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ENLIGHTENMENT MESSIAH, 1627 – 1778:

Jesus in History, Morality and Political Theology

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Submitted in Requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**University of Glasgow
College of Arts
School of Critical Studies**

July 2012

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of intellectual encounters with the figure of Christ during the European Enlightenment. In the first instance, it contributes to a body of research which has sought to revise the customary view in New Testament studies, that the historical study of Jesus began with the posthumous publication of Herman Samuel Reimarus's *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger* (1778), the last in a series of *Fragments* published by G. E. Lessing. The thesis proposed here is that Reimarus's writings on Jesus are a notable but relatively late entry, by the German intellectual establishment, into arguments about Jesus and Christian origins which had been raging across Europe for more than a century: arguments concerning history, morality and political theology.

In my Introduction I explain the rationale for this study within the context of contemporary scholarship and contemporary culture, giving a brief outline of my methodology.

In Part I of the thesis I outline my project, its themes and methods. In Chapter One I introduce the 'quest for the historical Jesus' as a major concern in modern New Testament studies, and a persistent source of interest in wider intellectual discourse. I then take the reader back into the eighteenth century, placing Reimarus's seminal contribution to the discipline within the context of the wider publishing controversy in which it featured (the *Fragmentenstreit*). In Chapter Two I explain the historical, moral and political theological dimensions of my analysis; in particular, I define the relationship between my history of scholarship on Jesus, and the one offered by Albert Schweitzer in *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* (1906), the single most influential work on the rise of historical Jesus studies. In Chapter Three I outline my periodisation and interpretive stance on the main context for my study: the European Enlightenment.

Part II of the thesis concerns history. In Chapter Four I review a range of literature on the origins of historical Jesus studies, discussing the advances made since Schweitzer, and sketching the contours of a new, more comprehensive interpretation. In Chapters Five and Six I supplement that sketch with my own account of the emergence of the modern historical-critical conscience within European intellectual culture during the Enlightenment, and its application to the Bible. I profile some of the scholars who blazed the trail for Reimarus, showing where, and by whom, he was anticipated in some of his critical stances regarding Jesus and Christian origins.

Part III of the thesis addresses morality. In Chapters Seven and Eight I consider why for so many thinkers in the Enlightenment, including Reimarus, morality came to be seen as central to Jesus' historical mission and his most important theological legacy. I locate this ethical turn within a long history of Western philosophical and theological disputation, with origins in antiquity, culminating in early modernity with the reassertion of moral-theological rationalism which was buttressed by an early modern Thomist revival. I also argue for the influence of a particular vision of Christian reform which prioritised freedom over predestination, and the moral example of Jesus and primitive Christian piety.

Part IV of the thesis concerns political theology. In Chapter Nine I consider this generally neglected dimension of Reimarus' work, placing him in a tradition of Enlightenment intellectuals who drew upon Jesus and primitive Christianity, in conjunction with theological metaphysics, to give weight to their own particular arguments for religious toleration.

In my Conclusion, as throughout this thesis, I argue that some of the writers who paved the way of Reimarus's writings on Jesus and Christian origins have their roots in much older, theological preoccupations, and often in heretical versions of Christianity. While these perspectives on Jesus and Christian origins constituted some of the most radical challenges to mainstream religious thought during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they do not submit to a vision of Enlightenment characterised by a straightforward process of overcoming theological worldviews through the emergence of a new secular critique. For the most part, this tradition of scholarship is best understood as a radicalisation of existing tendencies within the history of classical and Christian thought, which continued to understand Jesus, or at least his teachings, as either a path to personal salvation, or as a theologically authoritative court of appeal in the Enlightenment's protest against religio-political tyranny.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My greatest thanks go to my parents, Averil and Glyn, whose love and fulsome support throughout all my years has been the foundation on which all this has been built. To my brothers, Nicholas and Alexander, and my nephew Louis, I give thanks for keeping me anchored close to the shore of sanity through a combination of love and lampooning.

Academically, my debts are considerable, beginning with my own institution and adopted city in Glasgow. To Professor Yvonne Sherwood, I give thanks for providing a model for what can be achieved when moving between academic disciplines, and for writing about the reception of the Bible in ways which exploit historical and philosophical learning. This experience enabled me to quickly feel as comfortable in a biblical studies seminar as in a philosophy forum. In the early years, Professor Paul Holloway (now of the University of the South, Sewanee), provided an example of careful, detailed scholarly practice, and helped sharpen the historical dimension of my thinking during our conversations. The discussion of my work at seminars, particularly the questioning of Professor John Riches and Dr Charlotte Methuen (both in relation to the eighteenth-century German context) have helped refine my thinking on certain key points. Professor Ian Hazlett provided wise counsel on the Reformation and post-Reformation context, and was on hand to provide occasional guidance with my German. Ms Julie Clague read a large part of this thesis, and gave very generous and valuable feedback in terms of overall structure and presentation. I would also like to thank my friends Dr Samuel Tongue, Frances Hume, and Anthony Allison for reading and commenting on particular chapters. Their friendship during my time in Glasgow has enriched my experience of living in the city as well as my experience of studying here.

My association with the University of Glasgow has been one of professional development, as well as higher learning, and I appreciate the support of Dr Heather Walton for granting the lecturing opportunities I have enjoyed here when she was head of subject area, and more recently Dr Lloyd Ridgeon. I am also grateful to Dr A. K. M. Adam for inviting me to work alongside him as both a teaching and research assistant. The superb support of our administrators, Christine Roser and Meg MacDonald, has helped make my experience of combining work and study a thoroughly positive one.

Beyond Glasgow, I would like to thank Professor Halvor Moxnes, as director of the Jesus in Cultural Complexity project (based at the University of Oslo). This allowed me to present work alongside some world class biblical scholars, and helped to set a high standard for my own work. On a personal level, Halvor is one of many friends I have made during this process. He has gone the extra mile to help facilitate visits to several European universities to present work at major conferences, and helped to give me a better appreciation of European New Testament scholarship outside Britain, France and Germany.

I would also like to thank all those scholars who responded to my unsolicited enquires about various issues in intellectual history: on medieval philosophy, I thank Professor Brian Davies and Professor Eleanor Stump; on early modern intellectual history generally, I thank Professor Justin Champion; on early modern science specifically, I thank Professor Simon Schaffer; and on eighteenth-century Hamburg, I thank Professor Paul Spalding. When I reflect on my pre-doctoral studies, I am grateful to my undergraduate teacher and friend, Professor Suzanne Stern-Gillet, for my grounding in ancient philosophy, and for my historical perspective on Western philosophy as a whole. My early interest in philosophy was triggered in large part by the teaching of Lawrence Bentley while in further education; he gave me my first teaching opportunity in the subject many years later, and wrote a generous reference for my PhD application. Finally, I thank my superb classics teacher at school, Clare Richards (née Bird), a friend who I have had the opportunity to consult in the intervening years.

I return to Glasgow for the most important academic acknowledgement for this thesis: my supervisor, Dr Ward Blanton. Despite not meeting Ward until my arrival in Glasgow, when I was conspicuously lacking a supervisor through a series of mishaps, he has been the one constant in my time here. His unruly brilliance has been a persistent source of intellectual stimulation, and his friendship much valued when we were both starting out in a new city. It is rare to find someone trained in the historical-critical study of the Bible who is also fully conversant in modern philosophy, and it was a tremendous stroke of good fortune that his arrival in Glasgow should coincide with mine. I have learnt much from him in both fields. Ward granted me great independence in the writing of this project. I hope I have repaid some of the faith he has shown. Many of the overarching themes in this thesis are ones I have developed as a result of his encouragement to be

ambitious in the scope of my analysis, and clear in the formulation of my conclusions. His support for my professional development, in teaching and research, has also been invaluable. Finally, I am grateful to Ward and his family—which has grown during the lifespan of this thesis—for the hospitality they have shown during my years in Glasgow.

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather. He was delighted when I moved to the city of his birth to commence my project. He would have taken even greater delight from its completion.

In memoriam

Henry Brown (born Enrico Liberti), 1917 – 2008

Declaration

Portions of Chapters Five and Six have been published in a very different form as 'The Road to Reimarus: Origins of the Quest for the Historical Jesus', in Keith Whitlam (ed.) *Holy Land as Homeland? Models for Constructing the Historic Landscapes of Jesus*, Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2011, pp. 19 – 47. I thank the editor and publisher for the opportunity to present my work in an earlier phase of development.

Except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature _____

Printed name _____

Note on References

All references are given in footnotes. I generally given full publication details in the first instance, followed by the author's name and an abbreviated title. In some cases, however, I have used shortened titles from the outset, as the official ones are so long (this is particularly true of some eighteenth-century texts). Full titles are provided in the Bibliography.

Apart from books of the Bible and some classical texts, I have provided book titles in their original language in the first instance, and then referred the reader to an English translation (if available). Where a serviceable English translation of a text was available, I have made use of it; where there was no such translation, I have used my own.

All references to the Greek text of the New Testament come from:

The Greek New Testament, Kurtl Aland, Matthew Black, M. Martini, Bruce M Metzger and Allen Wikgren (eds.) in cooperation with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, 2nd edn, New York: American Bible Society, 1966.

For other references to the Bible, I have consulted *The Septuagint LXX: Greek and English*, Lancelot C L Brenton (trans.), Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., London, 1851; and *New Revised Standard Version*, Anglicised edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Acronyms for Works of Reference and Shortened Titles Used in Footnotes

ABD David Noel Freedman (chief ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols.), New York / London: Doubleday, 1992.

ODB *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (on-line), Oxford University Press, 2004, accessed 28. Jul. 2012: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/>

ODP Simon Blackburn (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

OCP Ted Honderich (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

SEP Zalta, Edward N (principal ed.) *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (on-line), The Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, accessed 28 Jul. 2012: <http://plato.stanford.edu>

Apologie Alexander, Gerhard (ed.), *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes / Hermann Samuel Reimarus* (2 vols.), im Auftrag der Joachim-Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften in Hamburg, Frankfurt: Insel, 1972.

- Auktionskatalog* Schetelig, Johann Andreas Gottfried, (ed.), *Auktionskatalog der Bibliothek von Hermann Samuel Reimarus* (2 vols.), Hamburg / Wolfenbüttel: Reimarus-Kommission der Joachim-Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften in Hamburg and the Lessing-Akademie in Wolfenbüttel, 1978.
- Catholic Tradition* Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (vol. 1 of 5): *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100 – 600)*, Chicago, IL ; London : University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- Reformation* Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (vol. 4 of 5): *Reformation of Church and Dogma, (1300 – 1700)*, Chicago, IL / London: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Deism to Tübingen* William Baird, *History of New Testament Research* (vol.1 of 2): *From Deism to Tübingen*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992
- Edwards to Bultmann* William Baird, *History of New Testament Research* (vol.2): *From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Fragments (6)* Herman Samuel Reimarus, ‘Concerning the Intention of Jesus and His Teaching’, in Charles Talbert (ed.), *Reimarus: Fragments*, Ralph S. Fraser (trans.), S. C. M Press: 1971, pp. 153 – 269. This is a translation of *Über die Auferstehungsgeschichte* (On the Resurrection Narratives), originally 1777, collected in Paul Rilla (ed.), *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Gesammelte Werke* (vol. 7 of 10), Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1956.
- Fragments (7)* Herman Samuel Reimarus, ‘Concerning the Intention of Jesus and His Teaching’, in Charles Talbert (ed.), *Reimarus: Fragments*, Ralph S. Fraser (trans.), S. C. M Press: 1971, pp. 61 – 153. This is a translation of *Vom dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger* (On the Aims of Jesus and His Disciples), originally 1778, collected in Paul Rilla (ed.), *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Gesammelte Werke* (vol. 8 of 10), Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1956.
- Lessing Werke* Wilfried Barner, with Klaus Bohnen, Gunter E Grimm, Helmut Kiesel, Arno Schilson, Jürgen Stenzel and Conrad Wiedemann (eds.), *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing Werke und Briefe* (12 vols. in 14), Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1989 – 2004.
- Radical* Jonathan I Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650 – 1750*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Contested* Jonathan I Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipated on Man, 1670 - 1752*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

<i>Democratic</i>	Jonathan I Israel, <i>Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution and Human Rights</i> , Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
<i>Reimarus zu Wrede</i>	Albert Schweziter, <i>Von Reimarus zu Wrede: Eine Geschichte der Leben-JesuForschung</i> , Tübingen: Mohr, 1906.
<i>Quest</i>	Albert Schweitzer, <i>The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede</i> , W. Montgomery (trans.), F. C. Burkitt (pref.), London: A & C Black, 1910.
<i>Quest: FCD</i>	Albert Schweitzer, <i>Quest of the Historical Jesus: First Complete Edition</i> , John Bowden (ed.), Bowden and W. Montgomery (trans.), London: SCM Press, 2000.
<i>ST</i>	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologica</i> (5 vols.), Fathers of the English Dominican Province (trans.), Allen, Texas: Christian Classics, Thomas More Publishing, 1948.
<i>SC</i>	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Contra Gentiles: On the Truth of the Catholic Faith</i> , Joseph Kenny (ed.), Anton C Pegis, James F Anderson, Vernon J Bourke and Charles J O'Neil (trans.), New York: Hanover House, 1955 – 1957.
<i>TPT</i>	Benedict De Spinoza, <i>Theological-Political Treatise</i> , Samuel Shirley (trans.), Seymour Feldman (intro.), Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Pub. 1998.
<i>Ethics</i>	Benedict De Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> , Edwin Curley (trans.), Stuart Hampshire (intro), London: Penguin Books, 1996.

Abbreviations for Citations within Texts

p.	page
chap.	chapter
vol.	volume
pt	part
bk	book
sect.	section
intro.	introduction
pref.	preface
fore.	foreword
q.	question
art.	article
prop.	proposition
dem.	demonstration
cor.	corollary
schol.	scholium

INTRODUCTION

Jesus in Contemporary Culture: Snap Shots from Europe and the Americas

According to one famous cultural barometer, 2011 was the year of the protestor.¹ The Occupy Wall Street movement may not have been the first, but it remains the most famous popular response to the global financial crisis. Sister movements quickly sprang up around the world, including in London, where protesters were foiled in their attempt to occupy Paternoster Square—locus of the city’s vast financial services industry—and instead set up camp outside St Paul’s Cathedral.

The occupation of the land outside St Paul’s, and the subsequent clash with the Cathedral’s authorities, received extensive coverage in the British media. On the BBC’s flagship political discussion, assembled panels of politicians and other public figures were repeatedly asked whether Jesus would have supported the protestors at St Paul’s; as one member of the audience posed the question: ‘Would Jesus have cleared the temple of demonstrators?’² In one edition there was a pointed exchange between a conservative journalist and cultural commentator, one of the country’s most famous poets, and a leading member of the Parliamentary Labour party.³ What was interesting about these debates is that British political discourse, unlike British institutions, is not particularly hospitable to religious references. But the protestors’ juxtaposition of the nation’s rich with the nation’s poor; the ensuing clash between largely peaceful protestors on the one hand, and secular and religious authorities on the other; and with the episode playing out in front of one of the most iconic places of Christian worship in the world—it all made speculation about what Jesus would make of the standoff irresistible to professional commentators and members of the public.

In the United States of America, where public institutions ostensibly exclude religion, public political discourse is regularly infused with religious language and imagery, and it does not take a *cause célèbre* like the Occupy movement to turn the conversation towards the central figure in Christianity. Two of the best recent studies of the broader

¹ ‘The Protestor’ was the *TIME* Person of the Year, revealed as their cover story, 14 Dec. 2011. At the forefront of editorial thinking was the so called ‘Arab Spring’, although Occupy movements were also prominent in their analysis.

² James Kirkwood, *Question Time* (from Winchester), BBC One, 27 Oct. 2011.

³ See *Question Time* (from the Houses of Parliament), BBC One, 03 Nov. 2011. The relevant panellists were the journalist Peter Hitchens, the poet Benjamin Zephaniah, and the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer Ed Balls.

cultural phenomenon behind this are Stephen Prothero's *American Jesus* and Richard Wrightman Fox's *Jesus in America*.⁴ The latter is a century by century history of Jesus' cultural reception in the States, while the former focuses on the major cultural constructions to emerge in the nation's recent history. The images of Jesus that Prothero identifies in modern America range from an 'enlightened sage', to 'manly redeemer', 'superstar', 'Mormon elder brother', 'black Moses', 'rabbi', and 'Oriental Christ'.⁵ These images are scarcely exhaustive within the US, let alone outside.⁶

In a South American context, the ever provocative Hugo Chavez described Jesus as 'the greatest socialist in history' after his 2007 re-election as President of Venezuela.⁷ In a recent gesture towards a more traditional understanding, Chavez identified 'Jesus of Nazareth, the highest of healers' as his most foremost 'doctor' when he announced his recovery from cancer in 2011.⁸ It is worth noting, however, that the other 'doctor' mentioned by name in his statement was the former President of Cuba Fidel Castro,⁹ a hitherto unknown in the field of oncology: even as a healer, Jesus remains closely aligned with revolutionaries in the mind of Chavez.

Culture and Scholarship

All the images of Jesus mentioned above hold interest from the point of view of socio-cultural history, but it seems undeniable that, from a scholarly point of view, some images would be regarded as rather more frivolous or eccentric than others. But what are the criteria for such discriminating judgements? One of the major shifts in modern intellectual history is a move away from theological reflection on Jesus against the background of a biblically attested divine revelation, which was more or less taken for granted, towards the critical study of the documents Jesus actually appears in, and the

⁴ See Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003; and Richard Wrightman Fox, *Jesus in America: Personal Saviour, Cultural Hero, National Obsession*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004.

⁵ These images constitute some of the titles from the book's eight chapters.

⁶ For perspectives on Jesus from two other continents, see R S Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Asian Faces of Jesus*, London: SCM, 1993; and Robert Schreiter (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991. A more recent collection of essays covers some of the major heretical ideas about Jesus in Christian history, along with perspectives from other traditions, ranging from Islam to the extra-terrestrial Jesus of The Aetherius Society: see Olav Hammer (ed.), *Alternative Christs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

⁷ Hugo Chavez, quoted in *USA Today* (on-line), 01 Oct. 2010, accessed 21 Mar. 2012: http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2007-01-10-chavez-venezuela_x.htm

⁸ Chavez, quoted by Ezequiel Minaya, *The Wall Street Journal* (on-line), 22 Aug. 2009, accessed 21 Mar. 2012: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903461304576524723086332838.html>

⁹ See *ibid.*

context in which those documents were produced: in short, a shift from theological metaphysics to historical enquiry.

It would be a mistake to assume that theology has been swept aside (or simply bracketed) by this ‘historical turn’ in intellectual culture, however: the two disciplines frequently appear in tandem. One need only consider the success of Pope Benedict XVI’s series of books on Jesus.¹⁰ The Pope frustrated many New Testament scholars by riding roughshod over some of their cherished methodological assumptions, and by taking the seemingly unusual step of presenting a vision of the historical Jesus which would be instantly recognisable to Christian readers. Nevertheless, his two international bestsellers are widely viewed as belonging to the ‘life of Jesus’ genre: engaging (however persuasively) with the primary sources and the cultural and linguistic context in which those sources were produced, albeit insisting that historical-criticism is insufficient to fully comprehend the significance of this particular figure.

At the very least, history now rivals philosophy as a critical discourse through which Christian theological claims are formulated, defended or repudiated, and it is a key discourse in the shaping of contemporary religious and cultural identities. Two recent studies which recognise this are William Arnal’s *The Symbolic Jesus*,¹¹ and James Crossley’s *Jesus in an Age of Terror*.¹² Both engage critically with the ideological biases in historical scholarship on Jesus, and the cultural, religious and political reception of such scholarship, particularly within a North American setting. One thing that all these surveys of scholarship acknowledge—no less than surveys of popular perceptions of Jesus in mainstream culture and the arts—is the plurality of images available. How did the second person of the Holy Trinity come to be imagined in such a multiplicity of ways, serving as an icon for a plethora of cultural and political interests?

Jesus and the Legacy of the Enlightenment

It is important not to exaggerate the pluralism in contemporary cultural representations of Jesus. Ever since the Reformation Christian denominations have been multiplying, and

¹⁰ From a projected three part study, see: Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth (Part 1): From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, Adrian J Walker (trans.), London: Bloomsbury, 2007; and *Jesus of Nazareth (Part 2): Holy Week—From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, Vatican Secretariat of State (trans.), San Francisco, Calif: Ignatius Press, 2011. For a book length critique of the first volume, see Gerd Lüdemann, *Jesusbild des Papstes: Über Joseph Ratzingers kühnen Umgang mit den Quellen*, Springe: zu Klampen Verlag, 2007.

¹¹ See William Arnal, *The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism, and the Construction of Contemporary Identity*, London: Equinox Publishing, 2005.

¹² See James Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Terror: Scholarly Projects for a New American Century*, London and Oakville: Equinox, 2008.

these churches are often characterised by quite different ideas about Jesus. Some historians have argued that this pluralism represents a return to the diversity which characterised Christianity in its infancy,¹³ before institutionalised orthodoxy sought to eliminate such differences and managed to engineer a sustained period of religious homogeneity. But these precedents for pluralism represent diversity *within* Christianity, broadly conceived. When did diversity begin to stretch the margins of Christianity, even of theistic religion, to the point where interest in (even enthusiasm for) Jesus as a historical figure or cultural icon need not indicate anything about one's religious outlook? One period presents itself as the most plausible source of this pluralism, and Prothero echoes the perception of many scholars when he writes,

Beginning with the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, skeptics in Europe and America started to chip away at the traditions of the Church, employing reason and experience to undermine confidence in the Bible and creeds. This assault on tradition might have killed Jesus, but it did not. On the contrary, it freed him up to be a hero to those who could not embrace the beliefs and practises of traditional Christianity.¹⁴

Aside from the exclusive focus on the eighteenth century, and a possibly misleading emphasis on 'skeptics' as the ones unsettling traditional Christianity, Prothero is on target with his identification of the Enlightenment as a seminal period for the development of modern perspectives on Jesus which are not subservient to orthodox Christian theology; indeed, this is something of a truism in scholarly discussions of Jesus' place in the history of Western culture. The impact of the Enlightenment on conceptions of Jesus is more often asserted than it is actually explored, however.

There have certainly been important and influential books published in recent decades which examine the place of the Bible in the age of Enlightenment. In the 1970s Hans Frei explored the shift away from theological and narrative interpretations of the Bible with the rise of historical-critical methods in his *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*.¹⁵ In the following decade Henning Graf Reventlow challenged the perception of modern biblical scholarship as a peculiarly German invention: in his massive *Bibelautorität und Geist der*

¹³ See Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (fourth edn), New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, chap. 1.

¹⁴ Prothero, *American Jesus*, p. 12.

¹⁵ See Hans W Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1974.

Moderne,¹⁶ Reventlow placed the Bible and its critical study at the centre of the cultural and political history of early modern England. More recently, and in a similar vein to Frei, with its focus on eighteenth-century hermeneutics within a mainly German context, Michael C Legaspi's *The Death of Scripture and Rise of Biblical Studies* explores the professionalisation of biblical interpretation within the modern university, whereby critical programmes of study were developed as an institutional response to the collapse of a unified approach to the Bible within the Christian churches.¹⁷ Perhaps the most celebrated work of its kind to appear in the last decade, however, is Jonathan Sheehan's *The Enlightenment Bible*.¹⁸ Although the book has a decidedly Anglo-German focus, it is a thematically panoramic study of the influence of the eighteenth century in shaping modernity's negotiation of a new relationship with the Bible, as a canonical cultural resource, in a post-theological age. What is missing in the literature is an extended study of the Enlightenment's reception of the central figure in the biblical cannon, from the point of view of European Christian culture.

This is hardly an untapped subject, of course: a great deal has been written about Jesus in the period in question, and I will be reviewing a large sample in Chapter Four. But the literature (some of it excellent) is scattered and fragmentary, usually appearing either as part of larger works on the history of biblical studies, in books about 'Jesus Christ throughout the ages' or as part of the background story to more recent modern perspectives. Indeed, at the time of writing, if one types 'Jesus in the Enlightenment' into the peerless on-line resource that is the Google search engine, the first result which appears which welcomes the visitor 'to Enlightenment' before promising an 'Uncompromising exposure of the counterfeit origins of Christianity and of the evil it has brought to the world.'¹⁹ This is not an altogether unusual sentiment in the world of on-line polemic, and it is certainly a view that can be found in the age of Enlightenment, but it will do little to introduce the interested reader to a scholarly study of Jesus as represented in the period. This study is intended to fill that space. But the Enlightenment, on any interpretation, covers a significant stretch of history, with many facets and

¹⁶ The full German title is *Bibelautorität und Geist der Moderne: die Bedeutung des Bibelverständnisses für die geistesgeschichtliche und politische Entwicklung in England von der Reformation bis zur Aufklärung*; in English, see Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, London: SCM Press, 1984.

¹⁷ See Michael L Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

¹⁸ See Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, Princeton, NJ. / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

¹⁹ The website itself is *Jesus Never Existed*, assessed 17 Mar. 2012: <http://www.jesusneverexisted.com/>

dimensions: intellectual, social, cultural and political. How to fashion a research project from this key period in the making of modernity?

Formulating a Research Question: The Origins of Historical Reassessments of Jesus

This study is an intellectual history of Jesus in the Enlightenment: an exploration of the reception of Jesus in popular culture, grassroots church life, or in the arts, is beyond my competence and beyond the scope of my thesis. On the other hand, I do not approach intellectual history as an ethereal stream of ideas across history: it is socially, culturally and politically embedded, and, where possible, I will illuminate the points of contact and symbiosis between critical scholarship and these other spheres of historical human experience. But within an intellectual framework of enquiry, one field presents itself as the most appropriate point of departure: the historical study and reassessment of Jesus as a figure of the ancient world. This has probably been the centrepiece of modern New Testament studies as an academic discipline, and, as indicated above, the discourse of history has echoes well beyond the guild of biblical scholars when it comes to Jesus. Indeed, there is a sense in which claims to historical accuracy, implicit or explicit, underpin most of the pictures of Jesus we have today, however outlandish. There have certainly been important thinkers, inside and outside the Church, for whom Jesus *is* a figure of immense significance, but for whom the historical facts of his life are relatively unimportant: a non-Christian example would be Mohandas Gandhi (1869 – 1948);²⁰ and, among Christian thinkers, the most important New Testament scholar of the first half of the twentieth century, Rudolf Bultmann (1884 – 1976).²¹ And of course there have always been a tiny number of scholars who have argued that Jesus never existed as a historical figure at all,²² lending a morsel of credibility to the kind of sensationalist web-site referred to above. These are outliers, however. Modern claims to be ‘getting to the truth’ about Jesus and the birth of Christianity are more often than not taken to be synonymous with getting back to the religion’s historical origins: from E. P. Sanders’s sober and celebrated portrait of Jesus as an eschatological prophet within the context of first-century

²⁰ See Robert Ellsberg (ed.), *Ghandi on Christianity*, Markknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991, chap. 2, especially p. 22.

²¹ See Rudolf Bultmann, ‘The Significance of the Historical Jesus for the Theology of Paul’, in *Faith and Understanding*, Robert Funk (ed.), Louise Pettibone Smith (trans.), London: SCM Press, 1969, pp. 220 – 246.

²² The arguments of the so called ‘Jesus mythicists’, from Bruno Bauer in the nineteenth century to G. A. Wells today, are summarised and rejected in Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, New York: HarperOne, 2012.

Palestinian Judaism;²³ to John Allegro's hugely entertaining (but career destroying) thesis that the figure of Jesus depicted in the Gospels was constructed out of the experiences of a Jewish fertility cult intoxicated by hallucinogenic fungi.²⁴ Assumptions about historical veracity abound in contemporary discourse. But when did this hunger for historical reassessments of Jesus make itself felt in the world of scholarship?

Jesus' historical identity has probably been contested ever since his death, but it seems to have become a dominant preoccupation in the modern period. What was the catalyst? The classic account of the genesis of historical Jesus studies is found in Albert Schweitzer's *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* (1906), which attempted the herculean task of summarising and evaluating the progress of historical reassessments of Jesus from the Enlightenment to the beginning of the twentieth century, and is surely a candidate for the greatest review essay in German letters.²⁵ In Schweitzer's account, this tradition of enquiry is inaugurated by his fellow German scholar Herman Samuel Reimarus, in a piece of writing he judged to be one of the 'größten Ereignisse in der Geschichte des Kritischen' (greatest events in the history of criticism),²⁶ and a 'Meisterwerk' (masterpiece) of 'Weltliteratur' (world literature).²⁷ Whether considered in the German original or in English translation, it would be hard to argue that Schweitzer's estimation of the literary value of Reimarus's *Vom dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger* (The Aims of Jesus and his Disciples, 1778), has won widespread support, but as an event in *Kritischen*, Schweitzer's judgement has commanded the assent of many, and continues to do so. The details of Reimarus's work need not detain us here (they are explored throughout this study). Suffice to say that Reimarus's unorthodox—and for most readers of the time, downright offensive—picture of Jesus and Christian origins has been a standard point of reference when identifying the genesis of modern dissent against the official Christological doctrines of the Church using the tools of historical criticism.

Many scholars have expressed dissatisfaction with Schweitzer's account of how this tradition of critical scholarship came into being, and some have (rightly) sought to

²³ The key texts here are E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, London: SCM Press, 1985; and *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1993.

²⁴ See John M Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross: A Study of the Nature and Origins of Christianity within the Fertility Cults of the Ancient Near East*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970.

²⁵ In the first edition Albert Schweitzer examines ninety two works (by my reckoning) in various editions, some of them in multiple volumes running to thousands of pages, and these are just the works formally identified for evaluation at the start of chapters; many more are actually discussed in his *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*; in the second edition, Schweitzer considers over one hundred additional books, this time published as *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1913.

²⁶ Schweitzer, *Reimarus zu Wrede*, p. 15.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p.15.

identify individual writers who can be shown to have influenced Reimarus's perspective on Jesus, a perspective usually associated with a deistic religious outlook. Other historians of biblical criticism have sought to identify more systemic changes in European intellectual culture in the early modern period, which created the conditions for the varieties of historically minded religious skepticism associated with the Enlightenment. I have no quarrel these methodologies, and I review some of the best examples in Chapter Four. My approach is rather different, however.

Widening the Scope: History, Morality and Political Theology

The much discussed *Vom dem Zwecke* was actually one of a series of controversial works by Reimarus published after his death during the late German *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment), and I provide a brief account of this publishing event in my Introduction. The key point to note here is that of the seven works published in the 1770s, although the most fulsome treatment of Jesus is indeed contained within the aforementioned tract, Jesus features to a greater or lesser extent in six of them, and within the context of different kinds of discourse, from biblical exegesis to socio-political critique. I want to take all these discourses into account, and provide a genealogical study under three headings: we have already identified the historical dimension, and I would like to add moral and political-theological dimensions.

For so much of Christian history, Jesus' role as a heavenly redeemer dominated the minds of European thinkers: the Cosmic Christ; the metaphysical King of Kings; the second person of the Trinity. Once this figure, once any figure, is brought within the framework of human history, then he becomes susceptible to analysis in terms that reflect the multifaceted nature of the human condition. If Aristotle was right in his characterisation of man as a *πολιτικόν ζῶον* ('political animal'),²⁸ and if, as a more recent and gender inclusive philosopher argued, '*Homo sapiens*' are an 'ethical primate'²⁹, then as soon as we take seriously the project of historicising Jesus as a human being, we bring him within the realm of moral and political discourse. Figures of history may, of course, be analysed in many other ways to illuminate their life: through their psychology or their sexuality, for instance. Indeed, the psychological and sexual life of Jesus of Nazareth have been subjects of considerable interest and fevered speculation in modern times, but they

²⁸ Aristotle, *The Politics* [c. 350 BCE], Trevor J Saunders (ed.), T A Sinclair (trans.), Harmsworth: Penguin, 1981, bk 1, p. 59.

²⁹ See Mary Midgley, *The Ethical Primate: Humans, Freedom and Morality*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 3.

do not seem to have been major preoccupations for Reimarus, nor for those other writers of the Enlightenment who paved the way for his theorising about Jesus and Christian origin.

