking for a way to relate philosophy and religion in a more dialectical fashion. How this pans out in the specifics is, of course, remarkably different. In Schelling's latest thought,

Kant, Freiburg 2011; B. Freyberg, *A Dark History of Modern Philosophy*, Bloomington 2017. See also the interesting work of Jason Wirth: J. Wirth, *Schelling's Practice of the Wild: Time, Art, Imagination*, Albany 2015. The Freiburg philosopher Lore Hühn is also to be mentioned as someone who allows Schelling and Nietzsche to converse, for instance in her edited volume (with Philipp Schwab): *Die Philosophie des Tragischen: Schopenhauer - Schelling - Nietzsche*, Berlin 2011.

² F. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols. And Other Writings*, Cambridge 2005, p. 141.

³ In my monograph (D. Vanden Auweele, *Exceeding Reason: Myth and Freedom in Schelling and Nietzsche*, Berlin and New York 2020), I discuss in more depth and detail the similarities and divergences in the work of Nietzsche and the later Schelling. While this paper is not a chapter from this book, the argument is drawn from chapters seven through nine.

Christian revelation brings all searching to a final close by that the figure of Christ supersedes even that most potent mythological figure, Dionysus. Nietzsche, however, wants to retain an open dialectic between Christianity and paganism, where Dionysus would always be in opposition to the Crucified. My focus in this contribution will be on the similarities rather than the differences. I will proceed by discussing first the dangers of an overly rationalized religion according to Schelling and Nietzsche; afterwards, I will discuss the dangers of an overly irrationalized religion.

1. Too Much Reason: Schelling on *Vernunftreligion*

Schelling studied theology at the Tübinger Stift at the same time that Gottlob Christian Storr (1746-1805) held a professorship at that college. Though only marginally important to the history of theology and philosophy, Storr was among the first to review Kant's inflammatory treatise *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (1793/1794)⁴. In the second preface to that book, Kant mentions that he received word of Storr's text *Annotationes Quædam Theologicæ ad Philosophicam Kantii de Religione Doctrinam* – a text translated into German by Storr's pupil Johann Friedrich Flatt in 1794 – and hopes to respond at some point to Storr's objections. Kant never explicitly attends to the matter⁵, but as a notorious and influential Biblical supernaturalist, it is not difficult to guess at the content of his critique of Kant's philosophy of religion. Kant's attempt to rationalize religion, in his view, degenerated religion into a hollow shell. Some of that critique is echoed in the way Schelling criticizes the general approach of *Vernunftreligion*.

Vernunftreligion is an approach to religion that can be essential or methodological. In its essential form, it claims that (authentic) religion functions in a purely rational manner; in its methodological form, *Vernunftreligion* is the attempt to interpret any given religion in such a way that it expresses a rational truth without thereby arguing that such a truth is the true core of that religion. Many read Kant's *Religion* as a moral interpretation of Christianity (methodological)⁶, but Kant's point of entrance is more impressive (essential).

⁴I reference Kant's work by the number of the *Akademie Ausgabe* (= AA). Translations are taken from the Cambridge Edition: I. Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge 1996; Id., *Religion and Rational Theology*, Cambridge 1996; Id. *Anthropology, History, and Education*, Cambridge 2011.

⁵For further discussion of Kant's reception of Storr's criticism: S. Palmquist, *Comprehensive Commentary on Kant's Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, Oxford 2016, pp. 37-38, 362 and 389-390.

⁶For instance, Keith Ward argues that Kant's chief concern in *Religion* is to translate Christian concepts into concepts that may be beneficial for morality and Kant has, therefore, little or no interest in traditional and historical Christianity (K. Ward, *The Development of Kant's View of Ethics*, Oxford 1972, pp. 150-170; Giovanni Sala argues that Kant's religion is a «critical revision of one positive, historical religion: Christianity» (G. Sala, *Die Christologie in Kants 'Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft'*, Weilheim-Bierbronn 2000, p. 9 – my translation; Stephen Crites believes that *Religion's* «four parts offer strictly moral interpretations of

Kant makes the essential or even ontological claim that the bare essence of any authentic religious faith is to recognize all moral duties as divine commands, which makes him assert that «there is only *one* (true) *religion*»⁷. Outside of this essential feature, there is no such thing as religion. This does not mean that Kant out of hand dismisses all non-rational elements in religion, but any historical items of clothing that serve as the vehicle for rational religion ought to be of such a nature that they could be dispensed with⁸. Later on, in *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), Kant argues that any non-rational content of a religion (such as a the very idea of a Trinity) *may* be interpreted in a moral manner; any irrational content of a religion (such as a divine command to kill one's own son) *ought* to be interpreted in a moral manner⁹.

This means that Kant is not hostile towards the non-rational or historical (sometimes called 'positive elements') content of any given religious faith, but that he argues that such should be geared towards more potently expressing the rational or moral inner essence of religion. The clothes of religion should suit the naked body, so to speak. Even doctrinal issues that have no bearing or morality must be put into a systematic wholeness so that they cultivate authentic faith¹⁰. The essential nature of religion then concerns a rational and moral project, namely to provide the means for human beings to actualize moral virtue in their lives. With this, Kant seemed to have argued – especially in the mind of most of his contemporaries and his future interlocutors – that religion is to be essentially understood as pre-occupied with something that could be framed in rational language. Schelling feared that Kant's attempts at universalizing religious faith will ultimately lead to the diminishment or even evacuation of everything religious or mythological from faith.

Schelling makes a very basic objection to the premises of *Vernunftreligion*: an honest philosophical engagement with revelation cannot a priori decide that revelation will reveal something rational. By 'rational', I mean something that could be deduced through the understanding and reason alone. In his *Berlin Lectures on Positive Philosophy*, he writes as follows: «As its first principle, it must be proposed (and was proposed) that this combination of philosophy and revelation does not occur at the cost either of philosophy or of revelation, that neither component will relinquish anything nor suffer any violence»¹¹. Schelling thus seeks to recover a sense of revelation more substantial than a vague echo of a priori reason. One could question Schelling's opening move: are we justified in assuming that revelation must exceed reason? However, the reverse

original sin, Christology, the coming Kingdom of God [...], and a doctrine of the church» (S. Crites, *Three Types of Speculative Religion*, Cambridge 2012, p. 550. For the full argument for a more substantial approach to Kant's sense of rational religion, see my text: D. Vanden Auweele, *Kant on Religious Moral Education*, «Kantian Review», XX, 3, 2015, pp. 373-394.

⁷ AA 6, 107.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 135n

⁹ See especially AA 7, 38-41.

¹⁰ See e.g. AA 6, 114.

¹¹ F. W. J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, New York 2007, p. 189; tr. p. 142.

question could be posed to the opposite assumption: are we justified in assuming that revelation can be understood by reason? As we will see, Schelling will not succumb to any extreme point of view, but he will point out that revelation is initially in excess of reason, but the *a posteriori* knowledge of revelation can be incorporated by reason in a higher philosophy. This means that Schelling is neither a rationalist or a superrationalist; one could even say that Schelling shows the compatibility of rationalism and superrationalism.

Many would read Hegel as invested in a similar project, namely that he would take up more charitably the revealed and historical content of faith through the recuperation of the philosophical significance of historical revelation. To some extent, this is true: in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*¹², Hegel shows the logic that has historically permeated religions: the concept (*Begriff*) of religion becomes manifested in a chain of particular religions which through the mediation of a historical development comes to know itself. In other words, the historical incarnation of the concept of religion comes to recognize itself as an expression of *Geist*. The long history of different revelations are necessary intermediary steps for the spirit to come to itself.

The nineteenth-century reception of Hegel's *Religionsphilosophie* was of two minds as to what this really meant for revelation. We will find, in the next section, that even Nietzsche engaged with this topic. What happened for sure is that, after Hegel's death, there were groups of theologians and philosophers who read Hegel either as creating honest space for Christian revelation ('Right' or 'Old' Hegelians) or as creating a frame of thought which ultimately leads, or should lead, to the end of religion ('Left' or 'Young' Hegelians)¹³. Most of the Berlin theologians, even the more charitable ones, detected two problems with Hegel's philosophy of religion: on the one hand, Hegel did not provide any resources to recognize the uniqueness of Christian revelation (other religions also reveal God though in a more fragmented sense) and, on the other hand, Hegel did not allow revelation to reveal something in excess of reason¹⁴.

¹² Hegel delivered these lectures four times (1821, 1824, 1827 and 1831) where the penultimate version of 1827 is the one most often researched and referenced by scholars. Hegel never published these lectures himself. There are some very interesting additions and shifts in positions between the earliest and the later versions of these lectures. In the earliest version, Hegel was fulminating particularly against the 'theology of feeling' (Schleiermacher) whereas in later versions he became more interested in attacking rational dogmatism. For further discussion: D. Buterin, *Hegel, Recognition, and Religion*, «The Review of Metaphysics», LXIV, 4, 2011, pp. 789-821; G. di Giovanni, *Faith without Religion, Religion without Faith: Kant and Hegel on Religion*, «Journal for the History of Philosophy», XLI, 3, 2003, pp. 365-383; R. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition and the Death of God: Studies in Hegel and Nietzsche*, Oxford 2012.

¹³ These two positions still exist in Hegel scholarship. For discussion, see my essay: D. Vanden Auweele, *Reconciliation, Incarnation, and Headless Hegelianism*, «Faith and Philosophy», XXX-IV, 2, 2017, pp. 201-222.

¹⁴ These are most importantly Johann Sebastian Drey (1777–1853), Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838) and Johannes Evangelist von Kuhn (1806–1887). For more extensive discussion of these theological problems with Hegel's philosophy: J. Zachhuber, *Theology as Science in Nineteenth-Century Germany: From F. C. Baur to Ernst Troeltsch*, Oxford 2013.

It is in the midst of these debates and concerns that Schelling was brought to Berlin to occupy Hegel's vacant chair. The theologians seemed to have hoped that he would unambiguously provide a philosophical foundation for Christianity, not a rational but a real foundation for Christianity. It came also to be believed that Schelling was all too happy to oblige the theologians. To an extent, Schelling did appease the Berlin theologians. He had and would continue to argue against Hegel and Kant that revelation must contain and contains something in excess of reason. A reduced sense of revelation is uninteresting: «If revelation contained nothing more than what is in reason, then it would have absolutely no interest; its sole interest can only consist in the fact that it contains something that exceeds reason, something that is more than what reason contains»¹⁵.

While some claim that Schelling only made these remarks to appease the Berlin theologians¹⁶, many of Schelling's claims in Berlin were already prepared in his earlier Munich Lectures. There, he had already attended to the supra-rational element in revelation and religion, where revelation – taken to mean both nature, history (mythology) and Christianity – reveals certain things in excess of human reason. No amount of rational concepts would be able to infer to the truth in revelation. The three main sources revelation are for him nature, history and Christianity, about which he writes as follows:

Nature, which is a book written from the inside and the outside, it is divine revelation and holy scripture. But he who moves to nature without an idea of God shall read nothing in it, then nature is not a primitive original revelation, not a holy scripture, only a marginal note. [...] History, but it is also in and for itself as little intelligible as nature. And then remains the Holy Scripture itself as immediate and specific revelation of God to man¹⁷.

These are the three main sources of a revelation of Being that precedes discursive logic. Nature, History and Christianity are a revelation that prepare, prefigure and even enable philosophical, systematic thought. These are the positive and real elements, the empirical revelation of the metaphysical (which is why Schelling calls his approach 'Metaphysical Empiricism'), that are necessary preambles to philosophical thought. Without these, there is no access to Being or God. They, and they alone, can offer an explanation how «the whole world

¹⁵ F. W. J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, p. 189 [142-143].