In choosing these three controlling categories of analysis, I acknowledge considerable overlap between them: many of the claims that Reimarus and his predecessors made about the morality of Jesus are historical claims, or presuppose historicity; the same is true of many of the claims made about the relationship between Jesus and politics; and there is, of course, significant overlap between the political and the moral—religious toleration, for instance, can be approached as a moral or a political issue (not to mention a religious one). I examine the issue of religious toleration under political theology in Chapter Nine—in relation to a cluster of other, broadly speaking, political considerations—but I recognise that an open border exists between the two domains of thought. And finally, although the term ‘theology’ only appears explicitly in relation to the political dimension of my study, theological considerations permeate the entire intellectual context in focus here.

So this is a thematic study of perspectives on Jesus in the Enlightenment. It is not a study of any one writer, not even of Reimarus: his writings shape the themes I have chosen to explore, but he is not the only or overriding preoccupation of my enquiry.³⁰ The position of this study is that Reimarus belongs to an Enlightenment tradition of hypothesising about Jesus and Christian origins in such a way as to challenge the official accounts of the mainstream Christian Churches.³¹ I investigate that tradition from the work of Reimarus *back* into European intellectual history, instead of following the more traditional line of enquiry which is to track the tradition from Reimarus *forwards* into the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first-centuries. This is not to say that my investigation

³⁰An examination of Reimarus’s posthumously published writings on Jesus do not provide an exhaustive understanding of Reimarus as a thinker and scholar. Three of the best, and most recent, works to assess Reimarus as a major figure of the Enlightenment are the collection by Martin Mulsow (ed.), *Between Philology and Radical Enlightenment: Herman Samuel Reimarus (1694 - 1768)*, Leiden: Brill, 2011; a monograph by a contributor to that volume, Dietrich Klein, *Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768): Das theologische Werk*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007; and the doctoral dissertation of another contributor, Ulrich Groetsch, *From Polyhistory to Subversion: The Philological Foundations of Herman Samuel Reimarus’s (1694-1768) Radical Enlightenment*, Rutgers State University of New Jersey, 2008.

³¹ When I refer to ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘the orthodox’ within the context of the Enlightenment, I am referring to those who either understood the Bible to be the word of God or the historical witness to God’s revelation in history, and who accepted the traditional creeds, such as the Nicene and Chalcedonian. It is not meant to signify an intellectually static position. As we will see, intellectual innovation, and socio-political reform, could be and were advocated from within orthodoxy.

has no bearing on more recent scholarship; on the contrary, while the themes of history, morality and political theology recommend themselves because they are clearly discernable in the Enlightenment tradition I have identified, they also recommend themselves because they are perennial preoccupations in the encounters between the modern mind and the figure of Jesus (something I elaborate on in Chapter Two).

My thesis, then, has a negative and a positive component. I argue that it is wrong to continue to identify Reimarus's posthumous writings as the origin of the historical-critical study of Jesus and early Christianity. But I also argue that these writings remain striking, multifaceted examples of an Enlightenment scholar drawing on unorthodox images of the historical Jesus and primitive Christianity and deploying them as intellectual and religious artillery in public battles over matters of pressing social and political concern. These writings by Reimarus are thus major contributions to an open-ended conversation between modern Western thinkers and the origins of their religious past which includes, but is not limited to, historical critique—a conversation which was already well developed by the time Reimarus joined it, and one which continues in our own time.³²

The Enlightenment and Religion

In producing genealogies for these historical, moral and political-theological engagements with Jesus, this study makes a contribution to the on-going debate about religion in the Enlightenment. In Chapter Three I will explain my understanding of the Enlightenment, but it is appropriate here to provide a hint of what is to come.

Writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries showed little respect for disciplinary boundaries, so students of those writers cannot afford to either: along with biblical hermeneutics and its attendant fields of text criticism and philology, I have sipped from a well of Western philosophy, which is often drained and divided up in our

³² Much of the academic work in this area has centred on the figure of St. Paul, issuing from the pens of European philosophers such as Jacob Taubes, Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek; more recently the literary critic Terry Eagleton, philosopher John Caputo and New Testament scholar Halvor Moxnes have turned to the figure of Jesus as a point of reference for reflection on the religio-political dilemmas of the present, in mainstream and academic mediums: see Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Post Modernism for the Church*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007; Eagleton, 'Occupy London Are the True Followers of Jesus, Even if they Despise Religion', *The Guardian*, (on-line), 03 Nov. 2011: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2011/nov/03/occupy-london-jesus-religion>; and Moxnes, *Jesus and The Rise of Nationalism: A New Quest for the Nineteenth Century Jesus*, I B Taurus: London / New York, 2011, chap. vii. This conversation with Christian origins, outside the context of traditional Christian discourse, is not a recent fad: the phenomenon is explored, with reference to both Jesus and Paul, within the context of the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Ward Blanton, *Displacing Christian Origins: Philosophy, Secularity and the New Testament*, Chicago, Ill / London: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

compartmentalised intellectual world, taking into account the natural, the moral, the political and the theological dimensions of enquiry. Just as the thematic focus is broad, so the history is long: to write this study, especially the parts on morality, I have reached deep into the intellectual history of the West. I have found that the provenance of the ideas and anxieties which were driving many of the apparently new engagements with Jesus in the Enlightenment lay as much in the classical and Christian past as in the influence of any of the alleged prophets of modern secularism and materialism who are often cited as the engineers of radical change.

Two of the aforementioned prophets are Thomas Hobbes and the remarkably fashionable Benedict (originally Baruc) de Spinoza. The latter will loom large in parts of this study, but without ever dominating the scene; the former will be a peripheral figure. I have no objection to including Hobbes within the history of the European Enlightenment: he certainly is not excluded in my dating of the period, which is very generous towards the seventeenth century. My choice of focus is determined by two considerations: 1) As I have already indicated, my point of departure in the Enlightenment is the publishing controversy of the 1770s prompted by a series of works by Reimarus, so I take the provenance of his ideas as one of the keys to my reconstruction of the genealogical routes to this *Ereignis* in intellectual history; and whereas Spinoza was clearly a significant point of reference for Reimarus when he was composing the work for which he is now famous, the same cannot be said of Hobbes. 2) There currently exists a major scholarly tradition in the interpretation of the Enlightenment where Spinoza is central, and it is my intention in this thesis to work (sympathetically but not uncritically) with that tradition. To write Hobbes into my story—and he probably warrants a much more prominent place than I have given him in this account—would be to fight battles on too many fronts in a study of this kind.

Some of the best clues to the sources of inspiration for Reimarus's ideas about Jesus, and, indeed, the general architecture of his intellectual perspective, are found in the (two volume) critical edition of the large treatise Reimarus left unpublished at the time of death, and from which his writings on Jesus were extracted for publication.³³ Other important sources for the formation of Reimarus' thinking are to be found in the contents of his private library, revealed in an auction catalogue originally published in two

³³ See Gerhard Alexander (ed.), *Apologie*.

instalments as *Bibliothecae Reimarianae* (1669 – 1770), but reissued in 1978.³⁴ I will be guided but not bound by these publications: having established some of Reimarus's central ideas and preoccupations when he was developing the subversive biblical hermeneutic he would eventually apply to the Gospels—and, just as importantly, the ideas and preoccupations of those who can be connected to Reimarus—I will identify those patterns and tendencies within the history of European thought which these ideas resonate with, develop or subvert.

Most of the writers considered here were (at least nominally) Protestant, and, even when their views placed them outside the mainstream Protestant Churches—in some cases, outside Christianity all together—their concerns are sometimes very difficult to distinguish from radical elements in the Protestant Reformation, and they often bear the mark of persistent heresies which have for centuries challenged, in some way or another, the orthodox doctrines of the triune God, the corrupting stain of original sin, and the necessity of superadded divine grace for salvation. But I aim to do more in this thesis than emphasise certain strains of radical Reformation (and heretical) thought. There may be a greater smattering of reference to St Thomas Aquinas specifically and Thomism as an intellectual tendency (broadly conceived) than one might expect in a study with this periodic focus. But as one of the leading philosophers of religion in our own time has written, even though 'there are mountains between Rome and Geneva, Aquinas is the natural theologian *par excellence*',³⁵ and 'Thomist thought...the natural starting point for philosophical reflection on these topics.'³⁶ Of course the philosophical estimations of a twenty-first-century Calvinist are not necessarily those of a seventeenth or eighteenth-century thinker of any confessional affiliation, but the resurgence in natural theology from the middle years of the twentieth century to the present represents a mere flicker of interest when compared with the vaulting confidence in such a tradition of reasoning during the Enlightenment. And for all the emphasis on innovation, the *philosophes* of this age were more indebted to the Christian past than is sometimes assumed. My intention here is certainly not to propose a 'Thomist Enlightenment' to add to all the other ones to appear in recent historiography, but it is important not to forget the extent to which the

³⁴ See Johann Andreas Gottfried Schetelig (ed.), *Auktionskatalog* (2 vols.). The study of this document has been made a good deal easier due to another excellent piece of editorial work by Gerhard Alexander, who produced an index for the *Auktionskatalog* two years later: Alexander (ed.) *Auktionskatalog der Bibliothek von Hermann Samuel Reimarus: alphabetisches Register*, Hamburg: Joachim-Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, 1980.

³⁵ Alvin Plantinga, 'Religious Belief as Properly Basic', in Brian Davies (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 42 – 94: 59.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 59.

Scholastic schools still exercised influence during the Enlightenment, especially in the seventeenth century. Scholasticism was deeply unfashionable on many levels during this period, but, as one historians of philosophy has written, ‘by dint of their publications, and by virtue of their prominence in institutions of higher education, scholastic thinkers were a significant and conspicuous presence’.³⁷ Many philosophers took an à la carte approach to scholastic thought, and there were a number of ‘peeping Thomists’ working in the Age of Reason,³⁸ who took the rationalistic tendency in that philosophical and theological tradition and developed it in ways were never really open to Thomas and his early followers, not least because they were working prior to the seismic changes in historical consciousness which occurred between the medieval and the modern periods. These pre-modern elements also warrant their place in the story of Jesus in the age of Enlightenment.

Jesus Now and Then

There are no straightforward parallels between recent public discourse on the Church and modern capitalism, or religion in public life more generally, and the kind of religio-political debates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And it is not just a matter of a difference in the problems confronting different historical communities: religious and political freedom then, a financial crisis and social inequality now. Taking England as a working example, we would be hard pressed to find many Anglicans today who would argue explicitly that their Church is ‘Christ’s presence, and in some sense his body in the world,’³⁹ and nor would we find many of their critics arguing that the apostolic authority for Christ’s continuing presence in the world is ‘reposed in themselves’ as faithful servants of the Lord,⁴⁰ quite apart from that Church ‘by law established, subject to the jurisdiction of the crown’.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the question of the presence or absence of values associated with the figure of Jesus remains a potent theme in discussions about the moral and spiritual orientation of many modern societies. When his name is invoked

³⁷ M. W. F. Stone, ‘Scholastic Schools and Early Modern Philosophy’, in Donald Rutherford (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 299 – 327: 300.

³⁸ This expression is taken from the subtitle to Ralph McInerny’s *A First Glance at St. Thomas Aquinas: A Handbook for Peeping Thomists*, Notre Dame, Indiana / London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990.

³⁹ J. G. A. Pocock, ‘Within the Margins: The Definitions of Orthodoxy’, in Roger D Lund (ed.), *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660 – 1750*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.37, 38. For Pocock, commitment to the Church of England as 1) authorised by law, under the authority of the Monarch and Parliament, and 2) authorised by Christ, was the heart of Anglican orthodoxy in this period.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 40.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 37.

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in acts of public protest or debate, it clearly still means something, and when we hear it, we hear an echo of a time in early modernity when to some, it meant almost everything. One of the aims of this study is to recover the intellectual history of that time.

Part I: Overture

CHAPTER ONE

Jesus and Critical Scholarship

1. The Quest for the Historical Jesus¹

In the modern history of the arts and sciences, few traditions of enquiry have proved as controversial as the historical investigation of the life of Jesus. Subjecting the reputed Son of God to the rigours of historical criticism and arriving at something other than a reflection of theological orthodoxy has proved to be one of modernity's fast tracks to incendiary charges of heresy, blasphemy, apostasy and sedition: professional careers and personal reputations have been destroyed by unwelcome contributions to the project of reconstructing the public mission, personality and relationships of Christianity's central figure from the available evidence. Nevertheless, the fate of modern historical critics writing about Jesus since the Enlightenment has been a relatively happy one compared with previous dissenters from Christian orthodoxy: as we will see, some of the heterodox images of Jesus produced by intellectuals prior to the Enlightenment rendered their authors, and not just their books, candidates for immolation.²

In more recent times, and particularly in the English speaking world, the reception afforded this research has been much more hospitable. Even if we exclude the recent example of Pope Benedict XVI, who has a unique profile which allows his fusion of history and theology to reach a vast audience, historical accounts of Jesus and Christian origins

¹ The 'quest for the historical Jesus' is one of a number of similar phrases inspired by the title of the English translation of Schweitzer's *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*. For the sake of brevity, I will usually refer to the discipline as 'the Quest'. The genesis of this phrase might be taken as a testament to the creative force of liberal translation: a more literal rendering of the German title would be, From Reimarus to Wrede: A History of the Life of Jesus Research; not nearly as suggestive as the actual title, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. The phrase does belong to Schweitzer, but it is within the opening chapter that he writes about modern man going in 'suchen'(quest) of the 'historischen Jesus' (*Reimarus zu Wrede*, p.3).

² For less gruesome tales of woe from the nineteenth century, see Schweitzer, *Quest*, chaps. vii - ix, xi, xii. The most notable casualty from this period of scholarship was David Strauss, whose use of myth to interpret the representation of Jesus in the Gospels proved too subversive for the German academy of the nineteenth century. Contemporary academics are unlikely to lose their jobs over a controversial study of Jesus, although there are exceptions: after Gerd Lüdemann published a letter addressed to Jesus in his book *The Great Deception: What Jesus Really Said and Did* (London: SCM Press, 1998), which presented the loss of his Christian faith as a result of his historical enquiries, Lüdemann was stripped of his professorship in New Testament studies and reassigned to another chair where he would no longer be responsible for teaching Protestant ministers and religious educators: see Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Faith, Truth and Freedom: The Expulsion of Gerd Lüdemann from the Theology Faculty at Göttingen University*, New York: Global Academic Publishing, 2002.

have helped turn major academics into minor mainstream celebrities.³ In addition to producing popular editions of their academic tomes—which furnish discussion and debate in newspapers and magazines, in documentaries and on the Internet—these historians often feature personally as expert witnesses in mass market productions for the broadcast media;⁴ other times, they serve as advisers to writers and directors engaged in artistic productions on Jesus and Christian origins.⁵ A once subversive and genuinely dangerous tradition of scholarship is now an established part of the cultural mainstream.⁶ The Quest was making such an impact at the close of the previous century, especially in the US, that one major New Testament scholar, John Dominic Crossan, was profiled in fashionable men's magazine *GQ*,⁷ appeared on *Larry King Live* was described by one of his peers as having 'become to biblical studies what Carl Sagan was to astronomy.'⁸ The historiography of the Quest has been the focus of continuous investigation, with critical histories and reconceptualizations of progress (or regression) proving to be almost as

³ To take one notable example, John Dominic Crossan is one of the most admired of recent historical Jesus scholars, and books like *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994) have made him famous well beyond the academy. Crossan is also a controversial figure in some quarters, due to his portrayal of Jesus as an illiterate Cynic philosopher and socio-political revolutionary, whose crucified body may have been consumed by carrion crows and scavenger dogs (see p. 143).

⁴ Just to give a few examples from television in the UK this century, one could cite many contributions by Jerome Murphy O' Connor—for decades, the Irish priest and scholar has been a ubiquitous figure on British television programmes dealing with the Bible and Christian Origins—such as the alterative analysis he and US scholar James Talbor offered in the novelist Howard Jacobson's documentary *Jesus the Jew*, Channel 4, 11 Jan. 2009. The following year, in a much discussed programme, New Testament scholar Helen Bond accompanied Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Féin, in his personal quest to better understand the historical Jesus in *The Bible: A History—Jesus*, Channel 4, 21 Feb. 2010. Although many of N. T. Wright's appearances in the media in recent years have been in his former capacity as Bishop of Durham in the Church of England, Wright's public profile was initially shaped by popularising his own scholarship: his documentary *Resurrection*, Channel 4, 12 Apr. 2004 wasn't quite the 'film of the book', but the programme was based on his multi award winning *The Resurrection of the Son of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (vol. 3 of 6), London: SPCK, 2003. In the same year, Wright was a contributor to two further programmes on Channel 4: 1) *Who Wrote the Bible?*, 25 Dec. 2004, and 2) *Blaming the Jews* (about the death of Jesus), 10 Apr. 2004; and he returned to the subject of Jesus' death as a contributor to a programme about Pontius Pilate: *The Man Who Killed Christ*, Channel 4, 23 Dec. 2008.

⁵ For example, Mark Goodacre—a leading British New Testament scholar, at the forefront of promoting New Testament study on the Internet—was the historical consult for the BBC's ambitious four part dramatization of the last days of Jesus: *The Passion* (4 parts), BBC1, 16 – 23 Mar. 2008.

⁶ One could argue that the origins of popular interest in the Quest actually goes back to the nineteenth century when there were a number of controversial bestsellers; for example Ernest Renan's 1864 *Vie de Jésus* (*Life of Jesus*, completed edn, London: Watts, 1935), and Strauss's 1864 *Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk* (in English, *The Life of Jesus: For the People* [2 vols.], London: Williams and Norgate, 2nd edn, 1879). Both authors paid a heavy price for these books in terms of their teaching careers and their social standing (see Schweitzer, *Quest*, chaps. vii – ix, xi – xii); on Renan specifically, see Harold W Wardman, *Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography*, London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1964; on Strauss, see Horton Harries, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, especially chaps. 7 – 9.

⁷ See Russell Shorto, 'Cross Fire', *GQ*, Jun. 1994, pp. 116 – 123. Crossan's work had already been discussed that year in Richard N Ostling, 'Jesus Christ, Plain and Simple', *TIME*, 10 Jan. 1994, pp. 38 – 39; and in Russell Watson, 'A Lesser Child of God', *Newsweek*, 04 Apr. 1994, pp. 53 – 54.

⁸ Mark Allen Powell *The Jesus Debate: Modern Historians Investigate the Life of Christ* [UK edition], Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1999, p. 95.

much a part of the tradition as monographic studies of Jesus himself: both have proved to be fountain-heads for wide ranging discussions of ancient and modern attitudes to religion and theology,⁹ nationalism and race,¹⁰ gender and the family.¹¹ But when and why did this fertile research tradition begin?

Accounts of the origins and progress of the Quest have been shaped, in part, by the extent to which the story of historical Jesus studies has been integrated within a larger intellectual and social history:¹² the project has been analysed 1) as a more or less independent field of enquiry, usually under the general auspices of Christian theology (broadly defined); 2) as a reoccurring preoccupation within modern New Testament studies as a whole; 3) as a development of the European Enlightenment, with the rise of modern science and critical history; and 4) as a recent Western emphasis in the history of Jesus' cultural reception over two millennia. These approaches are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, but they represent a range of identifiable frameworks within which scholarly treatments of the rise and development of historical Jesus studies have been constructed, and the range of sources reviewed in Chapter Four aims to reflect this diversity. The most influential histories of the Quest have been produced using the first two approaches, which lend themselves to relatively narrow but detailed studies of major figures from the worlds of New Testament criticism and Christian theology.¹³ Indeed, the influence of some of these accounts have meant that when it comes to the genesis of the critical study of the life of Jesus, the origins of this enquiry have often been explained by reference to one man and one publishing event: Hermann Samuel Reimarus's *Vom Zwecke*

⁹ See, for instance, Colin Brown, *Jesus in European Protestant Thought: 1778 – 1860*, Pasadena, Calif: Full Seminary Press, 2008; and Jonathan Z Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

¹⁰ There is a large body of literature on the themes of race and religion; see, for instance, Susannah Hershel's studies *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998; *The Aryan Jesus: Christianity, Nazis and the Bible*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007; and Shawn Kelley's *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

¹¹ On gender and the family, see Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's studies *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (2nd edn), London: SCM Press, 1995; *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology*, New York: Continuum, 1994; and Moxnes's (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, London: Routledge, 1997; *Putting Jesus in his Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom*, Louisville Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003; *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, especially chaps. vi – vii.

¹² The same could be said about the histories of most traditions of enquiry: Alasdair MacIntyre makes a very similar point in his 'Histories of Moral Philosophy', in *OCP*, pp: 357 – 360: 357.

¹³ Schweitzer's *Quest* is paradigmatic of this narrow approach: a little biographical information about a participant in the discipline is followed by a summary and evaluation of their key writings on the historical Jesus, although there is sometimes reflection on how a writer's depiction of Jesus stands in relation to liberal modernity. Schweitzer sometimes describes the study of Jesus as part of 'historical science' (*Geschichtswissenschaft*, p. 6), but 'theology' (*theologie*) is the preferred disciplinary category at the outset of the book, and this is maintained to the end (see throughout chaps. i, xx).

Jesu und seiner Jünger, published posthumously in 1778. This thesis is intended as a corrective to that view, but my aim is to contextualise Reimarus's critical stance and to trace its origins, not to repudiate its undoubted significance: *Vom dem Zwecke* is the most enduring piece of scholarship to emerge from a fascinating episode in German intellectual history which repays further study. This episode is often cited in the field of New Testament historiography as a necessary point of departure for reflections on modern critical studies of Jesus,¹⁴ but it is rarely investigated as an episode with an intellectual back story as interesting as anything which came after it. One of the main aims of this study is to illuminate that story. I aim to bring to life and impose order on the best of existing work on the origins of the Quest, supplementing that research with a new analysis of trends in seventeenth and eighteenth-century intellectual history which helped to shape modern critical scholarship on Jesus—trends in history, morality and political theology. But let us begin by revisiting, in outline, the historical circumstances in which *Von dem Zwecke* first appeared.

2. The *Fragmentenstreit*: Contours of a Scandal

Between 1774 and 1778, in the midst of the High German Enlightenment, the philosopher and dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729 - 1781) caused a sensation when he published seven anonymously authored works on a range of religious themes. To the eighteenth-century audience who received these texts—which were published as *Fragments* of a much larger work—at least one common thread was discernible: all seven pieces had potentially devastating implications for the intellectual and social standing of orthodox Christianity.

Lessing was already a towering figure in his own right in the German *Aufklärung*,¹⁵ but, for a sustained period in the latter part of his life, this highly creative and wide ranging writer became inextricably associated with the *Fragmentenstreit*.¹⁶ By undertaking the task of publication—while in the position of librarian at the Herzog-August-Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel—Lessing made himself the public face of a body of work which addressed a series of contentious subjects in eighteenth-century European

¹⁴ This is even true of the very best treatments of this back story such as Brown's *Jesus*, chap. 1.

¹⁵ Lessing's contribution to German Enlightenment culture, and the wider community of European letters, was enormous: see Alexej Ugrinsky (ed.), *Lessing and the Enlightenment*, New York / London: Greenwood Press, 1986.

¹⁶ The *Fragmentenstreit* (*Fragments controversy*) is the term often given to that episode in German intellectual history when Lessing was publishing the *Fragments* and negotiating their critical reception; for an excellent discussion see Brown, *Jesus*, chap. 1; and Jonathan Israel, *Democratic*, pp. 315 – 325.

societies: the toleration of minority religious movements, including those who reject orthodox Christianity in favour of natural religion;¹⁷ the influence of the clergy on intellectual life;¹⁸ and the intellectual credibility of revealed religion, over against natural theology.¹⁹ No stranger to the theatrical, Lessing presided over a *cause célèbre* which began with the publication of a forthright case for the freedom of religious thought and practice—challenging but not especially offensive to mainstream Christian culture—and ended with a pitiless critique of the orthodox Christian picture of Jesus and Christian origins, which caused a storm of protest in the academy, in ecclesiastical circles and among political elites.²⁰ Indeed, there is evidence from his personal correspondence that Lessing, having become disillusioned with the German theatre scene in the early 1770s, had resolved to instigate a real life drama involving the great and the good of German theology and biblical studies. In the year he published the first *Fragment*, Lessing wrote to his brother, Karl:

I would prefer to stage a little play with the theologians, if I had any need of the theatre. And in a sense that is what the material I have promised to send Herr Voss is about. But perhaps just for that reason it is none too acceptable to him, for he feels he needs to go carefully with Semler and Teler.²¹

Lessing ignored the reservations of Heer Voss; he published, and he was damned. Why?

The early *Fragments* are characterised by a defence of natural religion, and a moral critique of a culturally debased and politically pernicious Christian establishment, reminiscent of the kind of righteous fury exemplified by Voltaire in his legendary war

¹⁷ The subject of the first fragment (1774): *Von Duldung der Deisten*, in *Lessing Werke* (vol. 8), pp. 115 – 13.

¹⁸ The subject of the second *Fragment* (1775): *Von der Verschreitung der Vernunft auf den Kanzeln*, in *Lessing Werke* (vol. 8), pp. 175 – 188.

¹⁹ A theme which peppers all seven *Fragments*, but is most explicit in the third (1777), *Unmöglichkeit einer Offenbarung, die alle Menschen auf eine gegründete Art glauben könnten*, in *Lessing Werke* (vol. 8), pp. 189 – 236; fourth (1777), *Durchgang der Israeliten durchs rote Meer*, in *ibid*, pp. 236 – 246; fifth (1777), *Dass die Bücher des A T nicht geschrieben worden, eine Religion zu offenbaren*, in *ibid*, pp. 246 – 277; sixth (1777), *Über die Auferstehungsgeschichte*, in *ibid*, pp. 277 - 311; and seventh (1778), *Von dem Zwecke*, in *Lessing Werke* (vol. 9), pp. 219 – 340.

²⁰ Lessing waited several years between the publication of the first and second *Fragments*, during which time the critical response was muted, but the project gathered huge momentum when he published five pieces in 1777; the last of the pieces issued that year, on the ‘non-Resurrection’ of Jesus, and the final work (1778) on Jesus’ teachings over against those of the disciples, were by far the most explosive.

²¹ Lessing, quoted in John K Riches, ‘Lessing as Editor of Reimarus’ Apology’, in E A Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Biblica II: Papers on the Gospels: Sixth International Congress on Biblical Studies, Oxford 3 – 7 April 1978*, Sheffield: JSOT, 1980, pp. 247 – 254: 247. The two figures Lessing was referring to were Wilhelm Abraham Teller and J. S Semler, both of whom were major figures in German theology and biblical studies. Teller, trained in philosophy and textual criticism, was eventually to adopt a highly unorthodox Christian position—stripped of all but a rarefied morality—of a sort that the mature Reimarus would have had a good deal of sympathy with (see Teller *Die Religion der Vollkommeneren*, Berlin, 1792). Semler was perhaps the greatest New Testament scholar of his generation, and, in his case, Voss (Lessing’s publisher) was wise to expect a fierce backlash.

against the *ancien régime*.²² But it was in the final two tracts that the then unknown writer carved out a distinctive place for himself in the intellectual history of the Enlightenment. What was the nature of this contribution to anti-Christian thought?

In the final two pieces published by Lessing, the author strikes at the heart of Europe's dominant religious tradition through a sustained attack on the historical basis for Christian theology. In an often polemical examination of the Gospels and other New Testament texts, the author attempts to situate Jesus within his own historical time and place, while attributing concrete and all too human motives to the key actors involved in the creation of Christianity: the historical figure of Jesus who emerges from this study is a first-century Jewish moralist, stripped of any miraculous powers or prophetic fulfillments. The author concedes that Jesus considered himself a Messiah in a political tradition well attested in the Old Testament, but he was a false Messiah considered on those terms—not a conscious fraud, but a man immersed in the prevailing myths and fanciful expectations of his own primitive culture. But Christian theology as a whole was no innocent mistake; on the contrary, Jesus' proper place in history—as an exemplary bearer of some universal theological and moral truths proclaimed from *within* Judaism—had been *deliberately* falsified by those who followed him. The disciples and the Gospel writers used Jesus as the central focus for a new religion entirely of their own making: from its outset, the Christian religion reflected the aims of Jesus' disciples, not those of their crucified master. Although it was in the sixth *Fragment* that the central Christian event of the Resurrection is deconstructed, it is the seventh, *Von dem Zweke*, which furnishes Reimarus's attempt to divide the objectives of the historical Jesus from those of the early Church, and to explain why the latter concocted the Resurrection among other dogmas.

In a twenty-first-century context, when academic studies of the historical Jesus

²² The attacks by Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet) on the Church are too numerous to mention in any detail here, but he composed a poem in 1721 which came to be known by the title *Épître à Uranie*, and which represents an early expression of a consistently maintained deistic outlook and generally rebellious attitude towards Christian dogma: see Nicholas Cronk (ed.), Chronology, in *The Cambridge Companion to Voltaire*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2009, p. x. A more even handed assessment of Christianity is found in a later version of the poem, which appeared as the thirteenth letter of his famous 1733 collection of *Letres philosophiques*: see *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (revised. edn), Cronk (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Unlike another great religious skeptic of the age, David Hume, Voltaire did write about the Bible, and his thoughts on scripture are scattered throughout his 1764 *Dictionnaire philosophique* (*Philosophical Dictionary*, T Besterman (ed. & trans.), London: Penguin, 1972). Voltaire's critical engagement with biblical texts as historical documents—rather than his mining of biblical stories for the purposes of parody—is often considered one of his less distinguished contributions to European letters; for a more sympathetic view, see Graham Gargett, 'Voltaire and the Bible', in *Companion to Voltaire*, pp. 193 – 204. Reimarus cites Voltaire specifically in a discussion on the perils of 'blinden Glauben' (blind faith) in *Apologie* (vol. 1, p. 92).

routinely represent him as a figure within first-century Palestinian Judaism,²³ and when such studies compete in the publishing market with wild conspiracy theories which claim to be offering important insights into 'the real Jesus',²⁴ it may be hard for some to imagine the intellectual and spiritual trauma of the *Fragmentenstreit*. In the eighteenth century, however, publication of the kind of views outlined above would constitute a highly provocative act anywhere in the Christian world, but particularly in the northern German states, which had not witnessed the same degree of public hostility towards Christianity during the eighteenth century as some of their European neighbours.²⁵ This was, moreover, the intellectual and spiritual home of the Reformation. Why might this be significant? Protestant Europe had sown its reformed faith in the hard ground of scripture—the revealed and unchanging word of God—over against the allegedly obfuscating and fluctuating Catholic tradition. But for all the Reformation's emphasis on the individual conscience and its free encounter with the Word of God, over against obedience to the Church, correct belief (theological orthodoxy), was perhaps as important as it had ever been in Western Christianity. What changed was that the authoritative sources of this orthodoxy were now limited to the Bible. As Charles H Talbert writes, 'The experiential fervour of the German Reformation had given way to a Protestant orthodoxy in which assent to truth in propositional form was the primary trait. Faith in revelation meant assent to statements which had been given in an infallible form in Scripture.'²⁶ But

²³ Despite occasional suggestions to the contrary by New Testament scholars, Jesus' Jewishness had not exactly escaped the attention of historians prior to the 1970s, but it's fair to say that since the appearance of Geza Vermes's *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London: Collins, 1973), historians working on Jesus have generally been at great pains to stress the Jewishness of Jesus' cultural context and personal outlook, although there is little firm consensus on the precise character of the Judaism in which Jesus was immersed, let alone on the character of Jesus as an individual: influential interpretations range from readings of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet to a Cynic philosopher / socio-political radical. There are other positions, but many leading scholars have clustered around versions of these interpretations. The outstanding apocalyptic reading is probably Sanders' *Jesus and Judaism*; the cynic reading is probably best represented by Crossan's *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991.

²⁴ The most notable (and notorious) recent example of this phenomenon is from the world of fiction: Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, New York: Doubleday, 2003. But the novel's climactic revelation that the 'historical' Jesus fathered children with Mary Magdalen, and that their descendants emigrated to Southern France, drew on a tradition of conspiracy history (or pseudo-history) which advanced the same thesis: see, in particular, Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1982.

²⁵ That the German Enlightenment was relatively conservative in matters of religion—preferring peaceful co-existence between the old faith and new modes of critical enquiry—has often been accepted within biblical studies (see Frei, *Eclipse*, pp. 113 – 116), where Reimarus is cast as the exception to the rule). It is more accurate see the *dominant* and *most documented* tradition of German scholarship in this conservative light, while recognising the existence of more radical and subversive currents of thought decades before the 'Reimarus moment': for an exemplary, concise account of the radical *Aufklärung*, see Israel, *Radical*, chap. 34; for a book length study see Martin Mulrow, *Moderne aus dem Untergrund: Radikale Frühaufklärung in Deutschland 1680-1720*, Hamburg: Meiner 2002.

²⁶ Charles H Talbert, editorial Introduction to *Fragments*, pp. 1 – 43: 1.

when the basis for Christian theology was declared *sola scriptura*, the necessary focus for an enemy of Christian theology could be reduced to scripture, and if scripture was targeted with plausible criticism, the theological responses open to a largely orthodox Protestant audience were limited by the constraints imposed by this Reformed tradition: no additional intellectual authority could be invoked to redeem scripture and the religion it revealed. For some of those who lived through the *Fragmentenstreit*, the criticisms of scripture by this anonymous antagonist were all too plausible, and convincing responses from within orthodox Protestantism were not in plentiful supply.²⁷ Johann Salomo Semler, a contemporary of Lessing and one of the greatest biblical scholars of the eighteenth century, provides an insight into the social impact of the Wolfenbüttel *Fragments*:

The first result was a kind of amazement even on the part of many politicians; displeasure on the part of the more sober and worthy classes; frivolous jesting and deliberate elaboration of the derision. This derision spread immediately among many young educated people from whom these effects extended still wider to the citizens and such participants as the 'Unknown' [the author] had certainly never calculated on...Many thoughtful and serious young men who had dedicated themselves to the Christian ministry were involved in great perplexity in consequence of their own convictions being thus so fearfully shaken. Many determined to choose another profession for their future labors rather than persevere so long amid increasing uncertainty...²⁸

Semler was not exaggerating. Lessing had been given dispensation by the Duke of Brunswick, Karl I (1713 – 1780), to publish the secret treasures of the Wolfenbüttel library without the intervention of censors. By the time the *Fragments* had been published, however, the Duke's son, Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand (1735 – 1806), was already governing the principality, and was disconcerted by the furore caused by the episode. He instructed Lessing to cease publication, confiscated the source materials, and revoked his ex officio licence to publish without censor.²⁹

²⁷ The theologically suggestive response from Lessing himself makes so many concessions to the fallibility of scripture, all the while presenting Christianity as a religious movement which transcends the contents of the Bible, that such arguments would be unlikely to strike a chord with mainstream devotees of the Protestant faith: see, for instance, Henry Chadwick (ed. & trans.), *Lessing's Theological Writings: Selections in Translation with an Introductory Essay*, London: A & C Black, 1956, pp. 17 – 19. The most comprehensive and effective response to the *Fragments* in the eighteenth century, which challenged their author on historical-critical grounds, was produced by a writer much more at home in the Protestant faith than Lessing: Johann Salomo Semler's *Beantwortung der fragmente eins Ungenaten insbesondere vom Zweck Jesu und seiner Jünger*, Halle, 1789; although, as leading light of the Neo-logians, Semler's approach to biblical interpretation represented a departure from the *hermeneutic sacra* of Lutheranism, holding as he did that not all of Holy Scripture was equally to be considered the Word of God.

²⁸ Semler, quoted in Talbert, Introduction, p. 1.

²⁹ See Israel, *Democratic*, pp. 324 - 325.

The identity of the actual author was suppressed for forty years after the appearance of the first of the *Fragmente eines Ungenannten* (*Fragments of an unnamed*),³⁰ during which time a cottage industry had sprung up to address the vexed question of authorship.³¹ There is evidence that the author's identity was an open secret among some of the German literati,³² but the matter was only settled definitively in 1813 when the author's son came forward with copies of the larger work from which the *Fragments* were taken. Johann A H Reimarus, a medical doctor who counted Lessing among his patients,³³ donated the manuscripts to the university libraries of Hamburg and Göttingen in 1814; when submitting the document to Hamburg, he attached a letter identifying his father, Herman Samuel Reimarus, as the author of the *Wolfenbüttel Fragments*.³⁴

3. Reimarus Remembered

Born in the harbour city of Hamburg, Lower Saxony, H. S Reimarus (1694 – 1768) received a stellar education, guided by men who exerted an enduring influence on his intellectual, professional and personal life. At sixteen years of age he entered Hamburg's *Akademische Gymnasium*, an elite preparatory school which trained students for the rigors of a university education. The seeds of Reimarus's intellectual curiosity and academic skills were sown long before this, however, owing to the early education provided by his father,

³⁰ Lessing dealt with the question of authorship by attaching this intriguing attribution to each tract in the series.

³¹ Various men were suggested, including Reimarus himself, but this was so adamantly denied by his family that one journal was moved to publish a piece distancing itself from this supposed slight against the dead (see Brown, *Jesus*, p. 278, n. 5). Lessing did little to discourage speculation which served to place any kind of fire wall between Reimarus (not to mention himself) and authorship of the *Fragments*, and, for a time at least, he seems to have been happy to allow rumours to circulate that the infamous writer and translator Johann L Schmidt was the author (see *ibid.*, p. 279, n. 7). Schmidt was a known skeptic concerning the apologetic value of miracles and prophecy, the architect of an extremely controversial translation of the Bible, and the translator of a number of theologically controversial works from English and Latin into German, including work by Spinoza and so called 'English deists'; indeed, it has been suggested that the fate of Schmidt may have been one of the reasons why Reimarus declined to publish the *Apologie* in his lifetime (see Talbert, Introduction, p. 8). In addition to his controversial record as a writer and translator, Schmidt served as a convenient patsy for two further reasons: 1) he lived in Wolfenbüttel for a time after leaving prison, possibly spending his final days there; 2) by the time the *Fragmentenstreit* erupted, he'd been dead for twenty five years and could hardly protest (see Brown, *Jesus*, p. 279, n. 7). The best book length account in English of the controversy generated by Schmidt's turbulent life in German letters is Paul Spalding's *Seize the Book, Jail the Author: Johann Lorenz Smith and Censorship in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1998.

³² See Israel, *Democratic*, pp. 316 – 317.

³³ Brown, *Jesus*, p. 278, n. 6.

³⁴ A third copy of the *Apologie* is kept in the Hamburg Staatsbibliothek (see Talbert, Introduction, p. 18), but, according to Johann Reimarus, the copy retained by the university library of Hamburg was the final draft produced by his father and in his own hand (see Brown, *Jesus*, p. 278, n. 6). The history of the *Apologie*, through its various incarnations, is a complex one, which helps to explain why a complete critical edition only appeared in 1972. A thorough examination of how the various versions of the *Apologie* were produced would constitute a separate study in itself, but for a concise statement with recommendations for further reading, see Brown, *Jesus*, p. 278, n. 5. The actual manuscript (or manuscripts) from which Lessing worked have never been found (see Riches, 'Lessing as Editor of Reimarus' *Apologie*', p.252).

Nicolaus. The son of a Lutheran minister, Nicolaus received a theological education to university level,³⁵ and was a school teacher at the prestigious *Gelehrtschule des Johanneums*.³⁶ The young Herman attended the *Johanneums* where he was taught in the first instance by his father, and later by Johan Albrecht Fabricius, one of the greatest classical scholars of his age and a bibliographer of astounding productivity.³⁷ Having completed his university education in Jena, where he studied ancient languages, theology and philosophy,³⁸ Reimarus took a post in the philosophy faculty at Wittenberg in 1716.³⁹ Reimarus maintained his relationship with Fabricius, and added a domestic dimension to their intense intellectual connection when he married his mentor's daughter, Johanna Frederica. Although Reimarus arguably never matched the academic achievements of his illustrious father-in-law, he eventually became a professor of Oriental languages at his alma mater (the *Gymnasium*) where he produced distinguished work in theology, philology and text criticism.⁴⁰ A respected Hebraist, classical scholar and philosopher-theologian in his lifetime, Reimarus was an unlikely candidate for authorship of the *Fragments*: apart from his close association with the Christian scholar Fabricius, Reimarus had never written about theological matters from a notably skeptical point of view—although he had insisted on the rationality of faith commitments—⁴¹and he was praised at his Lutheran funeral for his religious as well as his academic credentials.⁴² The secret disdain which Reimarus harboured for orthodox Christianity found expression in an unpublished manuscript titled *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer*

³⁵ See Talbet, Introduction, p. 2: Nicolaus Reimarus studied theology at Kiel and educated his son up to the age of twelve.

³⁶ The school was founded by the Protestant reformer Johannes Bugenhagen (1485 – 1558), a close friend of Martin Luther and a towering figure in the Reformation in Northern Germany and Scandinavia.

³⁷ For most of his professional life, Fabricius taught at the *Gymnasium illustre* in Hamburg, the school H. S. Reimarus attended as a pupil, and where he eventually returned as a teacher. Fabricius collected and provided commentaries on early non-canonical Jewish and Christian writings, paving the way for modern enquiry into the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: see Erik Petersen, *Johann Albert Fabricius: en Humanist i Europa* (2 vols.), Copenhagen: Kongelige Bibliotek, Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 1998.

³⁸ See Talbet, Introduction, p. 2

³⁹ Reimarus was just twenty-two when he became adjunct to the philosophy faculty (see *ibid*, p. 2). In 1719 he became a full member.

⁴⁰ Reimarus's greatest publishing achievement in his lifetime was really a monument to the ongoing influence of his mentor: an edition of works by the Roman historian Lucius Cassius Dio Cocceianus, a project initiated by his deceased father in law: Reimarus (ed.) *Dio Cassius*, Hamburg, 1737.

⁴¹ Reimarus's insistence on rationality in matters of religion, as he understood it, was made plain in *Die Vornehmsten Wahrheiten der Natürlichen Religion* (1766), where Reimarus went public with his skepticism regarding miracles. It was the most commercially successful book in his lifetime, quickly translated into English: *The Principal Truths of Natural Religion Defended and Illustrated, in Nine Dissertations*, R Wynne (trans.), London: B. Law, 1766. In terms of Reimarus's attitude to Christianity, the text reveals more by what it does not say: the religion warrants just one mention by name, albeit a positive one (p. 460).

⁴² See Talbet, Introduction, pp. 6 – 7.

Gottes,⁴³ which he circulated among friends during his later years.⁴⁴ Fearing the repercussions of such an aggressive assault on the Christian faith, Reimarus refrained from publishing his theological *magnum opus*, but his daughter's acquaintance with Lessing and the agreement they reached⁴⁵—whereby Lessing would serve as his literary executor—meant that the *Apologie* would have a very different fate than that enjoyed by other underground classics of eighteenth-century religious polemic:⁴⁶ some of the contents of the *Apologie* would eventually take their place in the canon of European contributions to biblical criticism. But this canonical status would have to wait.

As noted already, the *Fragments* made a significant impact at the time of their publication, but, as with many other works of vituperative religious skepticism, any initial light was lost in the dark clouds of rage generated by such a polemical approach: the sound and fury of such texts are often heightened by an intemperate and obfuscating rush to rebuttal.⁴⁷ It didn't help that the *Fragments* were anonymous: anonymity may have had a certain gimmicky appeal at first, but, when anonymity was combined with a scornful attitude towards the subject matter, the work in question lent itself to being dismissed as highfalutin mischief making, the work of a bitter soul, perhaps even a madman, projecting his own warped imagination onto key figures in the history of a religion he was determined, for whatever idiosyncratic reasons, to discredit.⁴⁸ When the

⁴³ Apology or Defence for the Rational Worshippers of God. The irony that a supposedly secularising historical study of Jesus and Christian origins formed part of a massive work of apologetics (albeit non-Christian) is often ignored, but not in this study.

⁴⁴ See Brown, *Jesus*, p. 2.

⁴⁵ His daughter, Elise, was a notable woman of learning in her own right: see Almut Spalding, *Elise Reimarus (1735–1805), the Muse of Hamburg. A Woman of the German Enlightenment*, Königshausen & Neumann: Würzburg, 2005.

⁴⁶ For insights into the production, printing and influence of clandestine (or banned) works and their influence during the Enlightenment, see the seminal Ira O Wade, *The Clandestine Organization and Diffusion of Philosophic Ideas in France from 1700 to 1750*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938; Margaret C Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1991, chaps. 3 – 5; and Israel, *Radical*, chap. 36. In relation to the German context specifically, see Spalding, *Seize the Book*; and Muslow, *Untergrund*.

⁴⁷ Leading the charge for obfuscation was the Lutheran minister and scholar Johann M Goeze: venting his fury on the publisher of the *Fragments* (Lessing) Goeze argued that if these texts were to be published at all, they should have been issued in Latin, thereby making them inaccessible to the theologically corruptible masses (see Brown, *Jesus*, p. 7). Goeze's writings against Lessing are contained in no less than three volumes: Erich Schmidt (ed.), *Goezes Streitschriften gegen Lessing*, Stuttgart, 1893. The issues raised by Lessing's publication of the *Fragments* were also discussed over many years in the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, one of the most influential periodicals during the *Aufklärung*.

⁴⁸ This seems to have been the English intellectual experience in the wake of the so called 'deist controversy'. As we will see in later chapters, radical writers operating in England made important contributions to biblical criticism, and, while the polemical nature of much of their work initially provoked some intellectually robust and creative responses, it was followed by the rise of a Wesleyan sensibility which marginalised the rational dimension of theology in favour of felt experience; as such, the genuine intellectual challenges posed was forgotten along with their sometimes gratuitous and ultimately self-defeating provocations (see, Baird, *Deism to Tubingen*, p. 57).

intellectual rehabilitation of Reimarus began, it was largely due to the historical imagination judged to be at work in the later *Fragments* in an appreciative evaluation by one of the most controversial historical Jesus scholars of the nineteenth century, David Frederick Strauss (1808 – 1874).⁴⁹ But it was not until the early twentieth century that Reimarus received the stamp of approval which would enshrine him in the history of New Testament criticism, when he featured as one of the principal characters in the greatest story ever told about the discipline.

3. Jesus, the *Fragmentenstreit* and the European Enlightenment

Readers who are familiar with the history of New Testament studies may be puzzled by a study of Enlightenment perspectives on Jesus which takes Reimarus as its last major contributor, and with good reason. As indicated in the Introduction, surveys of the place of Jesus in modern intellectual history have tended to focus on the project of historical reconstruction, and the classic account of the origins and first phase of that project is Albert Schweitzer's *Reimarus zu Wrede* (1906), in which Reimarus emerges as the great innovator. As I have already stressed, however, this historical critique of the Gospels was part of a much larger theological project by its author: a project at once historical, moral and political-theological. Schweitzer acknowledges the other *Fragments* in his survey, but his understanding of Reimarus's interests with respect to Jesus is even narrower than the one exhibited by Strauss more than forty years earlier: Strauss tried to contextualise Reimarus's study of Jesus through an examination of an existing copy of the *Apologie*, and by reading Reimarus's work in relation to some very general notions of eighteenth-century thought;⁵⁰ Schweitzer, on the other hand, conceived of Reimarus's study of Jesus as the opening salvo in a tradition of scholarship invented out of whole cloth by Reimarus himself. Neither Strauss nor Schweitzer offer adequate appreciations of the conditions which created the *Fragmentenstreit* and launched the quest for the historical Jesus. Where might we look for such an account?

Recent studies of the history of European thought have located the origins of many of the most radical impulses of what is sometimes called the 'late' or 'high' Enlightenment in a much earlier period of intellectual ferment, and in different national

⁴⁹ See Strauss, *Hermann Samuel Reimarus und seine Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*, Leipzig: FA Brockhaus, 1862.

⁵⁰ They include such wild generations as, 'All positive religions without exception are works of deception: that was the opinion that the eighteenth-century really cherished within its heart, even if it did not always pronounce it as frankly as Reimarus' (Strauss, 'Herman Samuel Reimarus and His Apology', in Talbert [ed], *Fragments*, pp. 44 – 57: 44).

Chapter One

contexts, especially England and the Netherlands. My account will be constructed in light of these developments in historiography. I want to situate Reimarus's contribution to the critical study of Jesus within the context of the historical, moral and political-theological preoccupations of writers across Europe since the early seventeenth century. The task for my next chapter is to elucidate these thematic preoccupations, and their relationship to prior and subsequent intellectual history.

CHAPTER TWO

Jesus in History, Morality and Political-Theology

1. History

Although this entire thesis is a study in the history of ideas, there is a two-fold historical dimension to the study I would like to foreground here: 1) my thesis concerns Enlightenment efforts to illuminate Jesus as a historical figure; and 2) it also concerns how those efforts stand in relation to the research tradition as a whole—in relation to the historical study of Jesus as it has developed since the Enlightenment.

(i) Jesus as a Figure of History

What do we mean when we speak of 'the historical Jesus'? The phrase, as N. T. Wright has observed, 'is sometimes used in a broad sense to refer to Jesus as he actually was (whether or not we can know anything about him thus), and sometimes to refer to Jesus as he can be reconstructed by historians working within a particular frame of reference (whether or not this does justice to how Jesus actually was).'¹ My focus will be on the second of these senses: the intellectual 'frame of reference' in which H. S. Reimarus and his predecessors wrote is central to my enquiry. It is worth noting, however, that most of the scholars who undertook the project of reconstruction prior to the twentieth century—with its greater emphasis on methodical self-examination—were confident that the picture they were offering was 'Jesus as he actually was'.

Part II of this study is concerned with the emergence of those modes of enquiry which have sought to represent Jesus as a human figure of ancient history, rather than (or in addition to) a figure for theological devotion. I argue that the Medieval and Renaissance reorientation towards the human (incarnational) Jesus and the rise of modern historical studies of Jesus can be located on the same trajectory in European thought, a trajectory given impetus by a cluster of historical, intellectual and socio-political phenomena, which created a paradigm shift in the way many intellectuals conceptualised the Bible and its major figures. Into this paradigm stepped a number of writers, many of them with heterodox or heretical leanings, who began to reimagine the figure of Jesus from a perspective infused with an emerging historical-critical consciousness. In reviewing some of the most notable literature on this topic, and offering two additional chapters, I supply

¹ Wright, 'Quest for the Historical Jesus', in *ABD* (vol. 3), pp. 796 – 802: 797.

my own answer to the question of which intellectual trends, and which individual writers, need to be highlighted when we consider the context for Reimarus's famous intervention on the question of Jesus and Christian origins.

(ii) *The Historical Study of Jesus as a Research Tradition: Footnotes to Schweitzer?*

In keeping with other disciplines in the humanities, the historical study of Jesus and Christian origins has a reflexive tendency. Even within this general academic context, however, the Quest seems acutely aware of its own disciplinary history, or at least some version of it. Quite apart from the pedagogical imperatives for scholars to bring order to a long and complex tradition of enquiry, there are moral, social and political reasons for continually taking into account the history of the Quest, many of which centre on the chequered history of Western scholarship on the Jewish context for Christian origins. The proximity of the Holocaust, and the memory of centuries of persecution of Jews at the hands of Christians, have helped ensure that the fear of anti-Semitism hangs over the investigation of Jewish history, and its relationship to other ethnic and religious traditions.² The causes and consequences of the Holocaust, and the controversy which engulfs debate over the modern State of Israel are perhaps unrivalled as incendiary contemporary discourses on Jewish history, but the field of ancient religious history certainly warrants a mention in this context.³ The historical study of Jesus is perhaps the most culturally sensitive sub discipline of a whole area of enquiry (Christian origins) which is shot through with cultural sensitivities: the critical investigation of the life and mission of Jesus, a first-century Palestinian Jew who is nevertheless the heart and soul of the Christian religion. But there are also internal reasons for the reflexivity of this discipline.

² New Testament studies hit moral and intellectual rock bottom when the discipline was briefly infected with Nazi ideology during the 1930s and 1940s; its pernicious effects on the study of Jesus are recounted in Heschel's *Aryan Jesus*. A trend in New Testament studies gathered momentum in the 1970s, whereby prominent scholars focussed on forms of Palestinian Judaism, during the Roman period, and located Christian origins within that matrix. This is rightly seen as an important corrective to the anachronistic (sometimes racist) Christian conceptions of Judaism which blighted some earlier scholarship, although perhaps the most influential study of its kind did not focus on Jesus at all, but on the apostle Paul: Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, London: SCM Press, 1977. On the other hand, a sometimes zealous emphasis within the discipline on the *Jewishness* of Jesus—a fact no scholar of any credibility denies—has attracted critical attention from some commentators, who have suggested that modern cultural identities are at play in this unnecessarily belligerent insistence on Jesus' Jewish roots (often narrowly conceived), constituting possible impediments to historical understanding (see Arnal's *Symbolic Jesus*).

³ In truth, contemporary debates about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict cannot be neatly distinguished from questions about the history of ancient Palestine and that of the Jewish people: for many Jews and Christians, the legitimacy of the State of Israel is inextricably linked to a theological understanding of the Jewish peoples' relationship to a land still under dispute. The overly simplified debate between so called 'biblical minimalists' and 'biblical maximalists' is of interest beyond the academy precisely because the historical veracity of the Old Testament is held by many to be crucial to the legitimacy of modern Israel.

The historical study of Jesus is often presented as coming in waves: discrete episodes marked by progress and stagnation—‘First Quest’,⁴ ‘New Quest’,⁵ ‘Third Quest’.⁶ Wright has helped to cement this structure within the academy, and popularise it further afield. The model has not won universal acceptance, however, not least because there is a substantive, interpretive dimension to this classification, rather than a purely periodic one. One critic of the model, J. D. Crossan, has complained that the whole structure creates an impression of (premature) victor’s justice, with Wright charting the recent history and progress of a discipline in which he has a vested interest in the success of one of the approaches he reviews: Wright is a prominent member of the Third Quest tradition of scholarship, and, as Crossan wryly observes, ‘In Indo-European folklore, the third quest is always the successful one.’⁷ This periodic structure seems to me to possess a certain heuristic value for scholars and students who are trying to bring order to the vast body of literature on the subject, but it is only one of many ways that the history of scholarship could be conceptualised, and its dominance may sometimes impede our appreciation of

⁴ The First Quest is usually presented as beginning with the publication of Reimarus's *Von dem Zwecke* (1778), but there is an almost equally common (and erroneous) view that this was effectively killed off for decades by Schweitzer's *Reimarus zu Wrede* in 1906 (see Powell, *Jesus Debate*, p. 24).

⁵ In keeping with this research tradition's fondness for eureka moments, the so called New Quest is often traced back to a lecture by the New Testament scholar and theologian Ernst Käsemann on 23 Oct. 1953, given to a group of academic alumni who had studied under Rudolf Bultmann (see Powell, *Jesus Debate*, p. 25). Käsemann argued that an intellectually satisfying Christian theology had to be based on secure historical foundations, and, although he held that the project of writing anything approaching a *life* of Jesus was ill conceived, a historical foundation for his ministry could be found. On both counts, this can be seen as a reaction against a view closely associated with Bultmann, who was skeptical about our capacity to recover significant data about the historical Jesus, and skeptical about its theological importance. For an English version of the aforementioned lecture, see Käsemann, 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus', in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, W. J. Montague (trans.), Naperville, Ill: Alec R Allenson, 1964, pp. 15 – 47. Käsemann's intervention is sometimes construed as an attempt to place necessary historical limits on the freedom of theological construction, in the wake of the ‘Arian Jesus’ outrage (see Powell, *Jesus Debate*, pp. 25 – 26). The New Quest was particularly concerned to authenticate the sayings of Jesus through the strict application of historical criteria designed to isolate the voice of Jesus, a methodical procedure which has proved very influential, and can be credited to, amongst others, Norman Perrin (see Perrin's *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus*, New York: Harper & Row, 1967.)

⁶ The Third Quest suggests a chronological sequence, and successive bursts of research; things are not that simple, however, with some scholars identifying the Third Quest with a particular methodological approach and thematic emphasis. The concept of a Third Quest seems to have been coined by Wright in ‘Towards a Third Quest? Jesus Then and Now’, *ARC*, vol. 10, 1982, pp. 20 – 27. In this and other publications, Wright has tracked the progress of a body of twentieth-century scholarship which has been less concerned with determining the authenticity of Jesus’ saying, relying instead on our increased knowledge and understanding of Second Temple Judaism in order to produce a historically plausible account of Jesus’ public life as reported in the Synoptic Gospels (the primary sources for scholars in this tradition), and to answer concrete historical questions: ‘What was Jesus’ intention, what was his relationship to his Jewish contemporaries, why did he die, and why did Christianity begin?’ ‘Quest’, p. 800). In the Third Quest, answers given to these questions are characterised by the attention they pay to the eschatological / apocalyptic outlook shared by many first-century Palestinian Jews, including Jesus (see Powell, *Jesus Debate*, pp. 29, 184 – 186).

⁷ Crossan, ‘What Victory? What God?’ (review Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*: vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, London: SPCK; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 50.3, 1997, pp. 345 – 358: 346.

the tradition.⁸ There are probably a number of reasons why the Quest is conceived in this way,⁹ but we can certainly count among them the continuing influence of one of the undisputed classics of the genre: Albert Schweitzer's *Reimarus zu Wrede*.

A magnificent work of intellectual and disciplinary history, *Reimarus zu Wrede* is characterised by its own dramatic peaks and troughs, and a predilection for definitive historical markers. For more than a century, this book has defined the first flourish of modern historical-critical engagement with Jesus, and, although Wilhelm Wrede is ostensibly the last major character in Schweitzer's narrative, it is Schweitzer himself who steals his own show with a forceful recommendation of an apocalyptic (and anti-modern) vision of the historical Jesus.

To suggest that the historical study of Jesus in the twentieth century and beyond has been little more than a set of footnotes to the work of one man may seem excessive. It is a modest proposal, however, when compared with Alfred North Whitehead's remarkable (or notorious) judgement that, 'The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.'¹⁰ Moreover, my definition of the 'work of Schweitzer' is rather broader than the reader may think: in this context, I am not referring to the individual and distinctive contribution Schweitzer made to understanding the historical figure of Jesus; I am referring to the mass of quite distinct scholarship from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century which Schweitzer digested, synthesized and imagined as a single intellectual project with its own momentum, its own heroes and villains, and its own triumphant hypotheses. I do not mean to argue that no one realized that the historical investigation of Jesus was a live research project before Schweitzer brought it to their attention, but, as Wright reminds us, it is a mistake to imagine that all participating scholars were trying to do exactly the same thing: 'To him belongs the credit for seeing quite disparate "lives of Jesus" as, in a sense, a single movement, which in his own work he drew together and attempted to round off.'¹¹ It may be that the major writers whom Schweitzer profiles would all have emerged as canonical figures in the history of scholarship on the strength of their own

⁸ See Fernando Bermejo, 'The Fiction of the Three Quests': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Historical Paradigm', *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2009, pp. 211 – 253.

⁹ One reason may be that influential histories of the Quest have tended to be written by scholars working in the main centres of New Testament studies—German universities in the early and mid-twentieth-century; Anglo-American Universities in the late twentieth century—and so the important phases of historical Jesus studies tend to be seen in terms of the best work produced by scholars working in those settings, while work in other contexts is routinely ignored.

¹⁰ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929, p. 39.

¹¹ Wright, 'Quest', p. 797.

work: some undoubtedly would, and a number of them were famous (or at least infamous) in their own lifetimes. Nevertheless, it is no exaggeration to say that the shadow of nineteenth-century scholarship, which has hung over later work in the field, is seen, in large part, through the prism of Schweitzer's own assessment of the tradition. And although most of the period of intellectual history covered by Schweitzer's survey lies outside the primary focus of this study, I will begin each part with a discussion of some aspect of the intellectual tradition he chronicled. The rationale for this is as follows.

When surveying historical studies of Jesus, it is common place to find parallels drawn between nineteenth-century portraits—the main focus of Schweitzer's study—and those produced by later scholars. Sometimes these parallels are merely suggested to show continuity between different generations of scholarship;¹² on other occasions, they are suggested with unmistakable polemical intent.¹³ It is one of the contentions of this study that some of the trends in nineteenth-century interpretation, which seem to be continuously revisited by later writers, are actually prefigured in seventeenth and early eighteenth-century criticism.

2. Morality

(i) *Jesus as Moralist*

The moral teachings and persona of Jesus have attracted considerable attention from intellectuals in the modern era, and, with some notable exceptions,¹⁴ that attention has

¹² See *ibid.*, p. 797, where Wright identifies similarities between the use of myth by Strauss and Bultmann, and the eschatological readings of Schweitzer and Sanders.

¹³ The fault lines drawn by Schweitzer were everywhere apparent in the spate of works on the historical Jesus produced towards the end of the previous century; for instance, when Crossan contrasts his own sapiental understanding of Jesus' preaching (ethical eschatology) with rival apocalyptic readings, he bypasses more recent scholars who have proposed such a model and uses Schweitzer as his point of departure (see *Historical Jesus*, p. 227). By expounding a moral reading of Jesus' eschatological mission, Crossan implicitly identifies himself with what is often known as the 'liberal' scholarship of the nineteenth century, which was also hostile to apocalyptic readings. This *basic* level of interpretive continuity between Crossan and the nineteenth-century liberal tradition has been used against him by critics, such as James D G Dunn, who regard Crossan as belonging to a discredited scholarly tradition: see Dunn's *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed*, London: SPCK, 2005, p 62. No one has contributed more to the perceived discrediting of this liberal tradition than Schweitzer.

¹⁴ The moral standing of Christianity has been compromised in the eyes of many modern observers by virtue of the atrocities committed in its name, but there has been a tendency among intellectuals to characterise episodes of Christian barbarism as a betrayal of the religion's highest values, and certainly a betrayal of the teachings of Jesus. Friedrich Nietzsche represents perhaps the most powerful reaction against this tendency by a modern writer in such works as *Götzen-Dämmerung* (1889), *Der Antichrist* (1895) and *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887); ignoring the misdeeds of the faithful, he attacked the moral substance of the whole Christian value system, including the values espoused by Jesus: see *Twilight of the Idols; The Anti-Christ*, R. J. Hollingdale (trans.), Michael Tanner (intro.), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990; and *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*, Douglas Smith (trans.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

tended to be positive.¹⁵ Ethics is a shared concern of Christian and non-Christian thinkers, and the example of Jesus is frequently cited as one area of common ground between warring moral visions, both religious and secular.¹⁶ Some New Testament specialists warn against an overemphasis on the morality of Jesus, arguing that a historical conception which attempts to understand Jesus on his own terms cannot simply focus on the ethical dimension of his teaching without compromising our overall understanding: the distinctions we make today between ethics and theology, religion and politics, were not at home in first-century Palestinian Judaism.¹⁷ Nevertheless, some of the most notable historical reconstructions of Jesus in recent times do push ethics to the fore in their accounts of his public ministry.¹⁸ This follows in a tradition established in the Enlightenment, and is now so much a part of the furniture of modern perspectives on the Bible that two sharp eyed observers of the discipline have identified multiple 'Quests for the Moral Jesus',¹⁹ highlighting the ethical priorities in ostensibly historical-critical projects.

Although Reimarus's reconstruction of Jesus is notorious for a general lack of reverence for his subject, in so far as he finds Jesus a praiseworthy figure, and he often does, it is within the context of moral-theology. How did this fascination with the morality of Jesus arise? The reasons why Jesus' ethics are prioritised today will vary from scholar to

¹⁵ Jesus' ethical teaching has long been celebrated outside the confines of traditional Christian theological circles: some of the greatest statesmen of modern times, from Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin to Winston Churchill (none of whom were noted for their orthodoxy), have insisted on the pre-eminence of Christian morality when that morality is understood in terms of the example of Jesus: on Jefferson and Churchill see Sanders, *Historical Figure*, pp. 6 – 8; on Franklin, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*, New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 193. Jefferson actually made his own controversial foray into New Testament studies: between February and March 1804, he took copies of the New Testament and cut out passages from the Gospels which contained Jesus' moral teachings—discarding any references to the miraculous or signs of Christian dogma—and pasted his chosen fragments onto octavo sheets of paper under the title *The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth*: see Dickenson W Adams (ed.), *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson (Second Series): Jefferson's Extracts from the Gospels*, Ruth W Lester (assistant ed.), Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 27. Returning to his project years later, Jefferson produced a more ambitious polyglot version; the work was published posthumously by the US Congress as *Jefferson's Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth Extracted Textually from the Gospels in Greek, Latin, French and English*, Washington DC: US GPO, 1904.

¹⁶ From Spinoza to Gandhi, many non-Christian thinkers have talked about Jesus' ethics in the highest possible terms. Gandhi's views on Jesus, and on Christianity more generally, are collected in Ellsberg, (ed.), *Gandhi on Christianity*. More recently, the zoologist and renowned populariser of Darwinian evolution, Richard Dawkins—perhaps the world's most famous atheist—has even tried to co-opt Jesus for his Godless moral vision: see 'Atheists for Jesus', *Richard Dawkins. Net: A Clear Thinking Oasis* (on-line), 11 Apr. 2006, accessed 08 January 2010: <http://richarddawkins.net/articles/20>.