¹⁶ This point was voiced emphatically by Heinrich Heine and Karl Marx, both of whom charged Schelling with a sort of philosophical populism. Schelling would have defended revelatory fideism in order to appease his theological masters in Berlin. More recently, there is a wave of Schelling-readers who more charitably read Schelling's intellectual development not as a return to Christian orthodoxy, but as a progressive development of a 'philosophical religion'. For a discussion of this new trend and my own positioning within this debate: D. Vanden Auweele, *The Later Schelling on Philosophical Religion and Christianity*, «Idealistic Studies», XLVIII, 1, 2019, pp. 69-92.

¹⁷ F. W. J. Schelling, *System der Weltalter. Münchener Vorlesung 1827/28 in einer Nachschrift von Ernst von Lasaulx*, Frankfurt am Main 1998, p. 89 [84-85] – my translation.

is at it were caught in the nets of the understanding or reason», while most of his contemporaries simply assume that the world had always been reasonable¹⁸.

This invites the worry that Schelling retreats into a sort of revelatory fideism of the sort of Jacobi and Herder, a worry already voiced, to some extent, in the preface of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) where Hegel indicts Schelling with jumping into the system of reason as if one enters in a race: suddenly and immediately, as if by the shot of a gun. Hegel's own logic, however, suggests that the coming to be of reason is a protracted process. After receiving this criticism, Schelling would attempt to overcome this difficulty by including the dimension of history in his philosophy, especially from his years in Erlangen and Munich onwards.

But has Schelling really been successful in overcoming Hegel's criticism through including revelation as the source of philosophical thought? History works differently for Schelling than Hegel: for Schelling, the historical is the real, factual givenness of being while for Hegel it is the teleological, historical process by which God reconciles his empirical manifestation with his concept. In other words, the factual revelation of nature, history and God in Schelling's philosophy is still that which fairly immediately launches us into the race of rational thought. I think this criticism is countered well by Alexandra Roux. She points out, first, that Schelling rejects any direct, metaphysical revelations of God that do not mediate with rational thought. A direct revelation can take on two shapes namely, on the one hand, the exterior and historical revelation of God (e.g. miracles) and, on the other hand, the inward and universal revelation of God such as in Jacobi's reliance on the immediate certainty of faith. These two approaches are rejected by Schelling because they can only prove reliable if one first establishes a philosophy that validates these as reliable (a positive philosophy). Second, philosophical thought does not start from the absolute beginning, but must always work regressively from the consequences of God, namely from the revelation of God. God is known in his consequences, not in himself. This is why we require what Schelling calls a positive philosophy that establishes and validates what the true, legitimate consequences are of God¹⁹.

Schelling thus has voiced some serious hesitations against the project to collapse religion and reason. He feared that Kant and Hegel had created a space for this. This would ultimately, he feared, lead to the disappearance of religion, while religion has a vital function to play. In the next section, we discuss Nietzsche's own misgivings with an oversaturation of religion with reason. After that, we return to Schelling in order to show how Schelling does not make the mistake of isolating religion from its others, but instead finds a way to relate revelation to its others in what is best called an open dialectic.

¹⁸ F. W. J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, New York 1994, p. 147 [121].

¹⁹ A. Roux, *Schelling: L'avenir de la raison*, pp. 71-80.

2. Too Much History: Nietzsche on Historicizing Religion

Similar concerns with a reductionist approach to religion emerge in Nietzsche's writings. These are not commonly recognized in the literature. In fact, Nietzsche could be read as engaging in the same post-Kantian and post-Hegelian debates in philosophy of religion. Consider: in the largely satirical fourth part of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (initially only circulated privately), Nietzsche introduces the character type 'the ugliest human being' (*der hässlichste Mensch*). Zarathustra recognizes this individual as «*the murderer of God!*»²⁰. If we relate this statement to Nietzsche's famous declaration in *The Gay Science* that «*[w]e have killed [God] – you and I! We are all his murderers!*»²¹, then we cannot but conclude that the incremental becoming-ugly of mankind is the reason that God has died. And Nietzsche's point throughout seems to be that things tend to become ugly when we dig too deep, when we fail to stop prudently at some surfaces and haplessly stumble upon the abyss. The ugly human being is the one who knows too much.

This point obviously requires some careful exegesis and to this end it is helpful to look closely at one of Nietzsche's most coincidental interlocutors, David Strauss (1808-1874)²². Strauss was the subject of the first of Nietzsche's four *Untimely Meditations* and he is an equivocal character in post-Hegelian theology and philosophy of religion. Strauss was a vocal opponent of the 'Right Hegelians' who sought to reconcile Hegel's thought with traditional Christianity. In his view, Hegel's thought led us beyond Christianity and did not retreat back into Christianity. Some of the Right Hegelians, such as Hermann Friedrich Wilhelm Hinrichs (1794-1861), argued that Hegel's historical approach to religion provided a justification for traditional Christianity. This meant that Hegel's philosophy would provide a philosophical ground for the Christian Gospels. Hegel himself, however, disliked any overly historical approach to religion. Strauss remarks that «Hegel was personally no friend of historical criticism. It annoyed him, as it annoyed Goethe, to see the heroic figures of antiquity, to which their highest feeling clung lovingly, gnawed at by critical doubt»²³. Hegel himself, in one version of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, compared scholars overly concerned with religion as a historical system with «countinghouse clerks, who keep the ledgers and accounts of other people's wealth, a wealth that passes through their hands without their retaining any of it, clerks who act only for others without acquiring assets of their own»²⁴.

²⁰ F. Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Cambridge 2006, p. 213 – Nietzsche's emphasis.

²¹ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 119-120 [125] – Nietzsche's emphasis.

²² Nietzsche's attack on Strauss might be explained by that Strauss had attacked Wagner and Schopenhauer publicly. Yet, it is speculated that Strauss did indeed play a role of some significance in Nietzsche's earlier development, up to the point that he was a major factor in Nietzsche's abandonment of his theological studies. I thank the anonymous referee for pointing this out. For further discussion: C. P. Janz, *Vita di Nietzsche*, vol. 1., Milano 2014, p. 129.