¹⁷ See Sanders, *Historical Figure*, p. 8.

¹⁸ This is certainly true of Crossan's portrait in *Historical Jesus*, and of the portrait produced by his senior partner, Robert Funk, at the Jesus Seminar (Crossan was vice chairman): see Funk's *A Credible Jesus*, Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2002. The scholars involved in these projects would insist, however, that it was the ethical teachings of Jesus which emerged as the most authentic material in the tradition after the careful application of historical criteria.

¹⁹ Stephen D Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011, p. 64.

scholar, but the original ethical turn in modern perspectives on Jesus can be illuminated when seen within the context of shifting patterns in Western moral philosophy and theology.

(ii) *A Problem as Old as the Creation (of Western Philosophy)*

On one popular reading of intellectual history, ever since Plato (c. 427 – 347 BCE) bequeathed his *Euthyphro* dialogue to the Western philosophical tradition,²⁰ theological morality has had to confront the following challenge: Is something morally good because God wills it, or does God will something because it is morally good?²¹ If the theist accepts the former, then the nature of moral goodness would seem to be defined by a will which could in principle command anything. If someone accepts the latter, however, moral goodness would seem to depend on something other than the will of God, thereby calling into question the essential relationship between morality and the divine will. Neither option seems favourable to theistic ethics. The first option allows for the possibility that moral laws could be the result of arbitrary diktat, and, to add a narrative quality to what might seem like an abstract philosophical conundrum, there is ample evidence in the scriptures of the Abrahamic religions to suggest that obedience to the will of God *is* the highest good, regardless of the perverse and destructive nature of particular commands.²² The second option either assumes a metaphysical source of morality other than God's will—which clashes with one of the traditional conceptions of the deity—or it assumes a natural source, and thus calls into question the relevance of God to morality.

The *Euthyphro* dialogue is an interesting case study in reception history, not least because the philosophical problem it is most closely associated with is almost certainly not contained within the text, where Plato's focus is on neither the will of God nor moral goodness.²³ Notwithstanding this textual anomaly, there is little doubt that the dialogue has furnished a philosophical challenge to theological ethics, which is debated to this day.

²⁰ See Plato, *Euthyphro*, Ian Walker (intro.), Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984.

²¹ Plato actually poses the challenge thus: 'Is the holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved?' (*Euthyphro*, p. 27). Plato rejects the first definition proposed to him because it does not say anything about the οὐσία (essence) of ὁσιόν (holiness or piety): it is indicative of the kind of things the gods favour, not the common factor which compels their favour. Much of the argument in the dialogue concerns religious rituals commonly taken to be pleasing to the gods, but the problem for subsequent philosophical theology has tended to be seen in ethical terms.

²² Biblical examples abound, but familiar ones would include the near sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham at the behest of God (see Genesis 22); the merciless policy that God instructs the Israelites to adopt towards towns who dared to offer resistance to their military takeovers (see Deuteronomy 20:10–20); and the divinely ordained violence against the Amalekites (see 1 Samuel 15:1–3).

²³ For an entertaining and scholarly debunking of the dilemma from a Plato specialist, see Timothy Chappell, 'Euthyphro's 'Dilemma', Socrates' Daimonion and Plato's God', in Harriet A Harris (ed.), *Good, Goodness and Philosophy*, Farnham, Surrey / Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011, pp. 63 – 85.

But what bearing does the *Euthyphro* dilemma have on the subject of Enlightenment perspectives on Jesus? Concerned as it is with the fundamental relationship between God and morality, I take the *Euthyphro* dilemma to be the Mother Goddess of all rational challenges to theistic ethics, and the progenitor of a number of independent daughters who have presented their own distinctive moral challenges to Christian theism, particularly those centring on the character of God's commands in scripture, and on the supposedly providential reign of God. These problems have been felt more or less acutely by thinkers in different periods of history, depending on their lived experience, and the intellectual and social pressures characteristic of the age. In the wake of the Reformation, these problems were felt very acutely indeed: socially and politically, there were the European wars of religion which set Christian against Christian throughout the continent, and even in times of peace, members of minority denominations often lived in fear under intolerant regimes; theologically, there were the doctrines of predestination and double predestination, which raised questions about the moral character of God and the rationale for living a just life. It was in this historical context that a recognisably modern biblical criticism emerged, so it is hardly surprising that moral-theological considerations are everywhere apparent in these studies, bringing together figures as seemingly disparate as Desiderius Erasmus and Benedict Spinoza in a shared appreciation of the unifying moral figure of Christ (see Chapter 8). Erasmus and Spinoza were both inclined to separate Jesus and the Bible from philosophical disputation in their visions of true (ethical) religion, but the philosophical context should not be ignored when we try to understand the rise of the ethical Christ.

(iii) The 'Triumph' of Moral-Theological Rationalism

Theological voluntarism, with its emphasis on the absolute sovereign power of the divine will, remained strong in Calvinist and another Reformed circles of the seventeenth century, and it is often closely associated with some early modern giants of natural philosophy, not least René Descartes and Isaac Newton.²⁴ Within moral discourse, however, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed a pronounced reaction against the sovereignty of God's will in dictating the nature of moral goodness, and a shift towards the idea that moral goodness is co-extensive with divine being. Many of the most

²⁴ One substantial historiographical tradition links theological voluntarism with the rise of empirical science; for an affirmation of that tradition against recent criticism, see John Henry, 'Voluntarist Theology at the Origins of Modern Science: A Response to Peter Harrison', *History of Science*, vol. 7, pt. 1, no. 155, Mar. 2009, pp. 79 – 113.

influential thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries implicitly answered the question posed by the *Euthyphro* dialogue by coming down, very firmly, on one horn of that infamous dilemma. Some were more explicit, however, and brought this ancient philosophical text into the heart of public and political discourse.

On the 31 March 1647, in the midst of the English civil war, the Cambridge Hebraist and philosopher Ralph Cudworth delivered a sermon to the House of Commons, Westminster. In this address, Cudworth followed Erasmus and anticipated Spinoza in stressing the centrality, in matters of religion, of obedience to the rules of moral virtue made manifest in the teachings of Christ: a simple, moral piety, over against the intricate and irresolvable squabbles of theologians. But Cudworth could not leave speculative conceptions of God to one side in his advocacy of Christocentric moral religion. Cudworth had studied at the traditionally Calvinist College of Emmanuel, where students and fellows of his generation had spent years wrestling with the theological controversies associated with their Reformed tradition. For Cudworth, and many like him, that tradition was home to an extreme form of voluntarism which was the enemy within Christian theology, and with which there could be no compromise:

Now, may I be bold to add that God is therefore God, because he is the highest and most perfect good, and good is not therefore good because God out of an arbitrary will would have it so... Virtue and holiness in creatures, as Plato well discourses in his *Euthyphro*, are not therefore good because God loves them and will have them counted such, but rather God therefore loves them because they are in themselves simply good.²⁵

Irrespective of any problems this view poses for the pre-eminence of God in the moral domain, it was embraced enthusiastically by most of the writers considered in this study. Significantly, as the last example shows, this firm rejection of voluntarism manifested itself in the work of biblical critics in the Protestant tradition, who dominated critical scholarship in the early modern period. These writers tended towards a moral rationalism (or intellectualism) in their moral-theology which could be arrived at through a revival of Platonism (exemplified by Cudworth), or through the Christian rationalist and natural law tradition most closely associated with Thomas Aquinas, whose direct and indirect influence was carried into the early modern period in mainland Europe by later

²⁵ Ralph Cudworth, *A Sermon Preached Before the Honourable House of Commons at Westminster, March 31, 1646*, in Charles Taliaferro and Alison J Tepley (eds.), *Pelikan* (pref.), *Cambridge Platonist Spirituality*, New York / Mahwah, NJ.: 2006, pp. 55 – 94: 69 – 70.

scholastics, especially those associated with the School of Salamanca, such as Francisco Suarez;²⁶ by natural law philosophers, such as Hugo Grotius;²⁷ by rationalist metaphysicians, such as Christian Wolff,²⁸ and by writers on politics and jurisprudence in the English speaking world, from Richard Hooker to John Locke.²⁹

One consequence of the rationalisation of theological ethics during the Enlightenment was that, precisely because rationality has a history (regardless of whether or not the Enlightenment *philosophes* acknowledged it), the character of God's goodness became so closely identified with whatever seemed good to educated men of right reason during that historical time and place, that anything attributed to God which contradicted those moral intuitions had to be false or imperfectly understood, hence a certain urgency is evident in the project to vindicate the moral character of God. Theodicy in the Christian tradition is perhaps as old as the religion itself,³⁰ but, in the early modern period, with religious skepticism and anticlericalism on the rise, this discourse could not be left to Churchmen of the establishment, as if it was just one philosophical conundrum among others to be pondered by ecclesiastical elites (preferably in Latin).³¹ With leading intellectuals within the Church hierarchy increasingly identified with the very religious, social and political problems which had to be overcome, the question of the nature and justice of God and the reasonableness of his relationship to the world would be thrown

²⁶ See Paul E Sigmund, 'Law and Politics', in Norman Kretzman and Elanore Stump (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 217 – 231: 228. Suarez was the most prominent in the seventeenth century, but the revival of Thomism was well underway before then, in the thought of scholars associated in different ways with the University of Salamanca, in Spain, against the backdrop of Renaissance Humanism and the rise of modern natural philosophy. Francisco de Vitoria (c. 1486 – 1546) is often regarded as the father of the movement. For an overview of the school, its origins and legacy, see Andre Azevedo Alves and Jose M Moreira, *The Salamanca School*, New York / London: Continuum, 2010.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

²⁸ See Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, pp. 53 – 56.

²⁹ See Sigmund, 'Law and Politics', p. 228.

³⁰ The term 'theodicy' appears to have been coined by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in his 1710 *Essais: or Theodicy: Essays in the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951. I am using the word 'theodicy' (from the French *théodicée*) in the literal and broad sense of 'justifying God', from the Greek θεός (God) and δίκη (justice); understood in this way, Paul is the earliest known Christian practitioner: in Romans 9–11, for instance, he tries to reconcile God's election of Israel, to a unique covenantal relationship, with the idea that God has now granted salvation to *anyone* who has faith in Christ.

³¹ As mentioned in Chapter One, one of the complaints levelled at Lessing (by Goeze) during the *Fragmentenstreit* was that he had published in German, the language of the common people (*Volk*). This was by no means an isolated incident of anxiety, prompted by a controversial theological topic being discussed in the vernacular. One of the features of the early Enlightenment was the rise of French as the new lingua franca of European intellectual elites—to name but four significant figures, Descartes, Nicolas Malebranche, Pierre Bayle and Leibniz all wrote in French at one time or another. I discuss the rise of German and English as international languages of learning in later chapters.

open to new forms of discourse and to a different breed of intellectual.³² Nor was the question of the justice of God's relationship to the world the preserve of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*—the confident theological metaphysics of Leibniz in his (1710) *Essai*; the satirical response in Voltaire's (1759) *Candide*; or the modern Epicurean skepticism of David Hume in the *Dialogues* (1779)³³—it demanded a response from a wide range of writers, of different characters and intellectual temperaments, working in different literary genres. The problem of theodicy still loomed large in the final years of the eighteenth century, finding its way into the published reflections of the Enlightenment's most famous lover, and arguably its greatest memoirist.

In the Preface to his *Histoire de ma vie* (1797), Giacomo Casanova opens his account with a theological confession: an avowed Christian, 'not only a monotheist',³⁴ Casanova rejected outright 'the power of Destiny...a figment of the imagination which smacks of atheism',³⁵ having always 'counted upon his [God's] providence'.³⁶ And just as theodicy preoccupied the minds of European writers in the latter stages of the Enlightenment, it was there at its outset in the seventeenth century, well attested in John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), the stated aim of which is 'to justify the ways of God to men'.³⁷ The very idea that God's ways required justification would have been dismissed *tout court* by some of Milton's contemporaries, but, throughout the Enlightenment, so many forceful challenges were made to the goodness of the God of Christian theism that the question could not be ignored; moreover, in this extraordinary trial of the deity, some of the plaintiffs would call the centrepiece of Christian revelation as a material witness for

³² These discourses included poetry, most famously by Milton (see below); satirical novels, most famously Voltaire's *Candide*—see R. M. Adams (ed. & trans.), *Candide or Optimism: A New Translation*, New York: W. W. Norton and Co. 1966—which lampooned the theodicy of Leibniz; the memoirs of eighteenth-century adventurers and romancers such as Casanova (see below); and in tightly argued, often polemical, philosophical / theological pamphlets written in vigorous and penny plain English—the so called 'English deists.' I will highlight one explicit example: Thomas Chubb's *A Vindication of God's Moral Character*, London, 1726. Chubb was an example of the new kind of intellectual who was entering the arena of theological controversy: not only did Chubb write in English, he could do no other having had minimal formal education. Chubb is notable not merely as posing an unusual challenge to the dominance of intellectual discourse by economic and social elites, but as a challenge to the *raison d'être* of the European philosopher / theologian, since Chubb had no interest in producing intelligent defences of the orthodox positions of the religious tradition to which he was (loosely) affiliated: Church of England.

³³ See Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, J. M Bell (ed.), London, Penguin Books, pts ix – x.

³⁴ Giacomo Casanova, Preface to *History of My Life* (vol. 1 of 12), in *Volumes 1 & 2—Youth in Padua, Venice, Naples, Corfu, Milan*, William R Trask (trans.), Baltimore / London: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc: John Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp. 25 – 38: 25. Casanova refers critically to the 'doctrine of the Stoics' (p. 25): in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, theological concerns about fatalism were frequently expressed in conversation with either ancient philosophies (Stoicism, Epicureanism etc.) or Reformation theologies (especially Calvinism).

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 25.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 25.

³⁷ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Collected Poems of John Milton*, Antonia Till (intro.), Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1994, pp. 111 – 385: p.114.

the prosecution—the Bible.

Whereas Milton tried to offer a rationale for God's ways, some later writers abandoned any hope of rendering a biblically based Christian meta-narrative into rational and morally edifying terms. As we will see in Chapters Seven and Eight, the authenticity of revelation itself came to be judged by some writers in a piecemeal way against moral criteria—if apparent moral abominations were attributed to God, then they could be no part of authentic revelation. What impact did this moral-theological turn in religious discourse have on conceptions of Jesus during the Enlightenment? For orthodox Christians, if Jesus really was the highpoint of divine revelation, of God-incarnate, then, ethically speaking, he must be a moral being of the highest order, able to answer the charges of immorality or indifference which some might what to level at the deity. As we will see, most considered him equal to the challenge: most, but not all.

For dissenters from orthodoxy, Jesus became the most dangerous test case imaginable for an investigation of the Bible's moral-theological authority. When moral denunciations of Jesus came within a Christian cultural context, they were coextensive with repudiations of God. And in the materialism and moral egoism of Paul-Henri Thiry (1723 – 1789), the Baron d'Holbach, we find an atheistic attack which anticipates a cluster of moral arguments against the values of Jesus and primitive Christianity: from Friedrich Nietzsche in the nineteenth century,³⁸ and into our own time with the French philosopher Michel Onfray in his *Traité d'athéologie* (2005),³⁹ and one of the most celebrated English essayists of the last fifty years, Christopher Hitchens (1949 – 2011).⁴⁰ Unlike Reimarus, d'Holbach did publish his most combative writings on Jesus in his lifetime—*Histoire critique de Jésus-Christ, ou, analyse raisonnée des Evangiles* (c. 1770)—but even this naturalised Frenchman, and scourge of Christendom, would not allow such a work to

³⁸ d'Hollbach's 'offending' work was translated into English by the end of the eighteenth-century: *Ecce Homo! or a Critical Inquiry into the History of Jesus Christ, Being a Rational Analysis of the Gospels*, George Houston (trans.), London, 1799. The theme of 'slave morality', prominent in Nietzsche, is more than hinted at in d'Holbach's treatise (see pp. 136 – 137), where 'meekness', 'toleration' and 'moderation' are said to have been promoted by Jesus as the best way of ensuring the 'thriving' of men (the disciples) who were 'devoid of education' and in possession of 'repulsive manners'.

³⁹ See Michel Onfray, *Atheist Manifesto: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam*, Jeremy Leggatt (trans.), New York: Arcade Publishing, 2008. Here the Holbachian and Nietzschean complaint about the 'weakling's revenge' in Christianity's devious play for power is developed in relation to Paul (pp. 134 – 136). Onfray cites Holbach specifically in his trio of revered opponents of 'Moses, Jesus, Mohamed, and their religions of the book' (p. 39); the other two members of Onfray's 'unholy' trinity are Nietzsche and Ludwig Feuerbach.

⁴⁰ In *God is Not Great: Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve Books, 2007), Hitchens rails against the Gospels' supposed hostility to 'thrift, innovation, family life' (p. 118); over two centuries earlier, d'Holbach complained that the 'precept' to 'possess nothing' and 'think nothing of the morrow' would be 'prejudicial to families' (*Ecce Homo*, p. 146).

circulate under his own name.⁴¹ On Jesus, d'Holbach was something of an exception. Most writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from very different religious background, managed to find in Jesus a reflection of moral ideals to which they could subscribe, ideals which they found to be worthy of the will of God, a will manifest, however inadequately and inconsistently, in the Bible.

(iv) *The Enlightened Face of Jesus in the Well of Modernity*⁴²

Moral conceptions of Jesus in nineteenth-century New Testament scholarship, with all the anachronistic projects that often accompanied them, were well documented by Schweitzer,⁴³ but this was a period of intellectual history when the secularisation of European thought had deepened since the Enlightenment.⁴⁴ When reflecting on the scholarship surveyed by Schweitzer, Dennis Nineham notes that although many of those scholars

envisaged Jesus as basically a human being, they took it for granted that he was a *perfect* human being with the highest imaginable standards and values. In practice that was bound to mean the highest imaginable by nineteenth-century culture, or at any rate the particular representative of it who happened to be writing.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Born Paul Heinrich Dietrich in Edesheim (modern Germany), d'Holbach was raised and educated in France, going on to higher learning in the Netherlands (University of Leiden) where he acquired a sustained taste for convivial social intercourse: on his return to Paris, d'Holbach became as famous for his dinner parties as for his impiety. His anti-Christian sentiments were an open secret among associates, but d'Holbach was by no means carefree in his professions of faithlessness: along with the aforementioned *Histoire critique*, d'Holbach's other skeptical writing were initially published under pseudonyms. For a concise discussions of his life and work, see Michel LeBuff, 'Paul-Henri Thiry (Baron) d'Holbach' (revised edn), *SEP, Fall 2010*, accessed 14 Feb. 2012: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/holbach/>

⁴² It was the theologian George Tyrrell who coined this memorable metaphor for the kind of modern projections which have been a consistent feature of the Quest: in his response to a study by Adolf von Harnack, he wrote, 'The Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well' (*Christianity at the Crossroads*, London: Longman Greens, 1909, p. 49.) The Irish born Tyrrell converted to Catholicism from Anglicanism and joined the Jesuits, only to be stripped of his priestly powers and later excommunicated for a succession of clashes with the Vatican. His 'deep well' metaphor is often falsely attributed to Schweitzer: see Richard Holloway, Foreword to David Boulton, *Who on Earth was Jesus? The Modern Quest for the Jesus of History*, Winchester / Washington: O Books: John Hunt Publishing, 2008, pp. xiv – xv: xiv. One of the enduring appeals of this metaphor is that one can insert any number of different faces—representing different personality types or ideologies—into this image of the scholar peering into the well of ancient history.

⁴³ See Schweitzer, *Quest*, especially chaps. iv, xii– xvi, xx. . His most famous target here is the so called 'liberal' tradition of scholarship.

⁴⁴ See Owen Chadwick, *The Secularisation of The European Mind*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975. This highly respected study takes the nineteenth century as its focus, but we should be careful not to exaggerate secularisation even then; as Moxnes argues in his recent study, 'For the 'nineteenth-century authors of historical Jesus studies it seems more relevant to speak of a transfer of religious symbols, from Christ to the human Jesus, and of the political effects that this had in relation to citizenship and nations that were not yet secularized' (*Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, p. 202, n. 12).

⁴⁵ Dennis Nineham, Foreword to Schweitzer, *Quest: FCE*, pp. ix – xxvi: xvii. My own interest in the general subordination of the meaning of biblical texts to moral sentiments and political priorities—of which Jesus is a specific instance —was awakened by a paper given by Yvonne Sherwood at the University of Glasgow in 2006; her notion of a 'liberal' or 'Whig' perspective on the Bible, beginning in early modernity and

This moral emphasis in modern appraisals of Jesus begins long before the period Nineham refers to, and in a more thoroughly (or more traditionally) theological context: where Jesus' alleged human perfection was still seen, in some sense, as the embodiment of divine perfection. Nevertheless, the Enlightenment's perspectives on Christ—and he was generally referred to as Christ—reflected the moral priorities of the writers who offered their perspectives, just as nineteenth-century studies of the historical Jesus reflected the moral concerns of scholars. And in the Enlightenment, those moral priorities often had public and political implications.

3. Political Theology

(i) Religion 'Back' in the Public Square

Although the subject of 'public religions' was never really off the curriculum in the Western academy,⁴⁶ it seems clear that the terrorist attacks in the US on 11 Sep 2001—and the so called 'war on terror' which ensued—reinvigorated debate about public manifestations of religion in socio-political contexts,⁴⁷ and a number of writers have

continuing to influence contemporary discourse, is developed in 'Bush's Bible as a Liberal Bible (strange though that might seem)', *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts and Contemporary Worlds*, (2), 1, 2006, pp. 47 – 58.

⁴⁶ This phrase appears to have originated in José Casanova's *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

⁴⁷ Of particular note is the massive collection by Hent De Vries and Lawrence E Sullivan (eds.), *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post Secular World*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2006. Perhaps the most important recent work to analyse the rise of our reputedly secular age, taking into account religion at the level of private belief, philosophical argument and in the political sphere is Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, Mass / London: Harvard University Press, 2007. Israel's trilogy of books on the Enlightenment are more detailed work of history, with secularisation an important theme, but they lacks the temporal scope of Taylor's study, which is more effective at showing how intellectual features of our own age can be seen in much earlier periods. There has also been a spate of works, written for the mass market, which have been straightforwardly polemical in their stance towards religion and its cultural / political influence (see above for the works of Hitchens and Onfray). The catalyst for this early flurry in the English language was Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*, London: Bantam Press, 2006. Although all these books have different emphases, the common lines of argument are that belief in God, and other religious commitments, are either demonstrably false or highly improbable (with modern science presented as the antithesis and destroyer of faith), rendering all religious belief irrational, often dangerously so. Dawkins had considered writing the book in the 1990s, but he was advised against it by his literary agent. Dawkins specifically cites the US political context as a factor in him eventually receiving support to produce the book, following the transition from the Clinton presidency to that of George W Bush, with its 'feeling of an oppressive theocracy' (Dawkins, interview by Robert Piggott, *Newsnight*, BBC Two, 09 Aug 2009). These books, by the so called 'new atheists', have been a publishing phenomenon, but their critical reception has been extremely mixed. They have been countered by distinguished figures from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and religious (and non-religious) perspectives: from mathematics and the philosophy of science, John Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?*, London: Lion, 2007; from philosophy and history, John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, London: Penguin, 2008; from the Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate*: New Haven, Conn / London: Yale University Press, 2009; and from theology and history, David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.

announced the 'return of religion' or the 'turn to religion'.⁴⁸ The assumption that religion ever went away seems indicative of a socio-cultural myopia, whereby commentators have luxuriated in, or recoiled from, an imagined consensus on an ever widening secular order.⁴⁹ Some recent global studies of religion point towards an acute intellectual and geographic parochialism at work in those who have assumed, whether with joy or a heavy heart, that religion would cease to be a potent force as the scientific, technological and economic forces of modernity spread throughout an increasingly globalised world. Recent geo-political events have certainly helped to focus minds on those spheres of religious thought and practice which some thinkers had assumed, or hoped, could be safely ignored. These areas of thought and practice are often discussed under the broad rubric of 'political theology'. It is important to note, however, that 'political theology' is not just a trendy coping mechanism constructed by academics to try and make sense of an apparent upsurge in public religiosity: outside the brief history of the relatively secular West, the conceptual and practical alliance of theology and politics has been a mainstay of human history, of civilisation and barbarism.⁵⁰ This alliance permeated the intellectual disciplines, including biblical studies, throughout the period of European thought which constitutes the main focus on this study.

⁴⁸ On the renewed interest in religion in Western society, twinned with a critique of the 'new atheism', see Roger Scruton, 'The Return of Religion', *Axess Magazine* (on-line), No. 1, 2008, accessed 10 Dec 2009: <http://www.axess.se/magasin/english.aspx?article=220>; for a full study, see De Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*, Baltimore, Md / London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

⁴⁹ There have been other *cause célèbres* in the not too distant past, during which public intellectuals have been wrong footed by displays of theologically motivated political action (including violence). The fierce objections from millions in the Islamic community to the publication of Salman Rusddie's *The Satanic Verses* (London: Viking Press, Penguin, 1988) and the resulting fatwa issued by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, is one of the most significant examples of this phenomena from the late twentieth-century (see Daniel Pipes, *The Rushdie Affair: The Novel, the Ayatollah and the West*, New York: Birch Lane, 1990).

⁵⁰ Not that civilisation and barbarism are mutually exclusive, of course: empires or states are perfectly capable of civilised behaviour in some contexts (usually at home) but gratuitously destructive behaviour in others. Edward Gibbon (1737 – 1794) produced perhaps the most erudite study in modern times of 'public religions' and their relationship to 'civilisation and barbarism': *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (6 vols. in 3), David Womersley (ed.), London: Allen Lane, 1994. Gibbon's own judgements about Christianity may not have fared well with later historians, but the significance that Gibbon attributed to religion in the formation of political and intellectual cultures is being rediscovered by contemporary historians: on modern political history, see two wide ranging volumes by one of Europe's foremost historians of the Third Reich, Michael Burleigh's *Earthly Powers: Religion and Politics in Europe from the Enlightenment to the Great War*, London: HarperCollins, 2005; and *Sacred Causes: Religion and Politics from the European Dictators to Al Qaeda*, London: HarperPress, 2006. Other books, focussing on the history of ideas, would include Mark Lilla's *The Still Born God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West*, New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2007; David Jan Sorkin's *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna*, Princeton, New Jersey / Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008; and Michael Allen Gillespie's *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, Chicago, Ill / London: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

(ii) *Defining Political Theology*

'All political theology', writes Mark Lilla, 'depends on a picture, an image of the divine nexus between God, man, and world. For over a millennium the destiny of the West was shaped by the Christian imagine of a triune God ruling over a created cosmos and guiding men by means of revelation, inner conviction, and the natural order.'⁵¹ The lucidity and simplicity of this account does little to prepare a reader who wishes to become acquainted with the recent literature on political theology: they will find themselves confronted by a bewildering array of conceptual frameworks, historical points of departure and contemporary socio-political case studies.⁵² I will be travelling with a theoretically light set of working definitions. A review essay by Charles Taylor, one of the most powerful voices in current discussions of secularisation, has helped to shape my threefold typology:⁵³

1) 'Political theology exists where our normative political theory [or argument] depends directly on premises from Revelation',⁵⁴ such as theological insights drawn from sacred texts.

2) Political theology exists where normative political 'theory [or argument] depends on premises which are theological, even though not drawn (only) from Revelation', such as theological insights from the natural world.⁵⁵

3) Political theology exists when 'our whole thought about politics can be enframed by a view of God and his purposes, and their relation to human action in history, even though our normative thought doesn't derive directly from any theological premises, revealed or rationally arrived at',⁵⁶ just as a commitment to divine providence or destiny.

In summary, my understanding of political theology embraces arguments from scripture, arguments from natural theology, and a political worldview which presupposes some form of theological metaphysics.

⁵¹ Lilla, *Still Born God*, p. 55.

⁵² See De Vries and Sullivan (ed.), *Political Theologies*. The focus here is still predominately on the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

⁵³ These definitions arise in the course of Taylor's review of Lilla's *Still Born God*. They might be extrapolated from Lilla's account, but in a form of words which belong to Taylor, and with which he would seem to concur; these definitions are, in turn, modified by me: see Taylor, 'Two Books, Oddly Yoked Together', from *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Square: Social Science Research Council* (on-line), 24 Jan 2008, accessed 27 Sep 2009: <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2008/01/24/two-books-oddly-yoked-together/>

⁵⁴ Taylor, *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

(iii) *Jesus, Political-Theology and the Enlightenment*

It is clear to me that all three manifestations of political theology outlined above were apparent during the age of Enlightenment; moreover, they are evident in the work of figures often heralded as secularising political thinkers, figures of the so called 'radical Enlightenment', and figures who feature in the story I want to tell about early modern perspectives on Jesus. Jesus has been an important reference point for political thought and activism throughout the modern period: sometimes outside the realm of institutional democratic politics,⁵⁷ other times within;⁵⁸ sometimes he is cited as one among many inspirational examples from history, on other occasions he is invoked within the context of an explicitly Christian worldview.⁵⁹ The invocation of Jesus in the context of modern political discourse is liable to have some secular (even some Christian) thinkers grinding their teeth at the failure of their fellow citizens to learn the lessons of the past: the necessity of separate magisteria, but such invocations have deep roots in the Enlightenment. What is the significance of this for wider debates about the relationship between secularity, the Enlightenment and modernity? At the very least it raises questions for those, like Lilla, who have suggested that by the mid seventeenth-century, radical developments in political philosophy, instigated by Thomas Hobbes, brought about a 'great separation' in European political thought,⁶⁰ whereby a new political discourse, based purely on human interests, became detached from the theology of the continent's Christian past. Lilla is correct to say that a political philosophy which was less dependent on Christian theology began to emerge (or possibly re-emerge) during this

⁵⁷ The Christian faith of Martin Luther King, however unorthodox, and his theological-political discourse during the civil rights movement is extremely well documented; some of his key writings are collected in James Melvin Washington (ed.), *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*, Coretta Scott King (fore.), San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

⁵⁸ Prior to his election, former US president George W Bush was asked to name the political philosopher or thinker he most identified with. He nominated Jesus Christ. The significance of this answer was the subject of considerable scrutiny in the US: some commentators groaned at the presidential candidate's ignorance of intellectual categories; others saw his reply as a political masterstroke, appealing to a conservative Christian constituency whose votes he coveted. Bush was answering questions along with fellow Republican candidates at the Des Moines Register, Iowa, in 1999; during the course of the debate, five of the six candidates invoked the name of God, Christ or both: see Stephen Buttry, 'Des Moines Register: Candidates Focus on Christian Beliefs', *CNN.com* (on-line), 15 Dec 1999, accessed 31 May 2007: <http://www.cnn.com/1999/ALLPOLITICS/stories/12/15/religion.register/>. As the Republican race for the presidential nomination got underway in 2012, the relative religious diversity of candidates was a subject of much comment—with Roman Catholics, Baptists and Mormons all represented—although there is a broad consensus that the prospect of the US electing an avowed atheist is, for now, 'Unimaginable' (Terry Morgan, 'Faith on the Trail: GOP Race Shows Historical Religious Diversity', *ABC News* (on-line), 19 Jan 2012, accessed 06 Feb 2012: <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/OTUS/faiths-trail-gop-race-shows-historic-religious-diversity/story?id=15395858>).

⁵⁹ For a range of Christian conceptions of Jesus as an icon of liberation, see Pelikan, *Through the Centuries*, chap 17.

⁶⁰ See Lilla, *Still Born God*, especially chap. 2.

Chapter Two

period,⁶¹ but it is not clear that this more anthropocentric politics was adopted without recourse to theological considerations by the major thinkers of the period, including those noted for their political radicalism. In the final chapter of this study, I want to show that political theology was an important feature of work of Reimarus and those writers who helped to lay the groundwork for his critical writings on Jesus and the Bible.

It should already be clear by now that this thesis is as much about the context in which new critical approaches to Jesus arose as it is about the tradition of scholarship itself. That context was the European Enlightenment, and I would like to devote the next chapter to a reflection on that phenomenon, clarifying some of my working assumptions and critical judgments.

⁶¹ Lilla is thinking specifically of Hobbes and his social contract theory, but this was by no means the first political edifice to be based largely on human interests, with precursors in ancient Greek and Roman thought.