²³ D. Strauss, *In Defense of my 'Life of Jesus' against the Hegelians*, Hamden 1983, p. 8.

²⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion. Volume 1: Introduction and the Concept of Religion*, Oxford 2007, p. 44.

In order to counter the traditional approach to Christianity and usher in a more enlightened approach to Christianity, where its validation is based on witnessing the spirit at work in Christianity rather than based on the historical accuracy of certain events, Strauss undertook a major project to unfold the contradictions of a historical approach to Christianity. To that end, he published his very critically received *Life of Jesus (Das Leben Jesu)* in 1835, wherein he discussed a myriad of factual inaccuracies in the Gospel account of Jesus Christ. Strauss' work had counterpurposive effects: instead of substantiating a non-historical approach to Christianity, it was seen as an attack on Christian faith. Apparently, people were more willing to let go of Christianity than their historical approach to religion. For this, Strauss was attacked ferociously, perhaps most outspokenly by Schelling's student Carl von Eschenmayer (1768-1852) in his 1835 review of Strauss entitled *The Iscariotism of our Days*. The outrage was so extensive and persistent that when Strauss was elected to the chair of theology in Zurich in 1839, the university decided to pension Strauss before he could even commence his duties.

Towards the end of his life, David Strauss returned to eye of the storm because of his public debate with Ernst Renan in 1870, where Strauss would glorify German's spiritual and military prowess. These are the two topics that open Nietzsche's critique of Strauss in his *Untimely Meditations* (UB, 'David Strauss', 1). Continuing his dispute with Renan, Strauss would publish his inflammatory *On The Old and New Faith* (1872), where he would argue that Germany is, much like he himself, beyond the old faith of traditional Christianity, but he believes that a new faith must emerge, one substantiated by materialist science, which relied upon the individual's feeling of dependence upon the universe²⁵.

This extensive gloss of David Strauss' entanglements with philosophy of religion and theology are excellent illustrations of two approaches to religion that Nietzsche finds generally problematic. Both of these figures as rational or rationalized approaches to religion, which would also be unacceptable to Schelling. On the one hand, there is the approach to religion that seeks to historicize religion by substantiating religious narratives as accurate, historical events. Strauss sought in fact to dismantle such an approach, but his *Das Leben Jesu* had the adverse effect. On the other hand, there is a problem with Strauss' later approach to religion, the one that seeks to supplant the old with a new faith. The mistake here is that Strauss attempts to introduce a new faith, a new mythology, in an artificial rather than organic fashion. We will discuss Nietzsche's discontent with both approaches in turn.

A historical approach to Christianity is one possible form of a *Vernunftreligion*. In Nietzsche's view, such a historical approach tends to inhere

²⁵ For more detail on Strauss' impact upon 19th-century philosophy and theology: G. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany. Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche*, Chicago and London 2004, pp. 155-165.

in Christianity and even leads to the autodestruction of Christianity²⁶. He puts things succinctly in §357 of *The Gay Science*:

One can see *what* it was that actually triumphed over the Christian god: Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness that was taken ever more rigorously; the father confessor's refinement of the Christian conscience, translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price²⁷.

Unlike Greek mythology, Christian mythology tends to be read in historical terms: the Messiah arrived at a certain time, did a certain set of things and will return at some point. This makes Christianity falsifiable: if it can be shown that Christ did not do what is alleged of him or that He does not return, then Christianity becomes unbelievable. In Christianity, the falsifiability of that religion is combined with an ethical imperative for clarity of conscience, self-screening and general truthfulness (Greek mythology, to the contrary, had its occasion celebration of ignorance and deception). Christianity is Platonism «for the people», which is why ignorance is vice. Almost naturally, this means that Christians become invested in investigating rigorously the claims of its own religion, which tends to result in the death of that religion.

This point is made emphatically by Nietzsche when juxtaposing Greek mythology to Christianity in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

For this is usually how religions die. It happens when the mythical presuppositions of a religion become systematized as a finished sum of historical events under the severe, intellectual gaze of orthodox dogmatism, and people begin to defend anxiously the credibility of the myths while resisting every natural tendency within them to go on living and to throw out new shoots – in other words, when the feeling for myth dies and is replaced by the claim of religion to have historical foundations²⁸.

A more healthy and vibrant religion must be so constituted that it does not lend itself to a historical, but a mythological approach. This explains why, in Nietzsche's own fifth gospel, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, any references to particular

²⁶ Nietzsche's views in this respect could be traced back to his Basel 'brother in arms', Franz Overbeck. Overbeck made the claim – as early as his inaugural lecture in Basel – that the aims of (historical) science are quite different from theology, and to bring in historical science is a consequence of the Protestant reform. I cannot discuss this in depth, for discussion see: P. Woodford, *The Moral Meaning of Nature. Nietzsche's Darwinian Religion and its Critics*, Chicago 2018, pp. 52-78.

²⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 357.

²⁸ F. W. J. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 53-54 [10]. Nietzsche repeats this point in *Untimely Meditations*: «A religion, for example, which is intended to be transformed into historical knowledge under the hegemony of pure historical justice, a religion which is intended to be understood through and through as an object of science and learning, will when this process is at an end also be found to have been destroyed» (Id., *Untimely Meditations*, Cambridge 1986, p. 95 [7]).

places or times are avoided: it is a book not only for everyone and no one, but also always and never²⁹.

When religion is reduced to history, then it risks auto-destruction. There is another approach that falls under the broad banner of *Vernunftreligion*, which is equally deemed problematic by Nietzsche. This is when one consciously and overtly intentionally tries to erect a religious faith. While this might sound outlandish, ever since the publication of the *Oldest System Program of German Idealism* (1796/1697), it became commonplace to argue that a new mythology was to emerge in Europe so as to unite the broken hegemony of European society and that this new mythology must have its foundation in reason (see also Schlegel's *Gespräch über die Poesie*, 1800). These attempts are doomed to failure, according to Nietzsche since religions only emerge organically when they naturally overcome earlier religions. One God has to die, for a new God to emerge. Nietzsche's qualms with an artificial new mythology came up clearly in a note of late 1870, where he speaks about his time as having an «artificially inoculated religion» which cannot be long for this world: «Either we die because of this religion or this religion dies because of us. I believe in the primal Germanic idea: all gods must die»³⁰. Any attempts to create religions and deities artificially are not likely to find much of a grounding in a culture, mostly so because new gods typically arise when they topple old gods.