CHAPTER THREE

Jesus in Enlightenment Perspective

1. What is (the) Enlightenment?

In 1968, the social historian Norman Hampson (1922 – 2011) wrote, ‘Within limits, the Enlightenment was what one thinks it was.’¹ After reading this quote in a review essay,² I sought out Hampson’s book, hoping to find a no nonsense and ‘tell it like it was’ approach to the Enlightenment—refreshing to recall in an age of proliferating revisionary histories—only to discover that this assertion was made within the context of a frank admission of the inescapably personal nature of historical reconstruction. It seems fair to say, however, that since 1968, the business of defining those limits, and the need to reflect on and qualify our background assumptions about the Enlightenment, has become rather more complex: where the Enlightenment started, whether there was one Enlightenment or many, what its relationship to religion was, whether it was primarily an intellectual, cultural or a socio-political phenomenon—all these matters have been contested. On the other hand, for all the doubts which have surfaced concerning the most appropriate characterisation of the age—not to mention the question of whether or not the Enlightenment is judged to have been a commendable period of history with a positive legacy—³much of the more recent scholarship tends to insist on many of the

¹ Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment: An Evaluation of its Assumptions, Attitudes and Values*, London: Penguin, 1968, p. 9: ‘After weighing what the writers of the time thought of themselves and their period’, he continues, ‘one must finally impose a personal pattern on the rich anarchy of the evidence.’

² See Gerrit Voogt, review of Alan Charles Koors (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Enlightenment*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), *Humanities and Social Sciences On Line*, Feb. 2004, accessed 09 Jul. 2012: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=8940>

³ Criticisms of the values associated with the Enlightenment are as old as the Enlightenment itself, although problems arise when we begin to categorise individuals as ‘friends’ or ‘enemies’. While there would be little controversy in seeing the French bishop and theologian Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet and the Irish born statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke as erudite and perceptive critics—in the early and late phases respectively—the situation is complicated by other figures who stand among the most illustrious names of the Enlightenment and the arch enemies of some of its most cherished ideals. Perhaps the most famous example of this ambiguity is Jean Jacques Rousseau: a philosopher who distrusted philosophy; a critic and a friend of religion; a revolutionary progressive and educationalist, who argued that the very modern socio-political apparatus taken to be indicative of modern ‘civilization’ is morally corrosive and an impediment to our flourishing. One of the twentieth-century’s most important chroniclers of the so called ‘counter Enlightenment’, with all its ambiguities and ironies, was Isaiah Berlin; for a concise summary, see Berlin, ‘The Counter-Enlightenment’, in Philip P Weiner (ed.), *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas: Despotism to Law, Common Law* (vol. 2 of 4), New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, pp. 100 – 112. Twentieth-century critics of the Enlightenment have been less concerned with the damage the *philosophes* did to Europe’s traditional culture than on the supposedly dreadful consequences of the dominant concept of rationality it developed—universalist in its rhetoric; in practise, a reflection of rather more parochial interests—and the oppressive ends to which reason was put by the heirs to Enlightenment. A seminal work in this tradition is Theodore W Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s 1944 *Philosophische Fragmente*, commonly known as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, John Cumming (trans.) London: Allen Lane,

same broad features which preoccupied Hampson and his peers over forty years ago:⁴ the Enlightenment is more often than not presented as a progressive movement (or interconnected set of movements) within modern European and North American history, centring in particular on eighteenth-century Britain, France and the German speaking states, characterised by momentous intellectual, social and cultural change. Typically, in very broad outline, these changes include innovations in natural philosophy (precursor to natural science) and technology; reforms (or revolutions) in political governance and education, laying the grounds for modern, liberal democracy (or modern totalitarianism, depending on the historian's perspective);⁵ challenges to the traditional tenants of Christianity, and to the influence of the Church in public life. With some important qualifications, including periodisation and national context (see below), I do not wish to dispute this general picture, but it is important to distinguish this from another concept of Enlightenment.

One of the most famous answers to the question, What is Enlightenment?—or, to put it in its correct linguistic context, *Was ist Aufklärung?*—was suggested by Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804), in an occasional piece written for the German language periodical *Berlinische Monatschrift*.⁶ Posed in this way, without the definite article, Enlightenment seems to refer to a state of being, or a perspective on the world, characterised by a particular habit of thought or disposition to action. Indeed, that is the picture which emerges from an essay which reads like an intellectual mission statement: a

1973. Adorno and Horkheimer analysed and critiqued the concept of 'Enlightenment' in different stages of Western thought, including the modern. The later tradition of so called 'post-modern' criticism has tended to concentrate its focus on the European Enlightenment, with Françoise Lyotard's 1979 *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* serving as a concise and influential statement: see *The Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (trans), Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984. The most formidable recent counterblast to critics of the Enlightenment, whatever their complaint, comes in the form of Israel's massive trilogy.

⁴ General surveys and readers of the Enlightenment characterised by such themes include Isaac Kramnick (ed.), *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, New York / London: Penguin Books, 1995; Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (2nd edn), Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002; and Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (2nd edn.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Of these studies, Outram places greatest emphasis on social history, especially those pertaining to matters of gender.

⁵ The supposed connection between totalitarianism and the Enlightenment is repeated throughout Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic*, especially pp. 3 – 42. More concrete connections between French revolutionary violence on the one hand, and some of the actual ideas and thinkers of the age on the other, were made at the time by Burke (1790) in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, L. G. Mitchell (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993; in the nineteenth century by Nietzsche in the *Wille zur Macht: The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann (ed.), Kaufmann and R. J. Holingdale (trans), New York: Vintage Books, 1967, p. 55, 60; and right up to date with Dan Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, The Cult of Nature and the French Revolution*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009. Much to the chagrin of historians who stand in a strong tradition of repudiating connections between Enlightenment ideas and violent historical events during the era, the connection has been reaffirmed recently by Israel, *Radical*, chap. 38; and *Democratic*, chaps. 23, 28 – 38.

⁶ See Kant, 'Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?', *Berlinische Monatschrift*, Dec. 1784, pp. 481 – 494.

transformative goal for present and future generations to aspire to, perhaps even a duty, but certainly not a review and evaluation of the most influential ideas from the period of history we know as *the* Enlightenment. The opening passage is one of the most quoted on the subject:

*Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another. Self-incurred is this inability if its cause lies not in the lack of understanding, but rather in the lack of the resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another. Sapere aude! [dare to know]. Have courage to use your own understanding! That is the motto of enlightenment.*⁷

Later in the essay, Kant delivers his verdict on how his own age stands with respect to his vision of Enlightenment: 'If it is now asked, "Do we now live in an *enlightened* age?" the answer is, "No, but we do live in an age of *enlightenment*."⁸ Some historians have criticised Kant for a parochial historical perspective, manifesting itself in a 'timid' idea of freedom.⁹ According to Roy Porter (1946 – 2002), 'However sublime a philosopher, as a culture-watcher Kant was fated to be a man on the margins, hardly *au fait* with political realities in the west, where phrases like "this enlightened age" had been ten-a-penny.'¹⁰ On this view, Kant appears as something of a late comer where the causes of intellectual and political freedom were concerned, while '[e]lswhere in Europe, the question of enlightenment had been raised and, many were sure, resolved decades before'.¹¹ Whatever the historical shortcomings of Kant's essay, it remains a fine distillation of the preoccupations and longings of many of Europe's intellectual elite for many years prior to his intervention: intellectual freedom;¹² the courage to peruse knowledge and understanding, over against received opinion and tradition; and the public use of reason to establish truth in all matters, including religion.¹³ Moreover, as Porter himself concedes, some later historians have shared Kant's doubts about whether the vision of Enlightenment he sketched had actually been realised anywhere in Europe before the

⁷ Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', in James Schmidt (ed. & trans.), *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, Berkeley / London: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 55 – 64: 55.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁹ Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment*, New York / London: W. W Norton, 2001, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹² See Kant, 'What is Enlightenment?', pp. 59 – 63.

¹³ See *ibid.*, pp. 59 – 63.

Prussian savant took up the subject in 1784.¹⁴ There is a danger, however, when scholars swing too far in the opposite direction to Porter, taking Kant's essay not as an eloquent (and possibly out-dated) entry into Enlightenment discourse, but as the alpha (if not the omega) of that discourse. This approach may be excused if 'Enlightenment' is clearly defined along, say, Foucauldian lines as an 'ethos',¹⁵ whereby Kant is taken as the point of departure for a discourse on the topic of *Lumières* (Enlightenment), conceived 'as a permanent reactivation of an attitude—that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.'¹⁶ What is problematic, however, is when this use of Enlightenment functions as if it were synonymous with, or somehow exhaustive of, *the* Enlightenment: that complex period of history, marked by intellectual controversy and political upheaval, that most professional historians and interested lay persons in the West would tend to recognise as its referent.¹⁷

2. Kant, the 'Holy One' and the French Revolution:¹⁸ Taking Leave of the High Enlightenment

Many consider Kant to be the most important of all modern philosophers, on account of the scope of his theorising and the cogency of his thought.¹⁹ I offer no contest. Kant also had interesting and influential things to say about Jesus and his place within religion,

¹⁴ Porter, *Creation*, p. 2.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment? (*Was ist Aufklärung*)', Catherine Porter (trans.), in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, pp. 32-50: p. 39.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 42.

¹⁷ I have attended conferences at British and other European university's where 'the Enlightenment' has been the stated topic of a lecture by a philosopher, theologian or biblical scholar, during which Kant's essay and the broad outlines of his philosophy are the sole reference points. Foucault can reasonably be cited as encouraging this tendency, although his focus on Kant in his essay 'What is Enlightenment?', and his insistence that 'it is necessary to stress the connection that exists between this brief article and the three *Critiques*' (*Ibid*, p. 44), is tempered by his stated desire not to exaggerate the essay's importance (p. 32), and his admission that 'no historian...could be satisfied with it for an analysis of the social, political, and cultural transformations that occurred at the end of the eighteenth-century'(p. 37). Foucault was as good as his word: the irony of his association with the concept of 'Enlightenment' (minus the definite article) is that he has produced some of the most celebrated, original and controversial studies of concrete historical, cultural trends associated with the age, such as his *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1961), and *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la Prison* (1975): *History of Madness*, Jean Khalifa (ed.), Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalifa (trans.), London: Routledge, 2009; *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans.), London: Penguin Books, 1977.

¹⁸ Jesus makes a number of appearances in Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy, although Kant always seemed reluctant to mention him by name: in the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785), for instance, he is the 'Holy One of the Gospel' (*der Heilige des Evangelii*): *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Mary Gregor (ed. & trans.), Christine M Korsgaard (intro.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, sect. ii, p. 21.

¹⁹ Of course, most rankings of this kind are the philosophical equivalent the 'dream team' of sporting icons from different eras, but the results of surveys such as the one run by philosopher Brian Leiter, from his influential philosophy web-page, are interesting all the same: see 'The 20 "Most Important" Philosophers of the Modern Era', *Leiter Reports: A Philosophy Blog*, 04 May 2009, accessed 24 June 2012: <http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2009/05/the-20-most-important-philosophers-of-the-modern-era.html>

especially in *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (1793-1794),²⁰ and his emphasis on ethics in religion coheres with my insistence on the priority of moral readings of Jesus in the Enlightenment. And when one considers that G. E. Lessing issued the first of the *Fragments* ten years before the publication of Kant's 'Was ist Aufklärung?', there is strong a temptation to read one German scholar, Reimarus—a distinguished son of Hamburg whose intellectual development seems to have been stimulated by his travels—as an independent realisation, through the medium of biblical criticism, of that vision of Enlightenment imagined by the German philosopher Kant, who rarely left his home city of Königsberg.²¹ There is little doubt that the two thinkers shared some of the same goals, but I have resisted this temptation, and my reasons are twofold: 1) part of my project here is to construct a historically evidenced genealogy for some of the key themes in the *Fragments* published by Lessing, and this means that I am particularly (though not exclusively) interested in those thinkers who might reasonably have impacted on Reimarus when he was composing the *Apologie*, and his younger contemporary, Professor Kant, was not one of them; and 2) Kant's later 'critical' philosophy, where ethics really comes to the fore, conceives of religious commitment as a warranted postulate of faith, but not of knowledge.²² By contrast, Reimarus's posthumously published writings on Jesus and Christian origins, and the broader moral and political questions they raise, are rooted in older, more confident traditions of theological rationalism, which remained a ubiquitous presence in the period known as 'the Enlightenment', but which Kant rejected in his later work.²³

²⁰ See Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: And Other Writings*, Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (eds. & trans.), Robert Merrihew Adams (intro.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 31 – 205, pts i – iii.

²¹ For an interesting discussion of Kant's interest in distant cultures, juxtaposed with his famous aversion to travelling, see Steve Palmquist, 'How Chinese was Kant?', *The Philosopher*, No. 84.1, Spring 1996, pp. 3 – 9.

²² This was certainly the position Kant had developed by the time he published *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in 1781: see *Critique of Pure Reason* (incorporates 1st and 2nd edns.), Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (eds. & trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 117, 500, 684 – 690.

²³ Kant was not unsympathetic towards the urge of philosophers to extend thinking beyond the objects of possible experience to posit some transcendental, ontological ground—a 'cause' or a 'designer'—but he concluded that such striving can never deliver claims to knowledge, since the categories deployed in such metaphysical speculation, such as 'causation', acquire their epistemological force only within the context of the phenomenal world, and cannot be applied intelligibly to a transcendental (and hypothetical) reality: see *ibid.*, in particular his 'Critique of all theology from speculative principles of reason', pp. 583 – 589; this comes after his famous critique of the three classic theistic proofs (pp. 568 – 583). A similar point had already been made by Hume, albeit in a more straightforwardly empiricist fashion: see *Dialogues*; and *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 'Section 11: Of A Particular Providence and of a Future State', pp. 187 – 198. This skepticism about the possibility of providing any explanatory reason for the existence of the universe—the possibility of our being able to reason from our limited conception of the effect (the universe) to a coherent and probable cause (God)—cuts Kant and Hume adrift from a tradition of rationalist philosophical-theology which runs from, say, Descartes to Reimarus.

As indicated above, I assume the legitimacy of positing a period of major intellectual, social and political reform in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I do not necessarily assume that this Enlightenment should be understood first and foremost as an intellectual, rather than a socio-cultural phenomenon;²⁴ intellectual history happens to represent my research interests, and it seems to me to be the most relevant emphasis when considering modern, critical scholarship on Jesus. This is not a view shared by everyone, however. In an essay packed with suggestive ideas, but rather lacking in historical evidence, Charles T Davies argues that the Quest was ‘spawned by the [French] Revolution’.²⁵ Drawing on the work of William Barrett, he quotes the poet Heinrich Heine’s comparison of Kant and Maximilien Robespierre, with the former having unsettled the *Ancien Régime*, toppled by the likes of Robespierre, having undermined the traditional arguments for the existence of God (and, presumably, the divine right of Kings),²⁶ while the biblical scholarship exemplified by Reimarus is said to have ‘energised the propaganda of the Revolution.’²⁷ Davies’s essay constitutes a distinctive critique of Albert Schweitzer’s account because he does not actually question the position accorded to Reimarus in the tradition; what he questions is the marginal place of the French contribution: ‘While it is true that the first Life of Jesus scholars are German, it was the French Revolution and the Enlightenment that made the Quest so imperative.’²⁸

The role of Jesus in the literature and socio-political movements of the French Revolution is underexplored in reception history, and Davies is right to argue that ‘Jesus scholarship was never politically neutral.’²⁹ But I will not be following Davies into the political firestorm of the French Revolution (at least not in this thesis). The only scholarly study of Jesus by a French author that Davies actually discusses is Ernest Renan’s *Vie de Jésus* (1863),³⁰ and so the ‘historical Jesus’ of the French Revolution emphasised by

²⁴ Israel insists, against his critics, that he never claims that the radical Enlightenment ‘achieved its partial success in the late eighteenth century through the power of ideas alone’ (*Democratic*, p. 14), but his claim just three pages later ‘that *la philosophie* was the primary cause of the [French] revolution’ (p. 17), shows in no uncertain terms where he thinks the proper emphasis belongs, and constitutes a marked contrast to the socio-cultural approach of a historian like Roger Chariter in *Les origines culturelles de la Révolution Française* (1990): *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, Durham, NC., / London: Duke University Press, 1991. One of the distinguishing features of Jacob’s account of the radical Enlightenment is the significant role that she accords to sociability, especially through freemasonry.

²⁵ Charles T Davies, ‘The Historical Jesus as a Justification for Terror’, in J Harold Ellens (ed.), *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (vol. 2 of 4): *Religion, Psychology and Violence*, Westport, ST / London: Praeger, 2004, pp. 111 – 129: 111.

²⁶ See *ibid*, p.114.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 115.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 122.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 115

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 121 -124.

Davies, seems to be that idea of Jesus 'as he actually was' regardless of what anyone (especially the Church) has maintained, which is neither the preserve of scholars, nor a creation of the French Revolution. Jesus may indeed have been 'depicted as the great teacher of natural morality wherever the impact of the Revolution was strong',³¹ but such depictions are of a much older vintage, and it is one of the tasks of this study to illuminate those depictions and the socio-political functions that their creators and publishers seem to have envisaged for them. The question of how successful such depictions were as instruments of socio-political change is, of course, another matter altogether.

3. Radical Religious Enlightenment

The idea of a 'radical Enlightenment' is perhaps most closely associated with the work of Margaret Jacob and Jonathan Israel: both historians have written justifiably acclaimed books which make use of the concept in their analyses.³² One of the basic features shared by these studies, and one that seems to me of great importance, is the relocation of many of the most radical and influential impulses in the Enlightenment to a much earlier period on the historical map.³³ That there were good grounds for talking about the Enlightenment as a seventeenth-century phenomena had been implicit in scholarship for a long time, evidenced by that rather comical historiographical construction 'the long eighteenth century', often beginning with the Restoration of Charles II in England (1660) or the Glorious Revolution (1688), and ending at any number of points up to and beyond the French Revolution.³⁴ Jacob, Israel and others have shown that paying close attention to the seventeenth century is not only justified, but possibly essential for the historian of the Enlightenment. But there is more to this historiographical tradition than an earlier moment for the *mise-en-scène* of Enlightenment: a seventeenth and early eighteenth-century staging of the drama is but one feature.

³¹ Ibid, p. 121.

³² Other writers who make use of the concept include Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge, Mas: Harvard University Press, 1989. In chap. 19 Taylor identifies 'radical Enlightenment' with the rejection of divine providence and the insistence on utility as the guiding principle of morality. More recently the category has gained currency in non-English speaking scholarship: see Martin Mulrow's *Moderne aus de Untergrund*, where he examines radicalism in the early German Enlightenment as a subversive and highly progressive movement. Reimarus has been associated with the radical Enlightenment in Groetsch, *Polyhistory to Subversion*; for Groetsch, Reimarus's radical turn came not as a result of an encounter with Spinozism but developed out of his own training in classical scholarship, which led him away from the *hermeneutica sacra* of Lutheran orthodoxy to the radical historicising of his *hermeneutica profana*.

³³ For Israel, most of the major intellectual *innovations* of the radical Enlightenment, though not their practical realisation, had occurred by 1750, hence the periodic focus of his first volume.

³⁴ Just to show how elastic this definition is, one could point to the *Centre for Studies in the Long Eighteenth Century* (on-line), at the University of Kent, which spans the period from 1650 to 1830, accessed 09 Feb 2012: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/english/research/centres/18th.html>.

For much of the twentieth century, the Enlightenment was seen through the prism of a relatively small number of intellectual giants (mostly French, some German) who were inspired by British (mostly English) philosophers and scientists who did not necessarily realise the revolutionary potential of their own ideas.³⁵ These *philosophes*, it was argued, were at the height of their influence in the mid to late eighteenth century, and were thought to be working for a more or less common purpose: 'There were many philosophes in the eighteenth century', wrote Peter Gay in his seminal and captivating study, 'but there was only one Enlightenment.'³⁶ This conception remains influential; it is, for example, everywhere apparent in aforementioned essay by Davies on the origins of the Quest. But, from the point of view of the history of ideas, this traditional periodic focus, and the supposed intellectual homogeneity, should raise questions for any attentive student of modern philosophy who is also interested in intellectual history more generally conceived.³⁷

As almost every philosophy undergraduate is taught (as least in the English speaking world), René Descartes (1596 – 1650) was the 'founding father of modern philosophy',³⁸ and yet Descartes died fifty years before the beginning of the so called 'Enlightened century', and approximately one hundred years before the onset of the era's supposed intellectual highpoint. Given the emphasis that has been placed on the philosophical history of the Enlightenment,³⁹ and given the close connections assumed between the

³⁵ On the 'Anglomaniya' of the French, see Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (vol. 1 of 2)—*The Rise of Modern Paganism*, New York / London: W. W. Norton, 1966.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁷ Gay's vision of the Enlightenment is dominated by philosophers, so it is surprising to find him so neglectful of leading figures of the seventeenth-century. In the late twentieth-century, collections of essays devoted to Enlightenment philosophers could still be published without chapters on either Descartes or Spinoza: see Peter Gilmour (ed.), *Philosophers of the Enlightenment*, Edinburgh University Press, 1989. Even in the last ten years, one could take the second edition of Roy Porter's *The Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), where Descartes is briefly referenced four times in the main text (twice in footnotes), while Spinoza is referenced just once in the main text (once in footnotes); this was followed by the second edition of Dorinda Outram's widely praised book *Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), where Descartes receives three passing references in the main text (and one footnote), while Spinoza does not warrant a single mention. The last two studies are, admittedly brief, but the point I take from this is that even in some quite recent scholarship, one could get the impression that if an expert were to give the interested general reader 'the essentials' of the Enlightenment, Descartes and Spinoza would be peripheral figures—at most, precursors to the 'main event'.

³⁸ See Simon Blackburn, 'Descartes, Rene', in *ODP*, pp.100-101: 100; and Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, London: George Allen and Unwin, p. 510. Descartes is perhaps best judged as the greatest theoretician of the Scientific Revolution, but one with a greater sensitivity to the emotional life, to ethics and to aesthetic values than he is usually credited with. For a holistic appreciation of Descartes's thought, see the excellent collection by John Cottingham, *Cartesian Reflections: Essays on Descartes' Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

³⁹ Long before Gay took up the cause, Ernst Cassirer, another German born émigré, wrote *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung* (1932), which has been a standard reference point for historians of the Enlightenment ever since: *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, Fritz C A Koelln and James A Pettegrove (trans.), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951.

Enlightenment and modernity, are we to believe that the 'father' of modern philosophy initially made so few waves that the intellectual importance of the mechanical philosophy he helped to define was not appreciated until, say, French *philosophes* discovered and popularised the work of Isaac Newton and his supporting cast of Anglophone intellectuals?⁴⁰ Some influential histories of the Enlightenment have implied, if only by their omissions, that this is so.⁴¹ It is one of the achievements of later historians to demonstrate, emphatically, that it was not.⁴² Descartes—renowned and influential in his own lifetime—wrote with vaulting confidence about the power of human reason to grasp the workings of the natural world, and to formulate practical imperatives for the betterment of the human predicament.⁴³ Descartes was also a Catholic, steeped in the classical and scholastic traditions of philosophical theology, which made him one of the greatest heralds of one aspect of John Robertson's recent definition of the Enlightenment: namely, an emphasis on 'understanding the means of progress in human society, not on abolishing belief in a divine counterpart.'⁴⁴ Even the most sympathetic historian of the Enlightenment's irreligious wing acknowledges that rumours of secularism in the age have been greatly exaggerated.⁴⁵

Descartes provoked admiration and opposition,⁴⁶ and the philosophy produced in response to his work was not of one kind: philosophical diversity was an almost instant feature of the Cartesian legacy, and, as such, of the early Enlightenment.⁴⁷ One philosophical system which owes a huge debt to the thought of Descartes was conceived by Benedict de Spinoza (1632 – 1677), who used a comprehensive metaphysical picture of

⁴⁰ See Gay, *Modern Paganism*, p. 11 – 12: 'The propagandists of the Enlightenment were French, but its patron saints were British: Bacon, Newton and Locke had such splendid reputations on the Continent that they quite overshadowed the revolutionary ideas of a Descartes or a Fontenelle'.

⁴¹ In a collection edited and translated by Lester Crocker, Crocker pays tribute to Descartes as a 'turning point between the 'medieval and the modern' (*The Age of Enlightenment* Macmillan, 1969, p.7), but in the selection of writings he takes to be indicative of the key intellectual themes of the Enlightenment, none of Descartes's are included, whereas he includes three contributions from the unlikely figure of the Marquis de Sade (chap. 9, 15 and 28); apart from the chronology section, Spinoza receives just one mention (p. 11).

⁴² This is perhaps best viewed as a compelling re-emphasis rather than a new discovery. The case for a radical period of intellectual history in the late seventeenth century, which laid the ground for the more familiar Enlightenment trends, was made by Paul Hazard in his classic *La crise de la conscience europeene* (1935): or *The European Mind: 1680 – 1715*, J Lewis May (trans.), Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1964.

⁴³ This confidence is evident in many of his writings, but it is perhaps most potent in the work he left unpublished at the time of his death, *La Recherche de la vérité par la lumière naturelle*: or *The Search for Truth by means of the Natural Light*, in John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (eds. and trans.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (vol. 2 of 3), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 400 - 420.

⁴⁴ John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680-1760*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 8. Robertson actually favours a later focus than Jacob and Israel.

⁴⁵ See Israel, *Democratic*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ See Nicholas Jolly, 'The Reception of Descartes' Philosophy', in Cottingham (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 393 – 423.

⁴⁷ Israel is exemplary on this very point in *Radical Enlightenment*, chap. 2.

reality—monist rather than Cartesian dualist—as the philosophical basis from which to answer a wide range of theological, moral and political questions.⁴⁸ The cultural reception of Spinoza's metaphysical monism had been under explored in studies of the Enlightenment. This began to be corrected in the 1980s through the work of Jacob and others, and Israel has recently performed a great service to intellectual history by demonstrating in exhaustive detail the reach of Spinoza's influence.⁴⁹ This has all served to undermine, perhaps to an irrecoverable degree, the classic French dominated model of the Enlightenment, and vigorously challenged a more recent tendency—itsself a notable rival to the French centred paradigm—which approaches the Enlightenment as a period in European and North American history which is best understood in distinctive national contexts, rather than by trying to capture the grandeur of a transnational phenomenon.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the concept of a 'radical Enlightenment' is not without problems. Jacob—one of the pioneers of the model—is initially candid about this, before nevertheless pressing on with her definition:

Immediately that anachronistic term 'radical' applied to the Enlightenment raises queries. If these be radicals, who are the moderates? The radicals were intellectual dissenters...often with a refugee background, who could not share the willingness of the major philosophes like Voltaire and d'Alembert, or liberal churchmen like the Newtonians in England, to put their faith in enlightenment monarchy. They sought, therefore, through a variety of methods, propaganda as well as intrigue, to establish a republican ideal, if not always a republican reality, worthy of European-wide imitation. Predictably they, like the moderates were the intellectual heirs of the mid-century English Revolution, only unlike the moderates they sided more with the radical sectaries, that is, with the losers rather than the winners of that first major European revolution.⁵¹

Jacob's conceptualisation encourages a welcome move away from approaching the Enlightenment as a roll call of marquee names in the history of modern European thought, urging us instead to look at some of the lesser known writers, and social organisations, at the forefront of disseminating challenging and innovative ideas: writers who often had a much wider readership than the illustrious figures who remain on the

⁴⁸ This is the project in Benedict de Spinoza's *Ethica* (1677).

⁴⁹ Spinoza is a ubiquitous figure in Israel's awesome display of erudition (see *Radical*, chaps. 1, 8, 12 – 17, 32 – 36; *Contested*, chaps. 2, 6, 17, 25; and *Democratic*, chaps. 23 - 27).

⁵⁰ Israel defines his project over against what he sees as a more parochial focus on the Enlightenment experience of individual nations. A good example of the latter approach is the collection by Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

⁵¹ Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 20.

reading lists of humanities courses in universities today. Despite, or perhaps because of, the air of caution Jacob evinces, she offers a more persuasive definition than the more recent characterisation by Israel, who extends the definition to embrace much more than republican ideals:

[T]he radical Enlightenment, whether on an atheistic or deistic basis rejected all compromise with the past...rejecting the Creation as traditionally understood in Judaeo-Christian civilisation, and the intervention of a providential God in human affairs, denying the possibility of miracles, and reward and punishment in the afterlife...From its origins in the 1650s and 1660s, the philosophical radicalism of the European Early Enlightenment characteristically combined immense reverence for science, and for mathematical logic, with some form of non-providential deism, if not outright materialism and atheism with unmistakably republican, even democratic tendencies.⁵²

The question of what doctrines Israel's pantheon of Enlightenment heroes actually held and articulated is one of considerable controversy,⁵³ but interpretative problems tend to be marginalized in an attempt to construct a grand narrative which is similar in ambition, if not content, to Gay's classic history.⁵⁴ Perhaps this does not matter much in reception history, where misinterpretations, wilful misreadings and tendentious propaganda are no less significant (perhaps they are more significant) than the practise of carefully studying texts and attempting to elucidate the logic of an author's argument. At the centre of

⁵² Israel, *Radical*, p. 12.

⁵³ I will take just two major figures in his study as examples: Spinoza and Pierre Bayle. Edward T Oaks makes the point about the former very aptly: by conceiving of Spinoza as the great atheist—or at least the great progenitor of atheism—Israel focuses on 'only one side of this Janus-faced philosopher' (review of Israel, *Radical, First Things* (on-line), April 2002, accessed 23 October 2009: <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/radical-enlightenment—philosophy-and-the-making-of-modernity-16501750-18>). And even putting to one side the mystical interpretations of Spinoza that Oaks alludes to, and sticking firmly within naturalistic readings, Israel is happy to draw on Spinoza specialists when dismissing the widespread view that he was a pantheist, but he takes relatively little notice of what some of those same specialists say about Spinoza's positive doctrines on God and revealed religion: see his use of Richard Mason's work in *Radical*, p. 232; for Mason's own reading of Spinoza's view of God and revelation, see *The God of Spinoza: A Philosophical Study*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Israel's interpretation of Pierre Bayle as a rationalist (*Radical*, p.329) over against a Christian feidist and skeptic is one I am not unsympathetic to, but it places him at odds with major figures in relevant fields of enquiry, not least the greatest historian of modern skepticism—see Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonaola to Bayle* (revised and expanded edn), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003 — and the scholar widely regarded as the most important Bayle specialist of the twentieth century: see Elisabeth Labrousse's *Bayle* (2 vols.), La Haye: Nijhoff, 1963 – 1964. And given the priority Israel gives to one substance monism in his vision of radical Enlightenment, it seems problematic to identify Bayle with a tradition underscored by a metaphysical vision he showed no obvious affinity with.

⁵⁴ Like Gay, Israel wants to create 'a sense of the European Enlightenment as a single highly integrated intellectual and cultural movement' (*Radical*, p. v), with an emphasis on philosophy as the guiding force of the modern world. But the major figures in Gay's account belong to what Israel calls 'a mainstream' or 'moderate' Enlightenment (p. v). Israel aims to show that the radical Enlightenment 'is an integral and vital part of the wider picture', and that in many instances 'the moderate mainstream were consciously, even desperately, reacting to what was widely perceived as the massively dangerous threat posed by radical thought' (p. v).

Israel's study is Spinoza and the reception of his radical ideas, the one lasting philosophical legacy of which was the 'one-substance doctrine denying there is any divine governance of the world'.⁵⁵ In the third (possibly final) volume of Israel's extraordinary study of the Enlightenment, the reception of this doctrine unfolds in such a way that by the famous (or infamous) revolutionary marker of 1789, 'radical thought' constituted a 'package logic' of human rights,⁵⁶ including 'equality, democracy, freedom of the individual, freedom of thought and expression, and a comprehensive religious toleration'.⁵⁷

The question of whether Israel's interpretation of radical thought in the Enlightenment is correct—and the related question of whether a true understanding of this phenomenon requires us to overturn 'almost the whole current historiography of the French Revolution'⁵⁸—must be put to one side, as a subject for the vast literature it is sure to provoke. In terms of my own project, many of the names which fill its pages are prominent in the established chronicles of the radical Enlightenment: Spinoza, Pierre Bayle, John Toland, Anthony Collins, G. E. Lessing. But I also include other writers who would not necessarily make the 'cut', including Reimarus himself,⁵⁹ Hugo Grotius, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Richard Simon, Jean LeClerc, John Locke, Thomas Chubb, Matthew Tindal, Thomas Morgan and Thomas Woolston. In their own way all these writers were radicals, but not because of a unified intellectual creed. The cast of characters assembled in this production were radicals in the sense that at least some features of their work represented a sharp departure from *context dependent* norms and tacitly agreed proprieties, whether in method, theory or rhetorical style: few writers are radical 'all the way down', so to speak. Furthermore, their biblical criticism had both radical political-theological implications, and sometimes drastic implications for them personally. When one considers the burning of Miguel Servetus in the sixteenth century (see Chapter Four), the hanging of Thomas Aikenhead in the seventeenth century,⁶⁰ the imprisonment of J. L.

⁵⁵ Israel, *Democratic*, p. 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 16.

⁵⁹ Israel acknowledges the radicalism of Reimarus's biblical criticism, but he is outside the holy circle of true radicals because of his providential deism and unwillingness to rattle the cage by publishing his work in his lifetime (see *Democratic*, pp. 200 – 206).

⁶⁰ Aikenhead (c.1676 - 1697) was a student at the University of Edinburgh when his impious views were reported to the Scottish authorities. Key among his allegedly profane opinions were that Christ was an imposture, his miracles merely tricks, and that as a man, he did not compare well to other religious leaders such as Moses or Muhammad. By all accounts, he was not discreet. Aikenhead was summoned to the Scottish Privy Council in November 1696, tried for blasphemy the following month, and executed on 08 January 1697. For a concise account of the case, see Michael Hunter, 'Aikenhead, Thomas', in *DNB*, 2004, accessed 08 Feb 2012: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/225>

Schmidt and Thomas Woolston in the eighteenth century, and the conspiracy of silence surrounding the author of the *Fragments*, it seems fair to say that making heterodox or ‘impious’ statements about Jesus and the Bible were among the most perilous things an intellectual could do during the early modern period. What draws many of these scholars together is a shared sense that the problems that European societies faced were caused, in part, by inadequate ideas about religion, and especially about Christianity and its original or essential *raison d’être*. In drawing upon the resources provided by the figure of Christ, and deploying these in their arguments for the reformation of concrete features of modern thought and society, they chose a different path from some other famous Enlightenment figures.⁶¹ This was a radical path in so far as it went to the historical *root* of the still dominant religious culture in early modernity, and is consistent with a form of religio-political protest associated with the radicalism of the English Revolution referenced in Jacob’s definition.⁶²

4. 1627 – 1778

The reason why my primary focus on the Enlightenment ends in 1778 will be clear by now: it is the year that the famous final instalment of the Wolfenbüttel *Fragments* was published. Needless to say, in a study of this kind, I cannot possibly offer a comprehensive overview of the period covered by these dates; rather, I identify some key moments in the history of perspectives on Jesus during this period, investigate their connections, and consider their relationship to scholarship and ideas before and after those periods. But

⁶¹ I am thinking here of figures from across the two ‘Enlightenment centuries’: Descartes, Nicolas de Malebranche, Hume, G. F. Leibniz, Christian Wolf, Adam Smith et al. They all contributed to the reforming intellectual projects associated with the Enlightenment, but they did not attempt a systematic, sustained or direct revision of the Christian narrative.

⁶² Just consider some of the socio-political radicals from the seventeenth century, such as the Leveller William Walwyn (c. 1600 – 1681) and the Dutch Mennonite Peter Cornelius Plockhoy (c.1625 – c. 1670), both of whom feature prominently in the democratic and utopian movements of mid-seventeenth-century England, and the ideas of both men centred round an egalitarian Christian theology based, in part, on their interpretations of the early Christian Church: on the former, see Barbara Taft, ‘William, Walwyn,’ in *DNB*, 2008, accessed 15 Feb 2012: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/articleHL/28661?anchor=match>; on the latter, see Israel, *Radical*, chap. 9, where Plockhoy features as a major influence on Franciscus van den Ende (Spinoza’s Latin teacher). At the other end of the Enlightenment (chronologically), one might consider the radicalism of Joseph Priestley’s contribution (1733 – 1804), whose ideas about natural philosophy, including his Christian materialism—which Israel takes due note of in *Democratic*, pp. 12 – 13—and commitments to religious toleration and education, may have had greater popular purchase because they were developed in conjunction with a revised account of Christian origins. Of course, his studies of primitive Christianity also served to buttress the theology of the emerging Unitarian Church, with which he is closely associated. For just a tiny selection of his relevant writings, see Priestley *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity, in a Correspondence between Dr. Price, and Dr. Priestley*, London: J. Johnson, 1778; *An Address to Protestant Dissenters of all Denominations*, London: Joseph Johnson, 1774; *An Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life*, London: Johnson and Davenport, 1765; *An History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ, Compiled from Original Writers; Proving that the Christian Church Was at First Unitarian* (4 vols.), Birmingham: Pearson and Rollason, 1786.

why identify 1627 as a key marker?

This is certainly not an argument for a new definitive new start for the Enlightenment. It grows out of the recognition that the Enlightenment means different things in different intellectual disciplines. This thesis is, broadly, speaking, a study of the intellectual context for early modern interpretations of the Bible generally and Jesus specifically. From a constructive point of view, biblical studies in the Enlightenment is associated with the rise of historical-critical methods, sometimes challenging and sometimes exiting alongside theological hermeneutics; from a more destructive point of view, it is noted for an increased caution towards, or outright skepticism and mockery of, the miraculous or prophetic revelations reported in scripture, and its moral credentials. In addition to these specific disciplinary associations, there is the general intellectual trend, given impetus by advances in natural philosophy, to demand empirical warrants for truth claims of any kind, including theological claims drawn from the Bible.

All the concerns summarised above are present before the official onset of the 'Enlightenment Bible', in seventeenth-century works of biblical scholarship, some of which are explicitly apologetic. Notable among them is *De veritate religionis Christianae* (1627) by the Dutch philosopher Hugo Grotius.⁶³ In this work, Grotius was already engaging with the Gospels as historical sources for the life of Jesus, to be understood along the same lines as other historical documents; moreover, he was defending Christianity against many of the objections which would reign down on its claims to truth over the subsequent decades usually regarded as the 'Enlightenment proper'. Indeed, as early as 1627, Grotius felt compelled to respond to (or anticipate) a level of skepticism towards Jesus that even Reimarus would not have sanctioned, while operating with the kind of empirical, abductive reasoning which was to become the common currency of countless critics and defenders of the theological-historical foundations of Christianity, a currency still very much in circulation today.⁶⁴ Indeed, with his earlier tragic drama *Christus Patiens* (1608),⁶⁵ and his vast *Annotationes* on the Old and New Testament in the 1640s—one of the great storehouses of modern criticism for the leading 'method men' of Enlightenment biblical

⁶³ Constructed as it was in six books, Hugo Grotius's work was originally published as *Sensus librorum sex, quos pro veritate religionis Christianae*, Leiden, 1627.

⁶⁴ See Robert B Stewart (ed.), *The Resurrection of Jesus: John Dominic Crossan and N. T. Wright in Dialogue*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005; Gregory Dawes, *The Historical Jesus Question: The Challenge of History to Religious Authority*, Louisville, London / Leiden: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001; and Richard Swinburne's *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; and *Was Jesus God?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

⁶⁵ See Grotius, *Christ's Passion: A Tragedy, with Annotations*, George Sandys (trans.), London: J. L. Legatt, 1640.

Chapter Three

scholars—Grotius is perhaps the seventeenth-century's most luminous sign of what was to come in terms of literary and historical approaches to the Bible, warranting a significantly higher profile in histories of the discipline. In this study, however, he will appear as one voice among many in the story of the Enlightenment Messiah. The first aspect of that story concerns history, which has dominated the literature on critical scholarship on Jesus. It is to that scholarship we now turn.

PART II: HISTORY

CHAPTER FOUR

Narrating the Origins of the Quest: From Albert Schweitzer to N.T. Wright¹

1. Schweitzer's Quest

Albert Schweitzer has done more than anyone to shape our understanding of the genesis and development of historical Jesus studies, from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. An earlier monograph on Jesus, along with his books on St Paul, would have been sufficient to secure Schweitzer's place in the history New Testament studies,² but it is *Reimarus zu Wrede* which best explains why Schweitzer's contribution to the discipline 'stands at the head of the twentieth century like a colossus'.³ First published in 1906, the book follows the first interpretative model outlined in Chapter One: the historical study of Jesus is treated as an independent research tradition within modern Christian theology.⁴ If there is a wider intellectual or cultural background to the tradition, then it has to be the intellectual vitality of the German people, who Schweitzer considered peculiarly well suited to the tasks of forming a historical conception of Jesus and exploring the theological implications: '[N]owhere save in the German temperament can there be found in the same perfection the living complex of conditions and factors—of philosophical thought, critical acumen, historical insight, and religious feeling—without which no deep theology is possible'.⁵ According to Schweitzer, the critical study of the life of Jesus was 'the greatest achievement of German theology',⁶ and the cast of scholars he was able to assemble in his epic account is almost enough for this reader to forgive his

¹ Wright is not my last port of call in this survey, but, among contemporary scholars, he has been one of the most influential in attempting to impose order on the history of the Quest.

² See Schweitzer, *Das Messianitäts- und Leidensgeheimnis*, 1901: *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messianism and Passion*, Walter Lowrie (trans.) New York: Dodd, Mead & co., 1914; and *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, 1930: *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, Montgomery (trans.), London: Black, 1931.

³ Wright, 'Quest', p. 797.

⁴ See Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 1.

⁵ *Ibid*, p 1. A nationalistic reading of this statement is perhaps anachronistic, as Germany did not exist as a unified nation until 1871; on the other hand, some German intellectuals were inclined to 'imagine' their nation as an entity long before it became a reality (see Moxnes, *Rise of Nationalism*, intro, chaps. 1 - 3)

⁶ Schweitzer, *Quest*, p 1.

chauvinistic excesses: aside from the two named writers in the title of his work, Schweitzer's analysis engages with the work of such luminaries as G. E. Lessing, J. S. Semler, Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich D E Schleiermacher, D. F. Strauss, Ferdinand Christian Bauer and Adolf von Harnack to name but a few.⁷ Many writers would be proud to claim these men as emblematic of the intellectual life of their culture, and Schweitzer's passion for the project he chronicles is displayed on every opinionated page, in every gushing tribute,⁸ in every angry denunciation.⁹

In a work of monumental erudition and no little wit, the polymath of Alsace is savagely perceptive in his analysis of how the moral and theological spirit of nineteenth-century German writers is reflected in reconstructions of Jesus produced during the same period,¹⁰ and his book is concerned, in part, to document the struggle of this modern spirit with the disquieting possibility that Jewish *Eschatologie* (eschatology), of the apocalyptic variety, was the historical key to understanding Jesus' motivation and self understanding. Eschatology is a constant if quiet presence in the early phase of Schweitzer's enquiry, until it breaks through into open conflict with rival perspectives and becomes the irresistible conclusion of his study. There were alternative conceptions of Jesus' teachings about the coming Kingdom of God, but Schweitzer rejects all attempts to spiritualise or moralise Jesus' eschatological utterances: the arrival of the Kingdom, as understood by Jesus, was supposed to be a supernatural spectacular. But if Jewish

⁷ Giants of modern philosophy such as Kant and G. W. F. Hegel appear in Schweitzer's account, but their presence is restricted to brief sketches of the intellectual biographies of the main protagonists. For a fascinating insight into the often neglected relationship between modern philosophy and New Testament studies in the nineteenth century, see Blanton, *Displacing Christian Origins*; in chap. 4, Blanton analyses Schweitzer's own contribution to the Quest in the light of the latter's philosophical commitments.

⁸ He lavishes greatest praise on Reimarus (see *Quest*, especially chap. i), Strauss (chap. vii) and Johannes Weiss (chap. xv).

⁹ Schweitzer's tendency for hyperbole is tempered by awesome scholarship and seriousness of purpose. He is at his most combative in relation to the three great dividing lines he identifies in the history of Jesus scholarship: the historical priority of the Gospel of John over against the synoptic tradition (see *ibid*, chaps. vii, iv, x, xv); the 'purely historical' versus the 'purely supernatural' approach to the miraculous (chaps. iii, v, vi, vii, viii), and the eschatological versus the non-eschatological character of Jesus' mission (chaps. x, xv, xvi and xix). Schweitzer's wit is especially evident in his discussion of the excesses of 'imaginative lives of Jesus' (chap. xii): a genre characterised by the rhetoric of history, and occasionally its methods, to produce improbably detailed accounts, sometimes with considerable literary brio (chaps. ix, vii, xiii).

¹⁰ Born into the Alsace-Lorraine region of the German Empire, Schweitzer published in French and German, and was trained in classical languages, New Testament criticism, theology and philosophy. This intellectual range was not unusual for scholars working before academic fragmentation gathered pace, but even in this context Schweitzer's achievements across the disciplines were outstanding. In addition to his expertise in the humanities, Schweitzer, inspired by musically gifted role models in the family, became a world class organist, and musicologist; he also co-founded the Paris Bach Society, having established himself as one of the foremost experts on the great composer. It is hard to believe that his intellectual and artistic accomplishments actually took a back seat for years at a time, after he chose to peruse a career in medicine and work among the poor in Lambaréné, the Gabonese Republic, then part of French Equatorial Africa. For a well-documented biography of the man and his thought, see James Brabazon, *Albert Schweitzer: A Biography* (2nd edn), Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2000.

apocalypticism is where the story ends, where does it begin?

(i) Schweitzer's 'Lone Gunman' Theory:¹¹ *The Making of a Creation Myth*

It is perhaps surprising that a scholar so sensitive to the encroachment of the contemporary *zeitgeist* into the critical study of ancient history should pay so little attention to the intellectual ferment which created this particular historical discipline. Why this Quest for the *historical Jesus*? On Schweitzer's account, before H. S. Reimarus, 'there had been nothing to indicate to the world what a masterstroke the spirit of the time was preparing... Before Reimarus, no one had attempted to form a historical conception of the life of Jesus.'¹² The first of these claims is demonstrably false, and it is one of the burdens of this study to show why there was every indication of such a 'masterstroke'. The second is an exaggeration, and has been recognized as such by a number of scholars (surveyed below), but the majesty of Schweitzer's narrative has proved resistant to much of the criticism and continues to exert influence on the way some scholars see the history of critical scholarship on Jesus. Schweitzer's inadequate account of the origins of the Quest can be understood as part of a general tendency towards a great man theory of history and a great man theory of historiography, which was consistent with a historical approach favoured by some very influential writers of the nineteenth century.¹³ The heroic subject of Schweitzer's book is the thoroughly eschatological Jesus, 'a stranger and an enigma' who rises up from ancient times to clash with the spirit of liberal modernity and all its ways.¹⁴ In Schweitzer's account, the finest chroniclers of the life of Jesus were intellectual mavericks swimming against the tide of opinion: Reimarus, the great innovator; Strauss, who 'to understand you first had to love', and whose 'insights and errors were like the insights and errors of a prophet',¹⁵ and

¹¹ The violence of my phrasing grows out of Schweitzer's rhetorically robust and provocative style: he concludes his study by arguing that 'there is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the Life of Jesus' (*Quest*, p. 398), while previously insisting that the 'greatest' examples of such studies 'were written with hate' (p. 4).

¹² See *ibid.*, p. 13.

¹³ One of the most explicit and memorable articulations of this view was given by the Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle: 'For, as I take it, Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here' (*On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1840 p. 3). Ironically, Schweitzer is rather dismissive of this book in *Die Lehre der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben* (1963): *Out of my Life and Thought: An Autobiography* (60th anniversary edn), Antje Bultmann Lemke (trans.), Rhena Schweitzer Miller and Bultmann Lemke (pref.), President Jimmy Carter (into.), Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 89.

¹⁴ Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 397.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Johannes Weisse, before whom modern theology since Reimarus 'appears retrograde.'¹⁶ The work of these scholars was well represented by Schweitzer, but the historical and intellectual context he offers for their work is minimal.

(ii) The Scope of Reimarus's Achievement According to Schweitzer

Reimarus's then shocking thesis, sketched in Chapter One, that Jesus was a failed political claimant, whose defeat was turned into a spiritual victory by the apostles after his appalling death, provided sustenance for the emerging giant of German New Testament criticism, and it has continued to be cited as an intellectual landmark ever since. But for Schweitzer, the enormity of Reimarus's achievement exceeds his initiation of the historical project: Reimarus planted the seed which would slowly grow into one of Schweitzer's own historical conclusions—the priority of eschatology. In Schweitzer's reading of Reimarus, 'What belongs to the preaching of Jesus is clearly to be recognized. It is contained in two phrases of identical meaning. "Repent and believe the Gospel," or, as it is put elsewhere, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."¹⁷ For Schweitzer, the flaw in Reimarus's hypothesis was that he took the new age that Jesus announced to be of this world. Reimarus saw Jesus in the role of the kingly Messiah of Old Testament prophecy, ruling over an Israel free from Roman domination; in this reconstruction, 'Jesus must have known, too, that if the people believed His messages they would look about for an earthly deliverer and turn to Him for this purpose.'¹⁸ Reimarus was aware of a supernatural strain of messianic expectation at the time, and he seized on this to drive a wedge between the historical Jesus and the Jesus of Christian proclamation:

He recognized that two systems of Messianic experience were present side by side in later Judaism. He endeavored to bring them into mutual relations in order to represent the actual movement of the history. In so doing he made the mistake of placing them in consecutive order, ascribing to Jesus the political son-of-David conception, and to the Apostles, after His death, the apocalyptic system based on Daniel.¹⁹

Having begun his survey with a celebration of the achievements of the man who understood the importance of locating Jesus within the context of Jewish eschatology, Schweitzer charts the history of a persistent refusal to confront this context: a period

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 23.

¹⁷ Schweitzer paraphrasing Reimarus, *Quest*, p. 16.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 17.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 24.

during which great biographical and theological edifices were built on historical sand. In Schweitzer's narrative, the eschatological context of Jesus' mission comes slowly and painfully back into view: the final chapters of *Reimarus zu Wrede* advance an apocalyptic reading of Jesus, with Schweitzer polishing the flawed historical gem which lay undisturbed in Reimarus's notorious writings for over a century. How did Schweitzer achieve this?

[By] superimposing one [system of eschatology] upon the other in such a way that the Messianic King might coincide with the Son of Man, and the ancient prophetic conception might be inscribed within the circumference of the Daniel-descended apocalyptic, and raised along with it to the supersensuous plane.²⁰

Schweitzer's account of the Quest is a story of a scholarly tradition faltering towards the rediscovery and revision, along apocalyptic lines, of the eschatological hypothesis first proposed by Reimarus.

(iii) *The Survival of the 'Lone Gunman' Theory*

Reimarus's standing in the history of modern biblical scholarship, as the originator of the Quest, was affirmed or left unrevised by scholars in the main international centres of professional New Testament research throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: in France,²¹ the United Kingdom and Ireland,²² the US,²³ and in the traditional power base of the discipline, Germany.²⁴ I will take one especially vivid example from the

²⁰ Ibid, p. 24.

²¹ See Maurice Goguel, *Jésus de Nazareth, mythe ou histoire?* (1925): *Jesus the Nazarene: Myth or History?*, London: T Fisher Unwin, 1926, p. 2-3. Goguel identifies Reimarus as having produced the first 'scientific essay'.

²² In the same year that Schweitzer's book appeared in English, F. C. Conybeare made approving reference to the prominence given to Reimarus in Schweitzer's study in his *History of New Testament Criticism*, London: Watts, 1910, pp. 82 – 86; see also T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus: Studies of its Form and Content*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935, pp. 4 – 5; and Riches, 'Lessing as Editor', (Riches actually offers a rich and concise insight into the theological and political context for the *Fragmentenstreit* he just does not acknowledge significant figures prior to the Reimarus / Lessing intervention). More recently, see Sean Freyne, *Jesus: A Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus Story*, London: T&T Clark, 2004, p.1; and Boulton, *Who on Earth was Jesus?*, pp. 13 – 14.

²³ See Leander C Keck, *A Future for the Historical Jesus: The Place of Jesus in Preaching and Theology*, London: S. C. M. Press: 1972, 0. 18; John P Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* [vol. 1 of 4]: *The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, New Heaven, Conn. / London: Doubleday, 1991, p. 25; Funk, Hoover, et al, *Five Gospels*, pp.1 – 2; Powell, *Jesus Debate*, pp. 19-20; William R Telford, 'Major Trends and Interpretative Issues in the Study of Jesus', in Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans (eds.), *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, Leiden: Brill, 1998, pp. 33 – 74: 55 – 56.

²⁴ See Joseph Klausner, *Yeshu ha-Notsri* (1922): *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching*, Herbert Danby, (trans.), New York Macmillan, 1925 (Klausner was a Lithuanian born Jew, but he studied for his PhD in Germany); Bultmann, *Jesus* (1926): in English, *Jesus and the Word*, Louise Pettibone Smith and Ermine Huntress Lantero (trans.), New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958, pp. 8 – 9; more recently see

latter phase of the previous century.

In his 1985 *Lives of Jesus*, Warren S Kissinger shows the influence (direct or indirect) of Schweitzer's account, taking a 'year zero' approach to the history of problems and questions in modern historical Jesus studies, and yet he does so almost in spite of the evidence he clearly has available to him. In his bibliographical study, which approaches non-canonical accounts of Jesus' life as a single tradition spanning almost two thousand years,²⁵ Kissinger writes, 'Prior to Reimarus, neither the question "What is the historical value of the gospels?" nor its corollary, "What was the historical character of Jesus?" was raised. He was the first to do so.'²⁶ The irony here is that Kissinger is sufficiently well acquainted with earlier scholarship not to err in this way, but he seems inexplicably reluctant to meddle with the paradigm,²⁷ and he is not alone. More recently there are examples of scholars who have gone even further in their assessment of the writings at the centre of the *Fragmentenstreit*; for instance, Amy Hollywood claims (without protest) that 'Reimarus's work...is routinely taken to be the point of origin for critical readings of the Bible.'²⁸ I can find no evidence that scholars *routinely* overestimate the *Fragments* to quite that extent; nevertheless, Hollywood does capture a truth about the perception of the *Fragmentenstreit* as a watershed in critical scholarship. This perception is not wholly inaccurate, but it was a watershed in a specific context, the German Enlightenment.

The 'lone gunman' theory of origins has become received wisdom well beyond the confines of academic biblical scholarship: it is a narrative passed on from professional expert to interested amateur, facilitated and disseminated through the Internet. On a website where public speakers can share power-point presentations on a range of weighty intellectual topics, a presentation on 'Quests for the Historical Jesus' begins with the following terse summation of the state of the field prior to 1778: 'Pre-Critical Period: No

Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *Der historische Jesus. Ein Lehrbuch* (1996): *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Survey*, John Bowden (trans.), CSM Press, 1998, p. 2 – 3.

²⁵ See Warren S Kissinger, *The Lives of Jesus: History and Bibliography*, New York / London: Garland Publishing, INC, 1985; Kissinger's book is noteworthy for giving some space, albeit very little, to the medieval period (see pp. 7 – 12).

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 14.

²⁷ Kissinger's brief sketch of Reimarus's intellectual forbearers gives a misleading impression of homogeneity across this group of thinkers. Nevertheless, the account contains important truths: many of the unnamed writers Kissinger associated with a 'school of thought called deism' (*Ibid*, p. 14) did, as he acknowledges, challenge the reality of Jesus' miracles, deny his divinity and emphasise his ethical teaching. What Kissinger seems reluctant to acknowledge is that one of the ways these writers tried to undermine traditional Christianity is by questioning the *historical* value of the Gospels and the traditional picture of Jesus.

²⁸ Amy Hollywood, 'Reading as Self Annihilation', in Jane Gallop (ed.), *Polemic: Critical or Uncritical*, New Work: Routledge, 2004, pp. 39 – 63: 40.

Quest—No Problem.²⁹ Thankfully, the academic community has not been content with such a dismissive view of scholarship prior to 1778, and we will be examining their work in detail below. It is worth noting, however, that a flagrant disregard for early modern scholarship has been evident at the very summit of contemporary New Testament studies. E. P. Sanders, one of the most respected figures in the discipline, locates the Quest within the history of modern New Testament criticism (a narrow but perfectly logical approach), and by way of an indirect statement on the question of origins, Sanders writes, 'At the end of the eighteenth century a few brave Europeans began to apply literary and historical criticism to the books of the New Testament, which until then had been off-limits: too sacred for the secular scholarship of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.'³⁰ The stated source for this assessment of the history of New Testament studies? Dr Schweitzer.³¹

Despite the continuing influence of Schweitzer's account, a growing number of scholars have recognised the importance of the intellectual background to Reimarus's work, even if few have sought to dethrone the German from his elevated position in the canon.³² Some of the earliest and most forceful criticisms of the 'lone gunman' theory are to be found in German language scholarship,³³ which has not been slow to distance itself from nationalistic readings of scholarship on Jesus.³⁴ Recent work by Scandinavian writers suggests an increased awareness of and interest in those 'autodidacts or men who were not part of church or academic institutions',³⁵ maverick writers who 'presented portraits

²⁹ Anonymous, 'Quest for the Historical Jesus', *Docstock: Find and Share Professional Documents* (on-line), accessed 26 Jan 2010: <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/885073/Topic-2-Quests-for-Historical-Jesus>

³⁰ Sanders, *Historical Figure*, p. 5.

³¹ *Ibid*, p 292, n.7.

³² In their excellent histories of New Testament studies, Werner Georg Kümmel and Baird treat Reimarus as one very important contributor to the discipline, and show in detail the work carried out by others before the appearance of the *Fragments*, without ever directly addressing the question of who initiated the Quest: see Kümmel, *Das Neue Testament: Geschichte der Erforschung seiner Probleme* (1958), or *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems*, London: SCM Press, 1972, especially pp. 89 – 90; and Baird, *Deism to Tübingen*, especially chap 2, and pp.170 – 177.

³³ Some of the German literature arguing for Reimarus's dependence on English authors was actually opened up over forty years ago for an English audience, in George Wesley Buchanan's Introduction to Reimarus, *The Goal of Jesus and his Disciples*, Buchanan (trans.), Leiden: Brill, 1970.

³⁴ In fact, the historiographical resources for a more generous estimation of pre-Reimarus scholarship existed in German long before Schweitzer took up the subject in Gotthard Victor Lechler's *Geschichte des englischen Deismus*, Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1841. In the twentieth century there have been many more, see A. C. Lundsteen, *Hermann Samuel Reimarus und die Anfänge der Leben-Jesu Forschung*, Copenhagen, 1939; and Reventlow, 'Das Arsenal der Bibelkritik des Reimarus: Die Auslegung der Bibel, insbesondere des Alten Testaments, bei den englischen Deisten', in Wolfgang Walter (ed.), *Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768 ein, "bekanntes Unbekanntes" der Aufklärung in Hamburg*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1973, pp. 44 – 65; and in the same collection, Günter Gawlick, 'Der Deismus als Grundzug der Religionsphilosophie der Aufklärung', pp. 139 – 147. All these works emphasise the English influence on Reimarus.

³⁵ Moxnes, *Rise of Nationalism*, p. 20.

of the historical Jesus in criticism of the church.³⁶ In an Italian context, the scholar Mauro Pesce has contributed to the transmission of the traditional Germanic picture of modern New Testament studies to the Italian reading public,³⁷ and, while never uncritical in such work, in 2011 he felt moved to challenge the hegemony of German Protestant scholarship in his native country's perception of the discipline; taking the Quest as his case in point, he informed readers: 'La ricerca storica su Gesù non è iniziata con Hermann S. Reimarus' (Historical research on Jesus did not begin with Herman S Reimarus).³⁸

A major emphasis in these revisionary studies has been on the individuals who Reimarus seems to have taken inspiration from, and we will be profiling those figures in this and future chapters. Pesce is an example of a scholar who has combined this necessary corrective with a concern for a different but related question, concerning how scholars have represented the intellectual *context* in which Reimarus and earlier critics worked when they wrote about Jesus. It is to that question we now turn.

2. The Quest as the Outcome of the 'Great Reversal'

The work surveyed in this section considers the kind of historical conditions which can reasonably be thought of as facilitating a dramatic change in European thought with respect to the Bible, described by Hans Frei as 'the great reversal':³⁹ an intellectual reorientation whereby the Bible was no longer judged to be capable of providing the narrative framework into which all historical and cosmological reality could fit,⁴⁰ instead, the Bible had to be incorporated within a newly discovered, vastly expanded reality, thereby taking its place as just one among many literary monuments to the ancient world and its religions, to be examined and evaluated using the same critical methods that were applied to the study of non-Christian antiquity. The first group of authors considered in

³⁶ Ibid, p. 20. The Danish Lundseteen's work from the 1930s (written in German), should be mentioned here. Just two decades later (1952) Nilas Alstrop Dahl (Moxnes' former teacher) was arguing for the reinvigoration of historical Jesus studies (before Käseman), but the first publications of his work were in his native Norwegian, and, as such, few people noticed; Dahl also insisted on the influence of the 'English Deists' on Reimarus in 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus', in Donald H Juel (ed.) *The Historical Origins of Christological Doctrine*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991, pp. 81 – 11: 83. More recently, however, the Danish scholar Per Bilde shows no awareness of significant scholarship on Jesus prior to Reimarus: see Bilde, *Den Historiske Jesus*, København: Forlaget ANIS, 2008, p. 273.

³⁷ Mauro Pesce wrote the introductory essay to the Italian translation of Kümmel's classic: see *Il Nuovo Testamento, Storia della ricerca scientifica sul problema neotestamentario*, Vincent Luciano Benassi (trans.), Rinaldo Fabris (after.) Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976, pp. vii – xxxv.

³⁸ Pesce, 'Per una ricerca storica su Gesù nei secoli XVI-XVIII: prima di H.S. Reimarus', *Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi*, 28/1, 2011, pp. 433 – 464: 433.

³⁹ Frei, *Eclipse*, p.130.

⁴⁰ See *ibid*, especially chaps. 1 – 4, 16.

this section continue to cite Reimarus as the initiator of the Quest, but they also suggest a way out of Schweitzer's paradigm.

(i) The Scientific Revolution

Schweitzer's account of the origins of the Quest was more or less maintained by the best publicised collaboration in late-twentieth-century New Testament studies: the American based Jesus Seminar. According to Robert Funk and his colleagues:⁴¹ 'A close study... convinced Reimarus that what the gospels said about Jesus could be distinguished from what Jesus himself said. It was with this basic distinction between the man Jesus and the Christ of the creeds that the quest of the historical Jesus began.'⁴² Members of the Seminar have identified themselves with the intellectual traditions of the Enlightenment, and support the aims of the historical project that 'began' with Reimarus; nevertheless, in their first major publication, *The Five Gospels*, the Seminar have nothing to say about the theology, philosophy or politics of the Enlightenment; nor do they make anything other than cursory reference to the history of biblical scholarship before 1778. Unlike Schweitzer, however, they do propose a specific intellectual background: they present the birth of the Quest growing out of advances in the natural sciences between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries. When space or expertise is limited to a few pages to explain the historical context for developments in a modern intellectual discipline, paying a fulsome tribute to the influence of modern science seems like a safe option,⁴³ and the Jesus Seminar offer a rhetorically bloated example of this tendency:

The Christ of creed and dogma, who had been firmly in place in the Middle Ages, can no longer command the assent of those who have seen the heavens from Galileo's telescope. The old deities and demons were swept from the sky by that remarkable glass. Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo have dismantled the mythological abodes of the gods and Satan, and bequeathed us secular heavens.⁴⁴

The suggestion that the critical study of the life of Jesus flowed from an epistemological revolution stimulated by astronomy makes, at best, a simplistic and incomplete contribution to the question of origins. It constitutes one factor, albeit an important one,

⁴¹ The Jesus Seminar was founded by Funk, a New Testament scholar and classical Greek grammarian.

⁴² Funk, Hoover et al, *Five Gospels*, p 2.

⁴³ The natural sciences have proved to be the most precise and productive forms of modern enquiry, and there is surely an element of truth in the charge of 'physics envy', which John Lewis Gaddis has levelled against historians and social scientists in their methodological yearnings: Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*, New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p 89.