Nietzsche's engagement with Strauss shows there to be a problem with religions that are overly historical (because this bars honest belief in this religion) and religion that are overly artificial and universal (as these do not appeal to human beings). Both are versions of rationalized religions, where belief in a certain faith is supported by historical or rational argument. These were supposed to soften the fanaticism and irrationalism typically associated with religion. Nietzsche recognizes that ever since the Enlightenment, there have been various attempts to soften religion by disconnecting it from its elements that appeared to be in excess of rationality. Above, we have discussed how this was an overt aim of Kant and Hegel, but one should note equally the work of British philosophers

²⁹ Nietzsche wrote the opening paragraph of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* at least three times. In an unpublished fragment titled 'Midday and Eternity' of 1881, Nietzsche writes: «Zarathustra, born at the lake Urmi, loses his home when he was thirty years of age and went into the province of Aria where he wrote the Zend-Avesta in the ten years of his solitude in the mountains» (F. W. J. Nietzsche, *Nachlass 1880-1882*, Berlin 1967-1977, p. 519 [11[195]]). Not only does this fragment provide information about Zarathustra's activities in his ten-year solitude, it also localizes Zarathustra's place of birth (Urmi, the province of Aria). In the first publication of this paragraph in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes: «When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he left his homeland lake Urmi and went into the mountains» (Id., *The Gay Science*, p. 195 [342]). Nietzsche here still mentions the lake Urmi but not the province of Aria. In the final version of this paragraph, in *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, the line becomes: «When Zarathustra was thirty years old he left his home and the lake of his home and went into the mountains» (Id., *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Cambridge 2006, p. 3). Nietzsche gradually abandoned any elements that could localize Zarathustra in time or place.

³⁰ F. W. J. Nietzsche, *Nachlass 1869-1874*, Berlin 1967-1977, pp. 124-125 [5[115]].

such as John Locke, Samuel Clarke and John Toland³¹. These attempts, by Strauss and others, to deal with the rational or historical foundation of Christian faith furthered unbelief in Christian mythology. As George Williamson puts it, «Nietzsche saw liberal theology as symptomatic of a ‘historical-critical’ trend in modern intellectual culture that had robbed Europe of its myths»³². When and if theology is partnered with historical science, this will work to the detriment, even destruction, of religion. Historical science, and rational religion generally, tends to demystify religion, which makes it incredible (*credo quia absurdum*).

3. Too Much Faith: Schelling on Positive Philosophy

In the above, we have discussed how an approach to religion oversaturated by reason leads towards the relegation of religion under reason or even the auto-destruction of religion. Religion seen as based on understanding (*Verstand*) or reason (*Vernunft*) loses all the *Sache* of religion, all that is interesting and lively. This worry does not move Schelling (or Nietzsche) towards a purely fideistic or revelatory understanding of religious faith. This is another possible pitfall of a philosophical approach to religion.

In order to better understand Schelling’s hesitation with a fideistic approach to religion, we have to look more closely at his metaphysical empiricism, and the related distinction between negative and positive philosophy. Put briefly, negative philosophy is a science of reason and positive philosophy is a science of being. Schelling defines negative philosophy as follows: «[...] A science that is wholly a priori, in itself progressing and in itself enclosed, which brings about everything out of itself; a pure science of reason»³³. A science of reason is the self-development of the necessary, the logical, the a priori. It is the self-development of a system of thought that seeks to formulate a system of reason which is self-enclosed within itself. Such a science of reason was the main object of philosophy since Descartes, which was completed by the idealistic revision of Kant in Fichte and the early Schelling.

When completed, negative philosophy should come to recognize that its system of reason is still lacking in one vital aspect, namely being. A purely negative, rationalist approach has certain limitations: «Philosophical rationalism came to closure and completion in itself; the goal of a mere science of reason was reached completely. Arrived at its end, it must necessarily recognize its limits»³⁴. One of Schelling’s illustrations of this point comes in a discussion of Kant’s destruction of the ontological argument. The ontological argument

³¹ See especially: S. Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God. And Other Writings*, Cambridge 1998; J. Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures*, Oxford 1999; J. Toland, *Christianity not mysterious*, New York 1978.

³² G. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany*, p. 246.

³³ F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/1842 (Paulus-Nachschrift)*, Frankfurt am Main 1977, p. 101.

³⁴ F. W. J. Schelling, *System der Weltalter*, p. 54 [54].

asserts that God is that-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought; if God would not exist, then something greater than God could be conceived, namely a God that exists; since, however, God is that-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, he must exist necessarily. Kant famously criticized this argument because it took being to be a «real predicate», that is, a predicate that thought can assign to a concept. For Kant, however, being is the mere positing of a thing and does not add anything to the concept of a thing.

Schelling deduces from Kant's destruction of the ontological argument that no amount of rational deduction will ever arrive at being and something else it needed for philosophy to access being. Thought can never, no matter how far it exerts itself, reach being by itself. In other words, negative philosophy cannot fully complete the system of thought because of its very conceptual nature and must leave room for a science of being:

The negative philosophy does not have to prove the object of the next philosophy as actual; the conclusion of the one is not the beginning of the other. The negative provides its end merely as a task, not a principle. The means to complete the task must be given to the positive by itself³⁵.

This science of being is what Schelling defines as 'positive philosophy'. Positive philosophy is progressive as it starts from the revelation of being while negative philosophy starts from within thought (Descartes' *cogito*).