⁴⁴ Funk, Hoover et al, *Five Gospels*, p.2

in 'the great reversal' described above. But the Jesus Seminar are by no means alone in their prioritizing of modern science, or even individual scientists. In part, this is because the Scientific Revolution is often taken to be a key part in the passage of the West to an increasingly secular modernity, and those who regard the Quest as a secularizing endeavor, for good or ill, are inclined to associate this tradition of scholarship with the scientific enterprise. Richard S Westfall (1924 – 1996), who has written a widely praised biography of one of the key figures in the scientific revolution,⁴⁵ clearly articulates this view of European history; in fact, Westfall judges that by the end of the seventeenth-century, European civilization did not warrant the description 'Christian', despite beginning that century fully deserving the designation. This is all attributed to the 'rise of science'.⁴⁶ If, as Westfall suggests, the influence of this revolution could spread 'out over the history of the entire civilization',⁴⁷ then there is little wonder than some historians of the Quest have emphasized its influence. But does it warrant such a central place in the narrative?

In *The Rise of Modern Paganism*, Peter Gay summons the colossal figure of Isaac Newton (1642 – 1727) to pronounce his verdict on the question of Christ: 'JC was a man, not God's son, who hath given us a very good morale.'⁴⁸ The remark is emblematic of the age of Enlightenment as widely understood: irreverent in tone, skeptical of orthodox theology and preoccupied with the moral. It is a judgment pregnant with the kind of assumptions which revolutionised the intellectual encounter between European Christian culture and the central figure in its religious heritage: it assumes that factual and evaluative judgments can be made about Jesus and his legacy, which are not conditioned by creedal formulations and, indeed, can openly contradict them. The shadow of Newton and his scientific legacy looms large in the history of modern thought. The unifying power of the *Principia* offered perhaps the most spectacular confirmation yet of the scientific paradigm most firmly, though not exclusively, suggested by the work of Galileo Galilei (1564 – 1642) and Johannes Kepler (1571 – 1630), following in the wake of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473 – 1543),⁴⁹ systematized by the great theorist of natural philosophy, such

⁴⁵ See Richard S Westfall, *Never At Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton* (new edn), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

⁴⁶ Westfall, 'The Rise of Science and the Decline of Orthodox Christianity', in David C Lindberg and Ronald L Numbers (eds.), *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter Between Christianity and Science*, Berkeley / London: University of California Press, 1986. pp. 218 – 237.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 219.

⁴⁸ Isaac Newton (attributed), quoted by Gay, *Modern Paganism*, p. 382

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Michael Sharratt, *Galileo: Decisive Innovator*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

as Francis Bacon (1562 – 1627) and Rene Descartes:⁵⁰ that we dwell in a heliocentric universe governed by physical regularities, discernible from an empirical standpoint, explained by inductive inference, and describable through the language of mathematics. For some, this has raised a crucial theological question: Does God act in an apparently law bound, predictable universe? If not, that would necessarily undermine any notion of the Bible as a document which offers credible testimony of God's active presence in history, given that this presence is so often made know through wholly irregular occurrences. Newton himself thought otherwise.⁵¹ As Gay acknowledges, the quote he used was actually attributed to Newton by French libertines of the eighteenth century,⁵² and it is contradicted by a mass of Newton's own writing which affirms his belief in the divine sonship of Jesus, though not his consubstantiality.

Although writers of New Testament historiography rarely question Newton's personal and passionate Christian faith, which was established beyond reasonable doubt long ago,⁵³ there is still a tendency to see this as a reflection of Newton's idiosyncratic religious outlook, rather than a conviction which was at home, philosophically, in the scientific world-view he inhabited and helped to sustain. In Charlotte Allen's study of the Quest we are told,

The engineer of the paradigm shift that launched the search for the historical Jesus was the brilliant scientist Isaac Newton. As a practicing Christian, he himself did not believe that science and faith in the supernatural were incompatible. However, his scientific theories were steeped in philosophical arguments that made it possible for others to become religious skeptics.⁵⁴

It is true that Newton was a hero to the anti-Christian French *philosophes* and that the deistic Reimarus was an admirer,⁵⁵ but it would be quite wrong to allow these figures to

1996.

⁵⁰ Central works here are Bacon's (1620) *Novum Organum*, Joseph Devey (ed.) New York: P F Collier, 1902; and Descartes's *Discours de la méthode* (1637): *Discourse on the Method*, in *Writings of Descartes* (vol. 1), pp. 109–176.

⁵¹ This is one of Hume's complainants against miracles (see *Enquiry*, chap. 10), but it would be a mistake to project the great empiricist philosopher's skepticism back onto earlier pioneers of empirical science.

⁵² See Gay, *Modern Paganism*, p. 382, n. 4.

⁵³ Newton's preoccupations with alchemy, theology and apocalypticism were in the public domain from at least the early nineteenth century, following the publication of two revelatory texts by David Brewster: *The Life of Isaac Newton*, London: John Murraray, 1831; and *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton* (2 vols.), Edinburgh: Constable, 1855. Shocked by the sheer volume and intensity of Newton's theological speculations and alchmic obsessions, Brewster tried to explain away this portion of Newton's writings as the eccentric fascinations of an old man in a state of mental decline.

⁵⁴ Allen, *Human Christ*, p. 92.

⁵⁵ See Allen, *Human Christ*, pp. 96–97; and Israel, *Radical*, pp. 220–206.

dominate the reception history of Newton's work, which was more readily embraced in Christian theological circles than certain rival philosophies of the time.⁵⁶ According to Allen:

Before the eighteenth-century divorce between the natural and supernatural, the majority of Christians and Jews believed that God regularly interacted with the natural world he created. In the eyes of Newton such divine action was logically impossible...Newton himself publicly insisted that the laws he had propounded merely reflected the grandeur of God's creation. Although an avid amateur theologian who became increasingly obsessed with the prophecies of the Book of Revelation, in the end he was affected by his own scientific theories. In his private writings, he confessed that he had stopped believing that Jesus... could possibly have been the son of God.⁵⁷

The assertion that divine action was 'logically impossible' for Newton—suggesting some kind of conceptual contradiction—is incorrect: Newton's laws described and predicted *the regular behavior* of the universe; they said nothing about what was *logically possible* with respect to the behavior of the universe given the truth of theism.⁵⁸ Allen associates Newton's own thought with a denial of divine revelation, and the complete humanising of Jesus, both of which can be seen as important precursors to serious and unfettered historical investigation. But the opposite is true with Newton: he showed little appetite for purely historical accounts of Jesus, and, in the private writings Newton expounds a Christology in visceral theological language: in his 'Twelve Articles on Religion', Newton writes,

The Father hath life in himself & hath given the son to have life in himself...We need not pray to Christ to intercede for us. If we pray the father aright he will intercede...The father is omniscient & hath all knowledge originally in his own breast, & communicates knowledge of future things to Iesus Christ... And therefore the testimony of Iesus is the Spirit of Prophecy & Iesus is the Word or Prophet of God...To us there is but one God the father of whom are all things & we of him, & one Lord Iesus Christ by whom are all things & we by him. that is, we are to worship the father alone as God Almighty & Iesus alone as the Lord the Messiah the great King the Lamb of God who was slain & hath redeemed us with his blood...⁵⁹

⁵⁶ This is the argument of Jacob in *Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689 – 1720*, Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1976, chaps. 1, 5; *Radical Enlightenment*, chap. 3; and Israel, *Radical*, especially chap. 27. In both cases, especially the latter, Spinoza and those inspired by his philosophy represent the radical alternative to Christian-monarchical models of social organisation.

⁵⁷ Allen, *Human Christ*, p. 95.

⁵⁸ Allen cites no examples from Newton's writings which show his abandonment of Jesus' divine son-ship.

⁵⁹ This quote incorporates material from the second, fourth and twelfth articles: Newton, 'Twelve Articles on Religion', *The Newton Project* (on-line), University of Sussex, accessed 22 Feb 2012: <http://www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk/view/texts/normalized/THEM00008>

Newton's theology can quite properly be described as heterodox, and it is eminently plausible to suggest that Unitarian theologies contributed to the rise of the Quest: a religious picture which either unseats Christ from the right hand of the Father, or at least denies the Incarnation, will tend to place greater emphasis on the *humanity* Jesus and thus make historical investigation seem like a more appropriate mode of enquiry into a traditionally theological subject.⁶⁰ What is more problematic is to see Newton's theology as a direct consequence of his scientific world view: Newton's denial of the divine equality of Jesus with God, though not his Messianic and redemptive role, is consistent with key features of Arianism: a Christian heresy stretching back to the fourth century, one of the most influential in the religion's history, and one Newton strongly identified with in his private writings.⁶¹ A seventeenth-century Englishman did not need to write the *Principia* to be an anti-Trinitarian Christian.

Putting aside Newton's own theology, however, it is often argued that whatever Newton himself may have thought about revelation, his work helped to create the paradigm which undermined the idea of divine action in history, providing the intellectual underpinning for an attack on revelation by eighteenth-century biblical critics. Before Reimarus receives a mention in William Baird's rich and lucid history of New Testament studies, he wisely devotes a whole chapter to the so called 'English deists' and their 'attack on revealed religion.'⁶² When considering the intellectual context for the work of these writers, Baird writes,

Captivated by the cosmology of Newton and the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the deists stressed a religion of nature. For them, God was disclosed not in a mysterious burning bush or in the supernatural light of the Damascus road, but in the regular order of the cosmos...As advocates of this natural, universal religion, the deists opposed the old, orthodox faith, along with the authoritarian establishment which supported it...In their effort to demolish the orthodox establishment, the deists had to contend with the Bible, for the Bible was the inspired and authoritative witness to special revelation and supernatural religion, everything the deists were against.⁶³

⁶⁰ This is why it was wise for Pesce to emphasise the importance of Socinianism in his 'Per una ricerca storica su Gesù nei secoli XVI-XVIII'. Socinianism was one of the most potent anti-Trinitarian heresies in mainland Europe (see below).

⁶¹ See Westfall, *Never at Rest*, pp. 314, 324, 350 – 351, 828.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 31.

⁶³ Baird, *Deism to Tübingen*, p.31.

If his account of these 'deists' is true (we will be returning to these characters later), it is not difficult to see why such 'Newtonians' might be regarded as important figures in the history of the Quest: if they denied revelation outright, and brought this conviction to bear on their reading of scripture, then they must have denied any traditional understanding of Jesus' messianic status, let alone his divinity, and thereby brought him within the same field of investigation as other iconic figures from the ancient world. It would be a mistake, however, to see the commitment to natural theology (which is what the 'religion of nature' tended to amount to) as constituting too radical a departure from the Christian tradition. To be sure, many orthodox Protestants who insisted on *sola scriptura* would have been uncomfortable with the turn to natural theology, but the formulation of theological arguments from general features of the universe has a long and history in the scholastic tradition and had undergone something of a resurgence in the Renaissance.⁶⁴ This tradition never denied revelation but insisted that revelation expanded our natural knowledge of God.⁶⁵ Did the 'deists' push this one step further and deny that God revealed himself in history at all, placing *all* their faith in the power of reason to discover the divine? In some cases, yes;⁶⁶ in others, no.⁶⁷ And when they did deny it, it is not obvious that they did so because of a serious appreciation of Newtonian cosmology: often they rejected the divine authority of passages on the basis of textual contradictions, or on moral grounds (see Chapter Eight); sometimes on theological principle.⁶⁸ Moreover, the most scientifically literate and distinguished of those eighteenth-century thinkers to be 'captivated by Newtonian cosmology' did not all see the universe he described as one which excluded divine action; on the contrary, their writings suggest that they saw in Newtonian thought the resources for explaining just *how* God would interact with his creation.⁶⁹ Moreover, when Gottfried Leibniz (1646 – 1716) clashed with the Newtonian

⁶⁴ See Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Volume III Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy*, London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1953.

⁶⁵ This is evident throughout Aquinas's *ST* (especially, pt i, q. 12) and *SCG* (especially, bk i, chaps. 3 - 14).

⁶⁶ Peter Annet is representative of this tendency in his *Deism Fairly Stated*, London: W. Webb, 1746.

⁶⁷ Thomas Morgan did not deny revelation: see *The Absurdity of Opposing Faith to Reason*, London: John Noon, 1722.

⁶⁸ See Annet, *Deism Fairly Stated*; here deism is presented as 'the true, original Religion of Reason and Nature' (p. 5) which can be traced all the way back to that 'practised by Socrates' (p.5).

⁶⁹ This point was clarified for me by the historians of natural science Professor Simon Shaffer, of the University of Cambridge. There are various theories of how Newton himself conceived of God's relationship to the world, and in this instance to gravity, ranging from the continuous activity of the omnipotent deity (Westfall) to the idea that, although matter is essentially inert, God has infused it with the capacity for gravitational attraction which then operates by an (undiscovered) secondary and (possibly material) cause; for a survey of these theories, with a strong argument for the second, see John Henry, "Pray Do Not Scribe that Notion to Me": God and Newton's Gravity', in James E Force and Richard H Popkin, *The Books of Nature and Scripture*:

Samuel Clarke (1625 – 1729) on the question of miracles (among other things),⁷⁰ Leibniz took Newton to task for imagining a universe that required more divine intervention than was mechanically necessary or theologically edifying: Leibniz's complaint was not that Newton's universe did not allow for marvelous manifestations of the divine (it did), but that Newton's universe needed God to explain even the most mundane of its workings.⁷¹

(iii) The Hegemony of the Single Sense of Scripture

In a narrow but erudite account, Werner Kelber locates the origins of the Quest in the collapse of the fourfold sense of scripture—literal, allegorical, moral and anagogic / spiritual—which had, with differing degrees of emphasis, shaped interpretation of the Bible from St Augustine to the Reformation. In his paper, 'The Genesis of the Quest',⁷² Kelber places the Quest within the history of biblical interpretation, and chronicles the rise to dominance of the literal sense of scripture. On Kelber's account, the priority given to the literal sense emerged by way of quite unrelated intellectual and theological trends within Christendom: 1) outstanding medieval scholarship on the literal sense of the Old Testament was produced by Christian scholars motivated to find the surest possible foundation on which to base more edifying spiritual readings;⁷³ 2) the influence of philosophical nominalism, with its focus on the concrete particular over against the abstract and universal, including texts and their meanings;⁷⁴ and 3) the Protestant Reformation and Martin's Luther's insistence that *scriptura sui ipsius interpret*⁷⁵—that the Bible is a self explanatory document, the meaning of which is derived solely from the *sensus literalis*.

The final and decisive move, on this reading of the history, is the late Enlightenment and nineteenth-century decoupling of the literal sense with historical *réalité*: bluntly, the separation of the literal sense from the facts of the matter. Echoing the celebrated

Recent Essays on Natural Philosophy, Theology, and Biblical Criticism, Dordrecht / Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994, pp. 123 – 147.

⁷⁰ See H. G. Alexander (ed.), *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence: Together with Extracts from Newton's "Principia" and "Opticks"*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956.

⁷¹ This is a theme throughout the correspondence, and is at the forefront of Leibniz's thinking in his very first letter in the series (see *ibid*, pp. 11 – 12).

⁷² This is a version of a paper given at the University of Louvain in 2004, and develops his earlier 'Quest for the Historical Jesus from the Perspectives of Medieval, Modern, and Post Enlightenment Readings, and in View of Ancient Oral Aesthetics', in Crossan, Luke Timothy Johnson and Kelber, *The Jesus Controversy: Perspectives in Conflict*, Harrisburg, Trinity, 1999, pp. 75 – 116. Professor Kelber kindly provided me with the text of 'The Genesis of the Quest or: The Reduction of the Polyvalency to a Single Sense'. In its current format, 'Genesis of the Quest' is a 32 page document.

⁷³ See *ibid*, pp. 5 – 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 10 – 11.

⁷⁵ See *ibid*, pp. 11 – 13.

treatment of biblical hermeneutics by Frei, Kelber notes that,

The next decisive occurrence in the evolution of the literal sense in gospel studies was a rupturing of the broadly understood literal sense into a narratological, theological or kerygmatic meaning on the one hand versus a factually representative, historical meaning on the other... If in the wake of this development, the narratively constructed and the historically conceived Jesus were no longer logically identical, then biblical hermeneutics was on its way toward a separation of story from history whereby the Jesus of history became the subject of an independent, critical inquiry.⁷⁶

This is a plausible reading of the history of biblical hermeneutics in relation to the Quest, but it does not deal with the causes of the rupture. What forced a divide between, say, the literal / historical sense of Jesus turning water into wine (John 2:1-11) on the one hand and its theological meaning on the other? Was such a sumptuous example of God manifesting his power through Christ not meaningful enough? Not if the historicity of the literal sense began to fall into disrepute, which is precisely what happened during the Enlightenment,⁷⁷ when the whole concept of historically revealed religion came under question. Why did this happen? Implicit in Frei's whole history of biblical hermeneutics is that in the Enlightenment the truth of the Bible, even its meaning, came to be understood within the context of an external body of knowledge—informed by new encounters with a larger terrestrial, cosmic and historical reality—rather than the other way round: it was once assumed, at least by many in Christendom, that extra biblical knowledge could and should be subordinate to the literal and historical truth of the overarching biblical narrative, which began with the creation and fall of humanity, reached its redemptive high point with the revelation of Christ, and will conclude with his return. A full account of the conditions which brought about this 'great reversal' would certainly include the rise of new natural and empirically orientated philosophies (Jesus Seminar / Allen) and the demand for evidence based demonstration of all propositions; the collapse of the four fold sense of scripture (Kelber), and the focus on the representational content of biblical texts. But such an account would also have to take seriously the broader historical influences at work in the early modern period. Perhaps the finest general appreciations of

⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. 13 – 14.

⁷⁷ One of the ironies of biblical hermeneutics during the Enlightenment—given the Reformation's general prioritising of the single sense—is the rise of a belligerent insistence, in resolutely Protestant contexts, on the moral and theological truths to be drawn from allegorical readings of scripture: see, for example, Conyers Middleton, 'An Essay on the Allegorical and Literal Interpretation', in *The Miscellaneous Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Conyers Middleton*, (vol. 2 of 5), London: R Manby and H. S Cox, 1752, pp. 123 – 134. The earlier (and more notorious) work on miracles by Woolston adopts a comparable hermeneutic.

how a convergence of historical phenomena shaped modern encounters with the Bible are Klaus Scholder's *Ursprünge und Probleme der Bibelkritik im 17. Jahrhundert*, and H. G. Reventlow's *Bibelautorität und Geist der Moderne* (see Introduction).⁷⁸ Two contemporary writers who are especially cognisant with the importance of such phenomena, and who have brought them to bear on their analysis of the Quest, are Gregory Dawes and Wayne Meeks.⁷⁹

3. The Great Reversal and Religious Authority

(i) A Challenge to Religious Authority

In his Introduction to an anthology of writings on the historical Jesus, Dawes writes, 'The question of the historical Jesus is such a familiar one today that it is difficult to realise how recent a question it is. For more than 1600 years, the idea of asking such a question never arose.'⁸⁰ Further narrowing his focus on the modern age, he argues, 'It was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that practically all our current questions about Jesus were first posed.'⁸¹ There is a modern, Eurocentric and Christian bias to most surveys of scholarship on Jesus (my own included), and these remarks by Dawes are typical of the tendency. The historical Jesus was always put to the question by people standing outside the Christian faith: Jews, Pagans, Muslims and skeptical materialists have all have doubted the historicity of the Gospel narratives. Moreover, these doubts were not all of some strange pre-modern variety, when people are generally thought to have had an inadequate appreciation of the past. These doubts are entirely intelligible to the modern mind and consistent with the questions posed in modernity: some pre-modern critics judged that the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, death and Resurrection did not, either in part or whole, correspond to any past historical reality; they tended to suggest, instead, that these stories were created to provide a historical basis for a new and spurious theology. Dawes appears to acknowledge this with the qualification: 'More precisely, in the minds of the Christian interpreters of the Bible, there was no difference between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of Christian proclamation.'⁸² Of course there has never been

⁷⁸ See Klaus Scholder, *The Birth of Modern Critical Theology: Origins and Problems of Biblical Criticism in the Seventeenth-Century*, London: SCM Press / Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1990; and Reventlow, *Authority*.

⁷⁹ Dawes explicitly takes Scholder as his guide—see *Jesus Question*, p. 1—and directs readers to Reventlow's 'magisterial' study (p. 1, n. 1); Wayne Meeks does not cite either of these authors specifically, but he is cognisant with many of the themes in these works (see *Christ is the Question*, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006, chaps. 1 – 2).

⁸⁰ Dawes (ed.), *Landmarks*, p 1.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p ix.

⁸² *Ibid*, p 1.

a single Christian proclamation, no one vision of who Jesus was;⁸³ nevertheless, Christian proclamation of whatever stripe does seem to have presupposed substantial continuity between the image of Christ proclaimed and the Jesus of history. It is no surprise, then, that some of the more radical challenges to this continuity have come from outside the Christian tradition, but it is important not to drive too great a wedge between the intellectual concerns of Christians of different ages: no one could possibly read Origen of Alexandria's *Contra Celsum* (c. 248CE) and maintain that pre-modern Christians were oblivious to questions of historicity or did not feel the need to respond to historical challenges.⁸⁴ Even if such Christian scholars have tended to see God as the real author of scripture and therefore the guarantor of its authority, external critique has, at least intermittently, forced Christians to confront questions of historical fact, as a logically independent realm from scripture.⁸⁵

For all my reservations about the complete novelty of modern questions about Jesus, in *The Historical Jesus Question*, Dawes provides, in my judgement, the best broad brush account of the rise of modern historical Jesus studies and its associated theological problems.⁸⁶ As the subtitle suggests, Dawes locates the 'historical Jesus question' within the context of modern challenges to the authority of religious claims, and the genesis of these challenges are situated within the context of the seventeenth century. Dawes distinguishes between a broad and narrow sense of the historical Jesus question:

The narrow sense represents an historical question...The problems to be dealt with here are largely empirical: they are questions of historical evidence. But behind this set of problems lies a larger question. This larger question was prompted by, but is not identical with, the historical questions....This set of problems has to do with the challenge of traditional notions of religious authority. This is a conceptual rather than an empirical problem.⁸⁷

What are the conceptual questions that lie beneath the empirical?

⁸³ See the classic Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (1934): *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christianity*, Robert Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (eds.), Kraft (trans.) Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.

⁸⁴ The writings of the Greek philosopher Celsus are among the earliest anti-Christian polemics we have evidence for. Celsus's attack on the messianic status of Jesus (c. 177), is comparable to much Enlightenment incredulity at the miracles, and Christianity's historical-theological relationship to the Jewish tradition and Hebrew Bible. The text has been reconstructed out of the substantial quotations contained in Origen's rebuttal *Contra Celsum* (248 CE): see Celsus, *On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians*, R. Joseph Hoffmann (trans. & intro.), New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

⁸⁵ See Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Henry Chadwick (trans.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958.

⁸⁶ See Dawes, Introduction to *Jesus Question*.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 36.

If the Bible has to be judged against a wider framework of history, then what happens to its religious authority?...Even if we *can* discover “the real Jesus”, the Jesus of history, will he be anything more than a figure of his time and place, of no interest to a later age? More seriously, if the biblical *history* can no longer be taken as a reliable account of the past, why should the Bible's *religious* claims be taken any more seriously?⁸⁸

Dawes identifies five key stages in the development of the historical Jesus question, with its empirical and conceptual dimensions: 1) A new sense of the past inherited from Renaissance Humanism, whereby the social and cultural gulf between different ages was better appreciated.⁸⁹ 2) The effects of religious controversy when, as a response to the European wars of the religion in the sixteenth century, there emerged an aversion to dogmatic religion with its exclusive claims to truth.⁹⁰ 3) The rise of the new astronomy with its contradiction of biblical notions of the heavens.⁹¹ 4) The great voyages of discovery, which opened up hitherto unknown regions and civilizations of the world, and for which the biblical account of history seemed to provide an inadequate genealogy.⁹² 5). Expanding on Kelber's analysis of the history of biblical hermeneutics, Dawes points to modern natural philosophy's tendency to limit the range of legitimate explanation; more precisely, the influence on biblical criticism of a Baconian / Cartesian rejection of teleology, whereby the only legitimate cause to discover in the natural world is the efficient cause which, in terms of biblical criticism, is the intention of the author of the text.⁹³ All these factors are important when considering the general intellectual upheaval in the early modern period, and in bringing about the 'great reversal' in Biblical interpretation. It is debatable whether this period witnessed quite the sense of separation from the past that Dawes suggests, so great was the intellectual borrowing from antiquity and the close (and often uncritical) identification with so many of its representatives and their beliefs.⁹⁴ This is a relatively minor quibble, however, so let us turn to the specific writers who posed 'the historical Jesus question'.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 37.

⁸⁹ Ibid, pp. 2 - 4.

⁹⁰ Ibid, pp. 5 - 10.

⁹¹ Ibid, pp. 10 - 16

⁹² Ibid, pp. 17 - 23.

⁹³ Ibid, pp. 23 - 38.

⁹⁴ See Gay, *Modern Paganism*, chaps. 1 - 2, 5; and Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 10 - 18, 73 - 76, 130 - 172.

In *Landmarks of the Historical Jesus Quest*,⁹⁵ Dawes presents material from some of the great contributors to the empirical question, and he follows the tradition of presenting the work of Reimarus as the first proper study of its kind.⁹⁶ In *The Historical Jesus Question*, however, where Dawes's focus is on the conceptual theological problems posed by the Quest, he begins with Benedict de Spinoza in the late seventeenth century,⁹⁷ leaves out Reimarus and the eighteenth century altogether, and jumps from Spinoza to Strauss. While Spinoza's inclusion in the study is to be welcomed—he is usually ignored in scholarship on Jesus—Spinoza's place in the wider intellectual context of the early Enlightenment is ignored. Why does this matter? As Dawes acknowledges, 'Spinoza was not the first seventeenth-century thinker to propose new ways of interpreting the Bible.'⁹⁸ So what is the justification for Spinoza's inclusion as the first author? 'Spinoza's presentation of a new method of biblical interpretation stands out for its thoroughness, its consistency, and the degree to which its author is prepared to depart from traditional religious attitudes.'⁹⁹ The rigour and comprehensiveness of Spinoza's criticism are not in doubt, and Dawes is right to remind students of biblical studies of Spinoza's historical-critical approach to scripture, whereby texts are examined with a view to establishing their historically conditioned meaning; he is right, too, to discuss the metaphysical monism which is the radical philosophical context for Spinoza's hermeneutics: Spinoza's *Deus sive natura* formula remains one of the most tantalising in modern philosophy,¹⁰⁰ and beautifully captures the 'Janus faced' character of Spinoza's metaphysics referred to in Chapter Three. Surprisingly, however, given Spinoza's position in Dawes's pantheon of thinkers, there is no analysis of the philosopher's intriguing and highly controversial reflections on Jesus himself (which I discuss at length in later chapters) where Spinoza is rather more positive, one might even say dogmatic, about the theological significance of Jesus than a reader of Dawes would ever imagine.

For Dawes, the conceptual problems underpinning the historical Jesus question demand answers capable of winning the intellectual assent of all rational agents in the public domain: 'What publicly contestable arguments may be put forward for the idea that either the Bible or the historical figure of Jesus are uniquely reliable religious

⁹⁵ This is the subtitle, but I wanted to clearly distinguish it from Dawes's *Historical Jesus Question*.

⁹⁶ See Dawes, *Landmarks*, chap. 2.

⁹⁷ See Dawes, *Jesus Question*, p. 39.

⁹⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 39.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁰ His most concise statement on this formulae is in *Ethics*, pref. to bk iv, p. 134.

authorities?¹⁰¹ Having examined the work of one renegade Jew from the Netherlands and six German Protestant, Dawes concludes that all arguments fail, and he sees little hope for successful ones in the future.¹⁰² Dawes's skeptical argument presupposes a propositional conception of Christian theology many would reject.¹⁰³ And even if we were to grant the primacy of propositional notions of religion in contemporary Christianity, is the question of Jesus' unique authority really such a modern challenge? Why assume that the question of Jesus' religious authority was significantly less of a problem to Paul and other early evangelists, when faced with critics from a Greco-Roman culture with its own claims to religious antiquity and sophisticated philosophical traditions? In his history of the origins of the Quest, Wayne Meeks makes no such assumptions. Although his is not a study in theological method, Meeks clearly rejects the propositional (he calls it 'cognitive') notion of religion discussed by Dawes,¹⁰⁴ and argues that the history of Christianity has not been one of finding more or less convincing answers to theological questions, but of asking new questions about how Christians are to live in the light of their encounter with Christ—hence the title of his book, *Christ is the Question*.

(ii) *An Exercise in Religious Reform*

For Meeks, the question of Jesus' religious authority was already being wrestled with by Paul:

More clearly than any other interpreters we know, Paul understood that to become a follower of Jesus meant to live in a new way—in a world made new...When the apostle Paul speaks of the *logos* of the cross, he means more than just talking about the crucifixion of Jesus. He means that, for those who have been seized by the faith of Jesus, the very logic of reality has changed...And thus begins an imperious, subversive narrative that seeks to incorporate the whole human story into itself and which, as a consequence, never rests, is never finished.¹⁰⁵

What is significant about the modern approach to that story? Meeks's eloquent essay contains many of the same features as Dawes's,¹⁰⁶ but the former differs in at least two

¹⁰¹ Dawes, *Jesus Question*, *ibid*, p. 352.

¹⁰² See *ibid*, pp. 367 – 369.

¹⁰³ Dawes does at least consider the challenge posed by reformed epistemology to the foundationalism and evidentialism which underpins his own approach to theological enquiry, briefly outlining and rejecting the arguments of Plantinga. For the most comprehensive treatment of this issue in relation to Christianity see Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹⁰⁴ Meeks, *Christ*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁶ Meeks discusses developments in the Renaissance (see *ibid*, pp. 9 -13), modern science (p.33), and the rise of the single (literal) sense in biblical scholarship (pp.103 -107).

important respects. The first point of difference is that while Meeks is concerned with the Quest as a modern phenomena, he is not so fixated on the seventeenth century or the Enlightenment, seeing important developments in the Medieval period paving the way for historical studies of Jesus: an age when there was an indentifiable shift in focus from the cosmic Christ, the Pantocrator, to the individual figure of the human Jesus, the Incarnate Word, and the personal response he inspired. Following observations by the historian Louis Dupré,¹⁰⁷ Meeks argues,

Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan theologians after him...first upset the “axiomatic principle of the universal” in the Church's doctrine of incarnation, by introducing an individualistic devotion to Jesus of Nazareth...One of the most popular devotional books of the fourteenth century was *Meditations on the Life of Christ* by the Franciscan, John of Caulibus. The *Meditations* invite the worshiper to empathies with Jesus' feelings and sufferings, “for He had real and susceptible flesh like all other humans”.¹⁰⁸

Meeks sees this Medieval emphasis on the humanity of Christ was an important precursor to giving an account of Jesus in historical terms, and this is an important insight: the cosmic overlord of early Mediaeval theology could scarcely submit to the epistemologically conservative methods of modern historical investigation, but by focussing on the humanity of God incarnate, thinkers of the Middle Ages took early steps towards bringing Jesus within the 'immanent frame' of the modern,¹⁰⁹ historical imagination.

The second point of difference in the two accounts is that whereas Dawes seems to view the Quest as essentially subversive, and at a fundamental level—presenting an ultimately insurmountable theological problem—on Meeks's reading, modern history has actually served as the handmaiden for reforming theology. On this interpretation, the historical study of Jesus is part of a religious Quest born out of what Jefferey Stout has called 'the flight from authority'.¹¹⁰ In a book by the same name, Stout recounts the erosion of those multi layered foundations upon which people in the modern Western world had previously sought to ground their values;¹¹¹ according to Meeks, this has been

¹⁰⁷ See Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*, New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1993.

¹⁰⁸ Meeks, *Christ*, pp. 9 – 10.

¹⁰⁹ This phrase is borrowed from the title of chap. 15 of Taylor's *Secular Age*.

¹¹⁰ Jeffery Stout, quoted in Meeks, *Christ*, p. 31

¹¹¹ See Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Region, Morality and the Quest for Autonomy*, Notre Dame, IN, and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

a history of suspicion and disillusionment, but also of constantly renewed hope for freedom in believing and hope in a just social order. It is the story of uncovering the clay feet of public authority, but at the same time the story of a quest for a satisfying private authority—for each of us moderns is torn between our mistrust for the publicly and institutionally certified modes of authority and our longing to be secure in our deepest beliefs and hopes.¹¹²

On Meek's account, the Quest is as an essentially liberating enterprise, and, as I read it, a deepening of the Protestant Reformation, whereby individuals encounter Jesus 'as he was' behind the theological façades erected by established religious authorities. In response to historical questions, the modern period has witnessed intellectuals either operating on the defensive, trying to deny or minimize the historical fallibility of the Gospels;¹¹³ or, they have sought to prioritise the 'authentic' material to emerge from a historical investigation of the Gospels and recommended this as a more legitimate foundation for Christian faith.¹¹⁴ These recommendations may or not may not be convincing,¹¹⁵ but Meeks is right to suggest that the Quest has tended to be driven by a desire to challenge *particular manifestations* of religious authority, rather than religious authority per se.