The philosophical position that captures best the need for a positive next to a negative philosophy is called metaphysical empiricism. Schelling differentiates metaphysical empiricism from three, lower types of empiricism, namely epistemological empiricism, mystical empiricism and theosophy³⁶. His general point seems to be that metaphysical empiricism must allow for the possibility of the revelation of the supersensible (against epistemological empiricism), the possibility to inquire rationally into the revelation of the supersensible (against mystical empiricism), the revelation of the supersensible through an act of free will (against theosophy). The focus in metaphysical empiricism is then on the revelation of the supersensible which can only be known a posteriori as something «given, factual, historical [*Gegebenes, Tatsächliches, Geschehens*]» by which the revelation of God becomes «concrete, real and empirical [*konkreter, reeller und empirischer*]»³⁷.

The relationship between positive and negative philosophy is a complicated one³⁸. If one relegates positive under negative philosophy, then this would draw

³⁵ F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/1842 (Paulus-Nachschrift)*, p. 138.

³⁶ For his arguments, see especially F. W. J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, pp. 171-178 [115-126]

³⁷ F. W. J. Schelling, *System der Weltalter*, p. 59 [59].

³⁸ For more in-depth discussion of the relationship between negative and positive philosophy, and Schelling's relationship to idealistic thought generally: H. Fuhrmans, *Der Ausgangspunkt der Schellingschen Spätphilosophie*, «Kant-Studien», XLVIII, 1956, pp. 302-323; X. Tilliette, *Schelling. Une philosophie de devenir*, Paris 1970; L. Knatz, *Geschichte, Kunst, Mythos. Schellings Philosophie und die Perspektive einer philosophischen Mythostheorie*, Würzburg 1999; W. Kasper,

Schelling's philosophy dangerously close to Hegel's absolute idealism. Schelling reads Hegel's philosophy as a negative philosophy whose fundamental error «consists precisely in that it wants to be positive» or that «the philosophy that Hegel presented is the negative driven beyond its limits»³⁹. Hegel's reach, to paraphrase Robert Browning, exceeded his grasp. If, however, we would relegate negative under positive philosophy, as Schelling can easily be misread to do⁴⁰, then Schelling's philosophy draws dangerously close to Jacobi. In Jacobi's thought, at least the way Schelling reads it, the positive (revelation) is indeed present in more of a robust way than in Hegel's thought (where revelation is ultimately an expression of reason, *Geist*), but the positive does not manage to interact constructively with reason. This is where Schelling would emphasize that there can be too much of an emphasis on revelation which can then come at the expense of developing a positive *philosophy* and a *philosophy* of revelation. In this, Sean McGrath rightly emphasizes that what Schelling does «is not philosophy of revelation (*genetivus subjectivus*), but *philosophy* of revelation (*genetivus objectivus*): the philosophy that has revelation as its object»⁴¹.

Let us focus here on how Schelling deals with Jacobi in his lecture known as *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (a lecture either of 1833-4 or 1836-7). Schelling reads the initial intervention of Jacobi in the history of philosophy in a positive light. Jacobi was among the first to show how a philosophy of pure *Verstand* is ultimately devoid of freedom (fatalism), being (nihilism) and God (atheism). Jacobi remained stuck, however, in a sort of dualistic frame of mind – the age-old dualism between faith and reason, revelation and understanding – which forced him away from knowledge towards not-knowing. Schelling writes about Jacobi that «instead of really attacking the knowledge which displeases [him], [he] *completely* gives way to it, by withdrawing into not-knowing, with the assurance that only in not-knowing does salvation lie»⁴². While Schelling is also invested in showing the limitations of certain ways of doing philosophy, he does so with a commitment to arriving at the highest possible system of reason. He opens the first version of the *Philosophy of Revelation* (1831) with

Das Absolute in der Geschichte, Mainz 1965; T. Tritten, *Against Kant: Toward an Inverted Transcendentalism or a Philosophy of the Doctrinal*, New York 2017.

³⁹ F. W. J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, p. 145 [80].

⁴⁰ Heinrich Heine was perhaps the clearest when he lamented how Schelling retreated into Christian orthodoxy and revelation in his later thought: «We must not conceal it, either out of piety or self-interest, we do not want to hide it: the same man who once expressed most boldly the religion of pantheism, who proclaimed most loudly the sanctification of nature and the reinstatement of humanity to its divine rights, this man became a renegade to his own teaching: he left the altar which he himself had consecrated, he slipped back into yesterday's stables of belief, he is now a good Catholic and preaches an otherworldly personal God, 'who foolishly created a world'» (H. Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany. And Other Writings*, Cambridge 2007, p. 111). This point of view remained uncontested until very recently. For new perspectives, see D. Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, New York 1996; J. Wirth, *Schelling's Practice of the Wild. Time, Art, Imagination*, New York 2015.

⁴¹ S. McGrath, *Is the Late Schelling still doing Nature Philosophy?*, «Angelaki», XXI, 4, 2016, pp. 121-141, here p. 126.

⁴² F. W. J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, New York 1994, p. 165.

the programmatic statement that he wants to devise a system of philosophy that is «strong enough to endure the test [*Probe*] of life, strong enough not to pale [*erblassen*] in front of cold reality»⁴³. The point of such a system is that, in the words of the *Stuttgart Privatvorlesungen*, it should «not exclude anything (for instance, nature), not subordinate anything one-sidedly or suppress anything altogether»⁴⁴.

The concern Schelling has with Kantian idealism is that it disconnects nature from reason while Hegel's philosophy collapses their distinction. Jacobi's thought falls into a different pitfall, namely by denying the revealed (the positive) any interaction with reason (the negative). In his view, this is bound to end up in failure: «Every philosophy which does not keep its basis *in* the negative, and which wishes to reach the positive, the divine in an immediate manner, *without* the negative, finally dies of unavoidable spiritual exhaustion»⁴⁵. Schelling sniffs out a form of defeatism in Jacobi's thought. While it rightly recognizes how one type of philosophy is unable to understand the transcendent, this makes it regrettably turn its back on all knowledge: «The end of the Jacobian philosophy is, then, universal non-knowledge»⁴⁶.

This reflection on Schelling's hesitations with regard to Jacobi's thought shows his opposition to any frame of thought that either dualistically separates faith and reason or that relegates either to the other. This is not the occasion to develop in full Schelling's alternative position. For current purposes, namely to show that he tries to avoid the extremes of reducing religion to reason or disconnecting religion from reason, it suffices to point out that Schelling seeks the sort of philosophy that attempts to understand revelation/religion to the fullest extent possible. This might, and will, involve that reason must recognize that some truths ought to be revealed and cannot be attained through an inference a priori. Specifically, there is something revealed through nature, history, mythology and Christian revelation that is beyond the capacity of reason to adduce through its own devices. However, reason should not simply accept such revelation as a transcendent truth but must work to understand and substantiate the revealed truths. Any truly held belief will attempt to substantiate itself to the fullest extent possible: «True belief would have had to prove itself here by the fact that no effort was spared to discover the mediations via which that *in which* belief believes was also made plausible to reason and the strictest science»⁴⁷.

4. Too Much Sovereignty: Nietzsche on Religious Dialectics

Schelling aims for a sort of philosophy that connects reason and revelation in an organic fashion, where the one can go over into the other smoothly. Such

⁴³ Id. *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, Hamburg 1992, p. 3

⁴⁴ Id. *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*, Hamburg, 2016, p. 5 [421].

⁴⁵ F. W. J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 172.

⁴⁶ F. W. J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 174.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

an organic metaphysics is not served by austere dualism or reductionism. In our first discussion of Nietzsche, we have discussed his hesitations with regard to an approach to religion that reduces religion to a rational or historic system. In this final reflection, we will discuss Nietzsche's opposite concern, namely his hesitations with regard to a religion that claims sovereignty.

Part three of *Beyond Good and Evil* is particularly instructive in this respect. At the close of this part, Nietzsche discusses a positive sense of religion (§59), in what way religion can work beneficially for the sort of ideal humanity Nietzsche has in mind (§61) and in what way there can be a «high and horrible price to pay» when religion does not fulfil that purpose (§62). Nietzsche discusses many senses of religion, some to which he seems univocally appreciative (Greek mythology) and others that often receive his disapproval (Judaism and Christianity, particularly). This does not mean that the basic religious instinct is itself to be evaluated positively or negatively. Nietzsche's analysis takes place beyond good and evil, as he tries to evaluate the phenomenon of religion from the viewpoint of a psychologist. In doing so, he arrives at the conclusion that what he calls «the cult of the surface», which is a celebration of something quite superficial, is a defensive reaction to reaching «beneath the surface with disastrous results»⁴⁸. Despite prolonged rants against religion, Nietzsche does seem to recognize something conducive to life in the religious instinct. He recognizes namely that «a religious interpretation of existence» is driven forward by «a deep, suspicious fear of an incurable pessimism»⁴⁹.

Let us unpack this point. Nietzsche is explicit that religion expresses the cultural health of a people or nation. In *The Birth of Tragedy* and elsewhere, he speaks in glowing terms of the healthiness of the ancient Greeks, which is expressed in their religion as the «excessive amount of gratitude that flows from it»⁵⁰. This means that healthy cultures use their religion so as to express their gratitude and, *a contrario*, this means that unhealthy cultures express their sickness through their religion. What is more, unhealthy cultures use their sickly religion so as to justify their general weakness. Nietzsche signals this by that «when the rabble gained prominence in Greece», this resulted in that «religion became overgrown with fear»⁵¹. It is well-established that Nietzsche saw most of religion as an ideological justification for the sickness and weakness of the slave, which takes imaginary vengeance upon stronger natures through the postulation of a *Hinterwelt*.

That aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy of religion is quite well-established⁵². Less well-known is how Nietzsche recognized that religion can, and should

⁴⁸ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Cambridge 2002, p. 53 [59].

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47 [49].

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Nietzsche was initially received as a philosopher simply hostile towards religion. See especially the works of A. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, New York 1967; R. J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche*, London and New York 1973. For a more contemporary review, see T. Murphy, *Nietzsche, Metaphor, Religion*, Albany, 2001.

indeed, play a positive function for individuals and societies⁵³. As a first point, it merits pointing out that Nietzsche does not necessarily require religion to be linked to theism. Theism, or the view that there exists a supernatural agent, is one possible way of discharging the religious instinct. Nietzsche is convinced that theism is on a decline, that is, the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable but how does this impact the religious instinct? With the decline of Christianity, other ways of discharging the religious instinct have arisen, among which Nietzsche frequently discusses nationalism, Romanticism, positivism and even, ironically, atheism. There is only a decline in Christian theism, not in the religious instinct: «It seems to me that the religious instinct is indeed growing vigorously – but that it rejects any specifically theistic gratification with profound distrust»⁵⁴.

If religion can take on forms for Nietzsche that most people do not generally recognize as religion (such as positivism and nationalism), we must carefully zone in on what Nietzsche claims religion to be. Nietzsche is a philosopher not particularly interested in clear definition, but we can discern that Nietzsche usually connects religion to those aspects of individual and societal life that are about sacrifice, standing still, stop investigating, accepting⁵⁵. In other words, religion is, generally speaking, the most foundational point, the secure piece of land, which is not questioned by a society or individual. This foundation gives individuals and the society a certain purpose. Most societies evolve in ways that these foundational principles are exposed to criticism, repugnance and, ultimately, derision to such an extent that they are replaced by other foundational principles. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche calls this the «new law of ebb and flood»⁵⁶. Nietzsche envisions (or hopes for) a new species of philosophers that move beyond such foundations and can abandon all safety: «We have forsaken the land and gone to sea! We have destroyed the bridge behind us – more so, we have demolished the land behind us!»⁵⁷.

While Nietzsche has hopes that some free, very free spirits might go without foundational principles – without religion – most human beings retain a need for foundations and require their need to be somehow gratified. This is what Nietzsche signals with connecting the «cult of the surface» of «the *homines religiosi*» to «an incurable pessimism»⁵⁸. This pessimism relates to that most individuals cannot endure life without their foundational beliefs and would,

⁵³ Some more recent work bear out similar points, such as B. Benson, *Pious Nietzsche. Decadence and Dionysian Faith*, Indianapolis 2008; J. Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Religion*, Cambridge 2006; L. Lampert, *Nietzsche's Philosophy and True Religion*, Oxford 2006, pp. 133-147.

⁵⁴ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 49 [53].

⁵⁵ A few examples are Nietzsche's discussion of prayer as «idleness with a good conscience» (F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 51 [58]), piety as beautification (*ibid.*, p. 53 [59]), religion as mental house-keeping (*Human All too Human* §27), religion as inducing humility (e.g., *Daybreak* §60) or, quite plainly, that religion is a sort of intellectual error which takes something as foundational rather than to look beyond it (e.g., *The Gay Science* §151).

⁵⁶ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 29 [1].

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 119 [124].

⁵⁸ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 53 [59].

in response, turn to unpleasing forms of life denial. As a result, it becomes the purpose of higher individuals, true creators, to provide the masses of humanity with certain foundational beliefs that could be conducive to the elevation of the human species. Religion is then a means for discharging the build-up of resentment that could otherwise destroy the human being. While the masses might not be capable of rising above and overcoming themselves, they can be educated in such a way that over the course of perhaps centuries, they might overcome themselves⁵⁹. In an early fragment, Nietzsche links religion and art overtly to this concern with elevating the human species: «My religion – if one can still call it that – is labouring for elevation of the species»⁶⁰.

Whether or not there could come a time when humanity could dispense with religion altogether is difficult to engage at this point. Given Nietzsche's sensitivity to hierarchies, it is likely that he believed that a certain class of human beings could never be done with religion entirely. This is born out from the way Nietzsche frames the different uses religion can have for the cultivation of will to power in §61 of *Beyond Good and Evil*: For strong individuals, «religion is an additional means of overcoming resistances, of being able to rule»; for a select group of those who are governed by the strong, «religion gives [...] the instruction and opportunity they need to prepare for eventual rule and command» and allows these individuals «to take the path to higher spirituality and try out feelings of great self-overcoming, of silence, and of solitude»; finally, for the common people, religion gives an invaluable sense of contentment with their situation and type; it

puts their hearts greatly at ease, it glorifies their obedience, it gives them (and those like them) one more happiness and one more sorrow, it transfigures and improves them, it provides something of a justification for everything commonplace, for all the lowliness, for the whole half-bestial poverty of their souls⁶¹.

As such, we see that religion is to keep a dialectical relationship to that other aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy, the sceptical destruction of customs, ideas and habits. If religion does not provide the foundational principles necessary for the flourishing of a people, that is, if it becomes rationalized, then religions die and the people (especially the lower classes) are without a purpose. Humanity then becomes ugly. The dialectical relation between religion and philosophy may then not collapse religion into an ersatz form of philosophy: religion cannot become rational. We have discussed above how Nietzsche detected that danger in various forms, such as *Vernunftreligion*, historicism and artificial forms of religion.

The opposite danger, which we have now fully prepared, is that religion disconnects from its long term goal of the elevation of humanity. This happens when the foundational principles of religion claim a sovereignty beyond the

⁵⁹This comforting function of religion is discussed in more detail in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, particularly in the third essay §17.

⁶⁰F. Nietzsche, *Nachlass 1875-1879*, Berlin 1967-1977, p. 46 [5[22]].

⁶¹F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 55 [61].

pursuit of will to power. This is what Nietzsche calls the sovereignty of religion in *Beyond Good and Evil* §62: «There is a high and horrible price to pay when religions do *not* serve as means for breeding and education in the hands of a philosopher, but instead serve themselves and become *sovereign*»⁶². Religion ought to be a tool in the hands of a philosopher and should not claim an independence for itself. Regrettably, this is exactly what has happened most frequently. Instead of that religion has served for the education of the human race, it has in fact kept «the type ‘man’ on a lower level » by having « preserved too much of *what should be destroyed*»⁶³.

A true philosopher or creator is supposed to wield the power of religion. The priestly type lacks the capacities for guiding humanity, since it instinctively sides with what ought to perish. The people at the helm of religion were «not high and hard enough to give *human beings* artistic form», they were «not strong or far-sighted enough», they were not «noble enough to see the abysmally different orders of rank and chasms in rank between different people»⁶⁴. Put simply, the positive function of religion has been spoiled by those who were insensitive to rank and incapable of thinking in terms of long-term goals. They sought to remove suffering rather than to harden humanity. This is the danger when religion disconnects entirely from the philosophical pursuit of a higher form of humanity.

Conclusion

Schelling and Nietzsche wrote in the aftermath of the Enlightenment. While both were, at least at one point of their intellectual career, closely associated with Romanticism and its critique of the Enlightenment, they do not go into the extreme of radically elevating religion (or art) above philosophical reason. Their position is more moderate as they recognize how excesses on either side can have egregious moral effects and epistemic costs. A religion that devolves into a species of philosophical reason cannot fulfil its primary function of revealing something supra-rational. For Schelling, this would be the free revelation of Being that enlivens the negative system of philosophy; for Nietzsche, these are the foundational principles and values of an individual and people that avoid a disastrous collapse. If religion disconnects entirely from philosophical reason, however, there is equally a price to be paid. Then, religion does not serve its vital function either since it claims a sovereignty and might therefore traumatize reason. For Schelling, this would be a sort of mystical empiricism that does not allow revelation to be taken up by philosophical reason; for Nietzsche, this is a decadent, sovereign religion that is too near-sighted to set long term goals and rather secures what should perish. While they speak about religion in a

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 55 [62].

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 56 [62].

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57 [62].

different register and ultimately do have different end goals in mind, Nietzsche and Schelling give religion a highly similar, perhaps even identical, systematic function in their philosophical vision.

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