In terms of the individual scholars he profiles, Meeks does not explore the myriad challenges posed to traditional Christianity prior to Reimarus; in fact, he ignores Reimarus altogether, taking Strauss as his first example of a major contributor to the modern Quest.¹¹⁶ Perhaps this is because, on Meeks's interpretation, the nineteenth century still excerpts an unhealthy influence on historical Jesus studies; indeed, when he reflects on more recent Quests, he strikes a disapproving tone:

There is in fact nothing new...Each of them differs from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries only in one significant respect: we have changed our notions of the ideal Jesus whom we would like to find in the sources, and the self appointed experts obligingly (and profitably) dish up precisely the Jesus who is wanted ...They expertly sift out those disconcerting bits of the tradition that offend...proving by the very latest nineteenth-century techniques that the real Jesus could not possibly have said any of those offending things....Popular culture has embraced the many Jesuses

¹¹² Meeks, *Christ*, p. 31.

¹¹³ This trend continues today with such studies as Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitness: The Gospels as Eye Witness Testimony*, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006.

¹¹⁴ See Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for the New Millennium*, New York: Harper Collins, 1996. This popular work represents the author's sense of Christianity's future given, among other things, the minimalist historical conclusions to emerge from his scholarly work.

¹¹⁵ Dawes seems to think not (see *Jesus Question*, chap. 3).

¹¹⁶ See Meeks, *Christ*, pp. 7 – 8.

available for the taking or making, from the sadomasochistic Jesus of Mel Gibson to Mary Magdalene's secret lover in the fevered and careless imagination of Dan Brown. Here is the zenith (or the apogee) of the trajectory which began when David Frederick Strauss constructed "the life of Jesus for the German people", designed for the cheap print culture of the nineteenth century.¹¹⁷

Meeks is an urbane guide to the Quest throughout most of the discussion,¹¹⁸ but his obvious frustration with the contemporary scene manifests itself in a polemical treatment which is more entertaining than it is enlightening. Whatever one thinks of the merits or failings of Strauss's (1864) *Das Leben Jesu für das deutsche Volk*—and it came as a grave disappointment to some readers who considered the first edition of *Das Leben Jesu* a masterpiece¹¹⁹—to place the *Da Vinci Code* in the same cultural tradition seems tendentious, to say the least.¹²⁰ The charge that, from its very beginning, the Quest has been concerned with reaffirming certain contemporary values, rather than forming a better understanding of the Jesus of history, is an observation that never ceases to be made in histories of the discipline, and the ring of truth has scarcely faded. Nor is the observation that writing about Jesus is a good business move, though this is unduly reductive. Contemporary New Testament scholars would balk at the suggestion that they are following nineteenth century methodological practices,¹²¹ although it seems less controversial to suggest that there are significant thematic continuities.

In their own way, both Meeks and Dawes sketch the rise of the Quest against a background of theological and religious controversy, but they deal in large intellectual shifts rather than close analysis of concrete and particular intellectual confrontations. I now turn to those studies which have provided the most detailed accounts of philosophical/theological disputations which found expression in the largely inter-religious, and often inter-Protestant, polemics which flourished in the early modern period, whereby very different intellectual visions manifested themselves in trenchant exchanges—often rhetorically inflated and vituperative in character—in books, pamphlets

¹¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 30 – 31.

¹¹⁸ Meeks is arguably the dean of this field in North America, with his innovative social histories of early Christianity, but he has said little about the Quest in print until *Christ*.

¹¹⁹ See Schweitzer, *Quest*, pp. 193 - 199

¹²⁰ If one wanted to make such comparisons, there are much better examples of nineteenth-century works on Jesus driven by 'fevered and careless' imaginations. An example would be Renan's *La Vie de Jesus*, which is generally considered to be more successful on its own terms than *Jesu für das deutsche Volk*.

¹²¹ A repudiation of nineteenth-century method was a key component in the launching of a self-consciously new Quest (see James M Robinson, *A New Quest for the Historical Jesus*, London: SCM Press, 1959); on the other hand, exaggerating the differences between different generations of scholars is not unheard of in the humanities, serving as it does to justify the need to produce yet more work on a subject which has already been covered an inordinate number of times.

and printed sermons. More often than not, practitioners of such religious polemic drew heavily on the storehouse of philosophical ideas available to seventeenth and eighteenth-century writers.

4. Theological and Philosophical Conflict

(i) Rationalism

In an essay which has done much to shape contemporary perceptions of the Quest's history,¹²² N. T. Wright identifies 'six commonly held but erroneous views',¹²³ and first among these allegedly faulty opinions is that 'Reimarus began it.'¹²⁴ This is a refreshingly bold statement on the origins of the Quest when compared with some of the lazier repetitions of the account made famous by Schweitzer. The positive thesis Wright provides, following Colin Brown,¹²⁵ is to argue that 'Reimarus drew on the work of earlier writers, particularly the English Deists',¹²⁶ and that, 'The first phase of the quest fell historically within a wider movement in which orthodox Christianity came under attack from rationalism'.¹²⁷ The first of these claims is more or less true: not all of the so called 'English deists' were English, but England was the intellectual centre for this loosely connected constellation of writers, and their connection with Reimarus is well established. Whether the term 'deist' tells us anything meaningful about those writers is something I discuss below; suffice to say for now that I do not capitalise the 'deists' because it may give the impression that we are dealing with an official, or at least coherent, religious movement, which would be a difficult argument to sustain. Wright's second claim is also true, but, again, not without qualification.

Even if we could extract all genuine examples of rational disputation from the ubiquitous rhetoric of reason in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — 'ridicule' was often the real currency of writers who invoked reason—¹²⁸'rationalism' as a broad philosophical or theological category is still of limited use as an indicator of any ideological

¹²² Wright's analysis of the tradition, and particularly his coining of the term 'third Quest', has been taken up by a wide range of writers, including both sympathisers and critics of his approach to studying Jesus: for the former, see Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995; for the latter, see Funk, 'Milestones in the Quest for the Historical Jesus', *The Fourth R* (on-line), July / Aug, 2001, accessed 25 May 2012: http://www.westarinstitute.org/Periodicals/4R_Articles/milestones.html.

¹²³ Wright, 'Quest', p. 796.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 796.

¹²⁵ See *Ibid.*, p. 796.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 797.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 797.

¹²⁸ This is one of the themes in John Redwood's *Reason, Ridicule and Religion: The Age of Enlightenment in England*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1976.

or methodological stance in such religious polemic, unless it is used in a circumscribed way, say, to designate a particular hermeneutical approach to the problem of miracles,¹²⁹ or if it is understood as a thoroughgoing commitment to natural theology over against revealed religion (I suspect this is what Wright has in mind).¹³⁰ Just as some historians now insist that it always makes sense to ask which strand of the Enlightenment we are discussing—mainstream or radical, English or French etc—it also makes sense to ask which type of rationalism we are discussing during the same period. Few thinkers rank higher in the canon of modern philosophical rationalists than Leibniz, and yet it was Leibniz who brought some of the work of the ‘English deists’ to the attention of many German readers, possibly to Reimarus himself, through his highly critical reviews of their biblical criticism and heterodox theology.¹³¹ Leibniz, the quintessential rationalist at the dawn of the eighteenth century, was a stalwart defender of Christian orthodoxy, leading the fight in Germany against the subversive biblical criticism emerging in England and Holland: Trinitarian theology, the Incarnation and the Resurrection were among orthodox Christian propositions to be defended.¹³²

One of the advantages of locating the origins of the Quest within a context of theological and philosophical conflict is that it brings us into direct contact with figures of the Enlightenment who were reading and responding to each other's work directly. These were intellectual exchanges which may be judged the local manifestations, or proximate causes, of new developments in biblical criticism and in interpretations of Jesus. The weakness of this approach is that it can ignore the development of those larger intellectual frameworks in which those confrontations took place (the strength of accounts by Dawes and Meeks). What is required is an account which does justice to both large scale intellectual developments, and the interaction between particular writers engaged with specific questions. Two scholars who seem to me to have succeeded in meeting these twin challenges, at least in a preliminary way, are Charles H Talbert and

¹²⁹ In New Testament studies, rationalism is sometimes indicative of a particular stance on the question of miracles: rationalism proposes a historical core for stories of the miraculous, and explains away the fantastical elements as the result of elaboration or misunderstandings of natural causes. The most famous (or infamous) attempt to rationalise Jesus' miracles was the ‘fully developed rationalism’ of Heinrich E. G. Paulus (see Schweitzer, *Quest*, chap. 5).

¹³⁰ Specialist dictionary definitions of deism (see Blackburn, *ODP*, p. 97), which emphasise natural religion and universalism are of little use when trying to understand this historical phenomenon during the Enlightenment. Indeed, the scarcity of Anglophone writers who took a consistently negative position on the truth value of revelation, and the fact that such religious labels were often forced on writers in the course of polemic, makes the continued use of the term ‘deist’ problematic.

¹³¹ Talbert, Introduction, p. 15.

¹³² See Maria Rosa Antognazza, *Leibniz on the Trinity and the Incarnation: Reason and Revelation in the Seventeenth Century*, Gerald Parks (trans.), New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2007.

Colin Brown. Much of the analysis offered by these two scholars actually overlaps, and I will be drawing from them both in thematic discussions of the following intellectual controversies.

(ii) Lockean and Wolffian Epistemology and the 'Deist' challenge to Miracle and Prophecy

In his introductory essay to *Fragments*, Talbert grounds the thought of Reimarus in the intellectual soil of the German Enlightenment and German Christianity, while providing ample evidence of a cross fertilisation of ideas brought about by the reception of radical English scholarship.¹³³ According to Talbert, first among Reimarus's philosophical influences was the rationalism of Christian Wolff, who arguably exercised more sustained influence on German intellectual culture than any other figure in eighteenth-century philosophy, and whose intellectual ambition made him one of the most celebrated thinkers of his age.¹³⁴ Despite a reputation as a 'ruthlessly boring' writer of Latin and German prose,¹³⁵ Wolff nevertheless succeeded in establishing the latter as a major language for the communication of philosophical and theological ideas, and in creating much of the disciplinary categories and subdivisions of modern philosophy.¹³⁶ Although some of the most fastidious commentators, past and present, have seen great affinity between the philosophies of Wolff and Descartes,¹³⁷ Talbert reiterates the widespread impression, going back to the eighteenth century, that Wolff was offering the German people an accessible version of Leibniz's philosophical system. In the same polymathic spirit of Leibniz, Wolff's ambition was to unify all human knowledge and, in the field of theology specifically, to synthesize the natural and revealed dimensions of religion. It is worth pointing out, however, that this is an early modern version of the Thomist harmony of faith and reason which was the abiding ambition of the resurgent scholasticism of the early modern period, and Wolff was very conscious of his debts to Aquinas: reflecting on the early phase of his intellectual development and publishing career, he acknowledged a greater dependence on Aquinas than to his contemporary Leibniz.¹³⁸

¹³³ See Talbert, Introduction, pp. 4 – 18.

¹³⁴ Wolff's reputation as a philosopher suffered by being sandwiched between Leibniz and Kant: his polymathic talents, huge though there were, were put into the shade by the former, while his philosophical scope and penetration did not stand up well in comparison with the latter. Wolff's supporters tried to take revenge on their hero's behalf, becoming some of Kant's most vociferous critics (see L. W. Beck, 'Wolff, Christian', in *OCP*, p. 917).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 917.

¹³⁶ See Kerr, *Visions of Thomism*, p. 54.

¹³⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 917

¹³⁸ See Christian Wolff, *Opuscula Metaphysica* (1724), in J. Ecole (ed.), *Gesammelte Werke* (vol. 9), New

Wolff thought God's existence could be established by versions of the cosmological and ontological arguments,¹³⁹ and he judged that at least some of his attributes could be firmly grasped through reason alone, as necessary inferences about what God must be like in order to be the ground of all being.¹⁴⁰ How does this natural theology impact upon the revelations which remain central to orthodox Christianity?

On the basis of this attribute of infinite power Wolff concludes that God can perform miracles to whatever extent he wills...Revelation, therefore, which involves a miracle, is possible...Nevertheless, there are certain criteria by which every alleged revelation must be tested. First, revelation must be necessary. It must contain knowledge not attainable by natural means...Indeed, any alleged revelation of which it is possible to trace the natural origins is not to be considered the work of supernatural agency. Second, it must be free from contradictions. It cannot contradict either the divine perfections or the laws of nature. Neither can it contain inner contradictions.¹⁴¹

Although a student of Descartes, Leibniz, and Aquinas, Wolff had also been impressed by the empirical rationalism of John Locke,¹⁴² and I would suggest that English empirical influence may also be evident in this classic piece of German rationalism. Locke had already formulated a typology of propositional knowledge fit for religious and secular subjects:

1. *According to Reason* are such propositions, whose Truth we can discover, by examining and tracing those *Ideas* we have from *Sensation* and *Reflexion*; and by natural deduction, find to be true, or probable. 2. *Above Reason* are such Propositions, whose Truth or Probability we cannot by Reason derive from those Principles. 3. *Contrary to reason* are such Propositions, which as are inconsistent with, or irreconcilable to our clear and distinct *Ideas*.¹⁴³

York / Hildesheim, G. Olms. 1983, pp. 4, 16, 21, 24, 29, 32, 34 - 35, 51, 76, 113 - 114, 122, 141, 182, 200; and Ecole's introductory essay. Wolff was also indebted to the Thomist Suárez, he and Wolff agreed with each other, against Thomas, on important points (see Kerr, *Visions of Thomism*, pp. 54 - 55).

¹³⁹ For his natural theology, see Christian Wolff, *Theologia naturalis, methodo scientifica pertractata* (2 vols.), Francofurti / Lipsiae, 1739 -1741.

¹⁴⁰ See Talbert, Introduction, pp. 12 - 13.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 11- 13.

¹⁴² See Ibid, pp. 14 -15. The rationalist / empiricist distinction that students of philosophy are usually taught at British universities is of questionable worth when trying to understand the thought of writers in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but one of the more secure distinctions is the empiricist's rejection of innate ideas: see Locke's classic statement (1690): *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Peter H Nidditch (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, bk 1 chaps. ii - iii.

¹⁴³ Locke, bk 4, chap. xvii, p. 687. What bearing does this propositional typology have on Christian monotheism? This is how Locke categorises some key doctrines: 'Thus the Existence of GOD is according to Reason; the Existence of more than one GOD is contrary to Reason; the resurrection of the dead, above reason' (bk 4, chap. xvii, p. 687).

For Locke, the spectacular manifestations of God in biblical literature clearly do not derive from reflecting on our usual stock of sense impressions; nevertheless, if we bear witness to such manifestations in the biblical record, then we are quite within our rights to affirm this as further evidence of a God who makes himself known to his creation, above and beyond the evidence derived from the natural order:

Reason is natural *Revelation*, whereby the eternal Father of light, and Fountain of all Knowledge communicates to Mankind that portion of Truth, which he has laid within reach of their natural Faculties: *Revelation* is natural *Reason* enlarged by a new set of Discoveries communicated by GOD immediately, which *Reason* vouches the Truth of, by the Testimony and Proofs it gives, that they come from GOD.¹⁴⁴

Again, this is a modern empirical take on a Medieval philosophical inheritance: human persons have the innate capacity to achieve rudimentary knowledge of God through rational reflection of nature. The truth of Christian theism in all its fullness, however, can only be known through that sacred doctrine which comes to us through revelation; even here, though, it is insisted by the contents of faith cannot *contradict* the deliverances of reason, though they may transcend them. In Locke's version of the relationship between faith and reason, reason is broadly conceived to encompass logical thought and our reflection on sense impressions, and it becomes the arbiter of alleged revelations. This Lockean / Wolffian philosophical approach to theological truth attracted many followers, but its apologetic value eroded from within, falling into the grateful hands of some of Christianity's leading critics.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps the most famous and dramatic challenge by a German writer came with Lessing's publication of the *Fragments*, in which it was clear that the then unknown author, Reimarus, accepted the Lockean / Wolffian criteria for judging the veracity of an alleged revelation, but that when he applied it to the Gospel's accounts he found them hopelessly wanting: 'Reimarus's treatment of Christian origins set out to show (1) that it is possible to trace the natural origins of Christianity [thereby failing a Wolffian test], and (2) that the supposed revelation [particularly the miracle stories] is filled with contradictions' [failing another Wolffian test].¹⁴⁶ Because of the internal contradictions in the Gospel's accounts, Reimarus consigned Christianity's alleged

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, bk 4, chap. xix, p. 698.

¹⁴⁵ Peter Annet was amongst the most acute critics of the miracles of the New Testament—including a sustained assault on the Resurrection—working on principles which might well be regarded as Lockean: see *Super Naturals Examined*, London: F. Page, 1747; and *The Resurrection Considered*, London: M Cooper, 1744.

¹⁴⁶ Talbert, Introduction, p. 13.

revelations to Locke's third category of proposition: propositions *against* reason. But Reimarus was by no means the first to reach this conclusion:

English influence was exerted on Reimarus through the host of polemics against the English Deists which circulated in Germany ...One of the most significant was H. G. Schmidt's translation of John Leland's three-volume work, *A View of the Principle Deistical Writers*...This work was especially significant because of its comprehensiveness and because of its inclusion of excerpts from primary sources and treatment of each man's argument in detail.¹⁴⁷

Apart from his discussion of the two 'deists' that Reimarus is said to refer to explicitly in his *Apologie*,¹⁴⁸ Talbert seems content to build a compelling circumstantial case for the influence of these figures: '[T]he number of biographical reports about the Deists and surveys of their literature and the translations of the writings of many of the men themselves into German would *seem* to be an avenue of English influence on Reimarus [my emphasis]'.¹⁴⁹ Close examination of the contents of Reimarus' library means we can be rather more confident of his familiarity with these writers.

One of the writers that Talbert is confident in considering an influence on Reimarus is John Toland and his *Christianity Not Mysterious*, (1696) which may have impacted Reimarus precisely because it was one of those works which seemed to provide Lockean epistemological criteria which could be applied to scripture and carried it into battle against orthodox Christianity: 'Toland made it clear that a revelation had to be judged on the basis of its content alone...No supernatural signs can give it an authority which it does not intrinsically possess. Reimarus says basically the same thing.'¹⁵⁰ The tests which Toland brings to bear on the content of revelation were three fold, and bear signs of a Lockean inspired epistemology: ' (1) What is revealed must be useful and necessary; (2) it must be intelligible and easily comprehended; (3) it must be possible, that is, not contradictory but consistent with common notions.'¹⁵¹ Once again, then, Reimarus had a set of criteria against which to judge the credibility of Gospels; notice, however, that these are *a priori* principles imposed on the text by critics operating with a particular

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 15 - 16.

¹⁴⁸ In a previous publication (Birch, 'Road to Reimarus', p. 35) I agreed with Talbert's identification of two Anglophone 'deists' in the *Apologie*; having examined the text in greater detail since, however, I have also identified references to Conyers Middleton (vol. 2, pp. 377, 387), in addition to the previously acknowledged references to Toland (vol. 1, p. 434; vol. 2, p. 658) and Anthony Collins (vol. 1, pp. 728, 742, 905; vol. 2, p. 271).

¹⁴⁹ Talbert, Introduction, p. 16.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. 15 - 16.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 17.

metaphysic in mind: the principles do not obviously arise from a consideration of sources, language, chronology and other standard historical foci. Reimarus thought that any radical intervention by God into the natural order undermined the integrity and majesty of the deity's initial act of creation, and he denied that claims of the miraculous could bear the burden of doctrinal authentication: 'It is always a sign that a doctrine or history possesses no depth of authenticity when one is obliged to resort to miracles in order to prove its truth.'¹⁵²

The likely influence of Anthony Collins on Reimarus was much more specific. Collins was a leading light in a movement of self styled free thinkers and an enemy of the English political and religious establishments.¹⁵³ In his *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, Collins argued that prophecy, rather than miracle, constituted the most compelling case for Jesus' Messiahship.¹⁵⁴ But confidence in the fulfilment of prophecy, conceived in such a way that concrete events in the New Testament validated predictions in the Old, had already been shaken by writers with quite different agendas to this notorious infidel, not least the radical Protestant scholar and scientist William Whiston.¹⁵⁵

In *Grounds and Reasons* Collins informed his readers that the question at issue was, simply: 'Are the [Old Testament] prophesies cited in evidence really applicable to the event they are supposed to demonstrate, and, if not, is there any reason to believe the Christian claim about Jesus?'¹⁵⁶ Whiston had already answered the first part of that question in the negative,¹⁵⁷ arguing that, on close inspection, apparent instances of fulfilled prophecy in the New Testament did not actually constitute literal fulfilments. Collins endorsed Whiston's debunking of popular notions of prophetic fulfilments, and sought to confirm Whiston's thesis with a range of illustrative examples. One of the most

¹⁵² Reimarus, *Fragments* (6), p. 234.

¹⁵³ Anthony Collins is probably most closely associated with the movement than any other eighteenth-century thinker, not least because one his *Discourse of Freethinking, Occasion'd by the Rise and Growth of a Sect call'd Freethinkers*, London, 1713—a defence of various heterodox religious opinions, and, perhaps more importantly, a defence of the freedom to express them.

¹⁵⁴ See Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, London, 1724. This text and Collins's follow up to his initial broadside —*The Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered*, London, 1726—are cited by Reimarus in the *Apologie* (see above).

¹⁵⁵ Whiston succeed Newton to the chair of Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at the University Cambridge. He also found time to be a prolific biblical scholar and translator of the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus; for an intellectual biographical study see Force, *William Whiston: Honest Newtonian*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

¹⁵⁶ Frei, *Eclipse*, pp. 66 – 67

¹⁵⁷ Whiston's provocative thoughts on this were manna from heaven for a religious dissident like Collins; they are contained in *An Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament*, London, 1722.

notorious from a traditional Christian point of view—familiar to many undergraduate students of biblical studies—concerns Jesus' virginal conception: Matt. 1:22-23 is presented as a fulfilment of a prophecy in Isaiah 7:14, but, on a literal reading of the passage in Isaiah, within the context of the narrative, the prophecy seems to have applied to an unidentified *young woman*, not necessarily a virgin, and in the days of Ahaz, the King of Judah, many centuries before the birth of Jesus.¹⁵⁸ There was no disagreement between Collins and Whiston on this point, but Whiston had not given up on fulfilled prophecy as a source of evidence, and it was Whiston's elaborate strategy for rescuing prophecy that brought him into conflict with Collins: one of the burdens of Collins's wide ranging survey of biblical and non-biblical sources was to refute Whiston's wild conspiracy theory that Jewish scribes had deliberately altered their own sacred texts to muddy the prophetic waters, thereby undermining the evidential case for Christianity.¹⁵⁹ For Whiston, it was the duty of the Christian scholar to restore the original text of the Old Testament; in so doing, we would find that Old Testament prophecies did literally predict key events in the New. Collins argued that this project was quite unnecessary, since there was no evidence that Jews sabotaged their own scriptures, and that, in fact, ancient Jewish procedures for interpreting prophecy were precisely the kind used by New Testament writers, both yielding non-literal fulfilments: Collins insisted that the relationship between Jewish prophecy and the life of Jesus must be understood allegorically, which was entirely in keeping with common Jewish practice at the time the Gospels were written. Whereas Collins left it up to his readers to judge whether an allegorical fulfilment of prophecy carried any argumentative weight,¹⁶⁰ Reimarus gave us his own very definite conclusions:

If a prophecy is to be called infallible, I demand fairly that it should state beforehand legibly, clearly, and distinctly that which no man could previously have known, and that the same should thereafter take place at the time appointed... If, however, such a prophecy can only be verified through allegorical interpretation of words and things...then the prophecy is either doubtful or false. If, then, we judge by these rules and commence an investigation of those Old Testament prophecies which have been applied to the New Testament, we shall find them to be worthless and false.¹⁶¹

Talbert resists the temptation to posit a definitive new starting point for the Quest,

¹⁵⁸ See Collins, *Grounds and Reasons*, pp. 40 – 46.

¹⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 40 – 46.

¹⁶⁰ Some scholars think Collins was writing 'tongue-in-cheek all the way' (Fri, *Eclipse*, p. 67), barely concealing his relish at the disruptive force of his argument.

¹⁶¹ Reimarus, *Fragments* (6), pp. 235 – 236.

preferring instead a multi layered context for the emergence of Reimarus's work. One individual who might reasonably be said to have preceded Reimarus with a critical study of Jesus, Thomas Chubb, warrants a very brief but tantalising reference: Talbert mentions that Chubb was singled out for criticism by German writers for his thesis that 'the apostles altered the original gospel of Jesus, making it into something entirely different.'¹⁶² Yet this is precisely the thesis that Reimarus is consistently credited with being the originator of (see Chapter Six).

(iii) Socinianism and Skepticism

Colin Brown's approach to the Quest does not fall exactly into any of the main categories outlined in Chapter One: he grounds the origins of the Quest within the context of European Protestant thought between 1778 and 1860. Any attentive reader will have noticed the significance of the year Brown takes as his starting point. While the periodic focus reinforces the impression that interesting modern scholarship on Jesus only really begins in 1778 with the publication of the seventh *Fragment*, Brown offers a rich and detailed preamble to the *Fragmentenstreit*, locating Reimarus in a tradition of early modern European dissent against Christian orthodoxy. One of the earliest and most prominent figures in this tradition was the Spaniard Michael Servetus (c. 1511 – 1553), who, like Reimarus, denied central Christian doctrines such as the Trinity (at least as understood by the Reformed Church);¹⁶³ but Servetus was anything but a covert skeptic in the style of Reimarus:

The case of Michael Servetus was certainly the most notorious but by no means unique instance of denial of the Trinity or the divinity of Jesus. Nor was Servetus the only thinker to pay for such views with his life...In a sense it could be said that he was an enthusiast for the historical Jesus. But the Jesus he saw in scripture was the product of a modalistic adoptionism reminiscent of earlier heresies.¹⁶⁴

Servetus was one of a number of precursors to a more organized religious movement, Socinianism, characterised by a non-Trinitarian theological outlook, crystallized in the

¹⁶² Ibid, p.16.

¹⁶³ Like so many characters in this story of intellectual history, Michael Servetus was a man of many intellectual interests and talents, including theology, medicine, astronomy and cartography; for an account of his life, thought and fate, see Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy*, Genève: Droz,1978.

¹⁶⁴ Brown, *Jesus*, p. 30.

Racovian Catechism.¹⁶⁵ For followers of Socinianism, a movement which had its origins in a radical wing of the Reformation, their doctrines were thought to be closer to scripture than those of any other Christian movement. So, while Socinianism and its satellites posed a radical challenge to Christian orthodoxy, there is an important distinction between this skepticism and the skepticism of later thinkers:

[W]hile the [Racovian] Catechism viewed Jesus as a human, historical figure, it did not question the authority of Scripture. The Holy Scriptures were sufficient, authentic and perspicuous. The Socinian case in the sixteenth century and seventeenth centuries turned on the failure of the orthodox to see what God was so clearly saying about the person of Christ...The questions of Servetus and the Socinians were posed within the framework of revealed theology based on Holy Scripture. The questions of Reimarus and Lessing were questions which attacked the very idea of revelation.¹⁶⁶

The Socinians were regarded as heretical Christians rather than devotees of natural religion who attacked all revelation, but the lines between all these religious outsiders can become blurred. One of the established Anglophone influences on Reimarus, Toland, wrote a sympathetic account of Sociniaism for which there is no parallel in his writings on the deism he is supposed to have subscribed to.¹⁶⁷ Reimarus himself expresses open admiration for Socinians and their older anti-Trinitarian bedfellows, the Arians, in the very first of the *Fragments*,¹⁶⁸ and was well acquainted with Socinian literature,¹⁶⁹ so we cannot rule out Socinianism as at least a factor in Reimarus's religious odyssey.

Unlike most other treatments of the origins of the Quest, Brown's revision takes seriously the significance of modern skepticism (or Pyrrhonism), as a catalyst for the

¹⁶⁵ A creedal statement by a group of radical reformers, the document was first published in Poland in 1605; for an early English translation, see *The Racovian Catechisme*, Amsterdam [sic]: Brooker Janz, 1652. Although this group was initially based in Poland, these reformers were inspired by such anti-Trinitarian figures as the Spaniard Servetus and the Italian Laelius Socinus. Faustus Socinus, nephew of Laelius, was an Italian refugee living in Poland, where he developed his uncle's ideas in conjunction with other sympathetic dissidents: the term Socinianism was a tribute to these Italian radicals; the group were otherwise known as the Polish Brethren, and often grouped together with Arians: see the web-site run by the medic turned intellectual historian and Servetus expert, Marian Hillar at the *Centre for Socinian Studies*, accessed 18 March 2010: <http://www.socinian.org>. This is a useful resource on East European theological non-conformism, which locates the development of Sociniaism in Transylvania as well as Poland.

¹⁶⁶ Brown, *Jesus*, p. 31.

¹⁶⁷ Toland published the following brief text under the mysterious guise of a 'Pantheist' addressing an 'Orthodox Friend': *Socinianism Truly Stated: Being an Example of Fair Dealing in All Controversys*, London: 1705.

¹⁶⁸ See Reimarus, *Duldung Der Deisten*, p. 116: 'Arianer und Socinianer' are praised as manifestations of 'vernünftiges Christentum' (reasonable Christianity).

¹⁶⁹ Reimarus references the work of Socinian writers in his New Testament writing (see *Apologie* [vol. 2], p. 269 – 270). He also kept copies of work by Faustus Socinus and the *Racovian Catechism* in his private library (see Schetelig [ed], *Auktionskatalog* [vol. 1], p. 81).

varieties of rationalism (including Reimarus's deism) which were so prominent during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

In the hands of sixteenth-century Catholic apologists it [skepticism] became a “new engine of war,” forged for the destruction of Calvinism. By questioning its truth claims based on the Word of God and internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, Catholic Pyrrhonists sought to clear the ground for accepting the authority of the church. But it was readily apparent that Pyrrhonism could be turned against such fideism and indeed against all claims to knowledge.¹⁷⁰

Despite their popular reputation as skeptical enquirers, the philosophical systems of both Descartes and Spinoza can actually be understood as largely successful attempts to stave off a much deeper philosophical skepticism of the kind described above.¹⁷¹ Brown mentions Spinoza's biblical criticism, specifically his critique of miracles,¹⁷² but he does not seem to think that this had any direct impact on Reimarus; indeed, he argues that Spinoza's influence on Protestant thought is only really felt towards the very end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth.¹⁷³ This traditional view of Spinoza's reception has been completely overturned by more recent scholarship, and, while it is true that in his lifetime Reimarus published work critical of Spinoza's metaphysics,¹⁷⁴ he made use of Spinoza's biblical scholarship when he wrote the *Apologie*,¹⁷⁵ he possessed his complete works in his private library,¹⁷⁶ and shared with Spinoza a fascination with the historical Jesus as a moralist (see Part III).

Brown also identifies early challenges to the concept of revelation with another traditional theological bogeyman in early modern thought: the great political theorist Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679). Although Brown's identification of religious doubt in seventeenth-century England with the thought of Hobbes is conventional, he resists an insular reading of the incubation of subversive theological views: Brown points out that

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 31.

¹⁷¹ Descartes is famed for installing doubt as his methodological point of departure for philosophical enquiry, and Spinoza for his denial of some of the traditional Jewish and Christian attributes of God, but the primary philosophical impulses of these two seventeenth-century thinkers were far removed from the full blooded skepticism promoted by some contemporaries: see Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonaola to Bayle*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003 (revised edn), especially chaps. 9 – 11, 15.

¹⁷² See Brown, *Jesus*, pp. 32 – 33.

¹⁷³ See *ibid*, p. 33. More specifically, Brown recognises Spinoza's influence in the thought of Lessing (see chap. i) and on the philosophical idealism of the nineteenth century (chap. ii).

¹⁷⁴ See Reimarus, *Natural Religion*, pp. 130–131.

¹⁷⁵ See Reimarus, *Apologie* (vol. 1), pp. 844 – 866: 857.

¹⁷⁶ Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma* is listed in Schetelig (ed.), *Auktionskatalog* (vol. 1), p. 157.

Hobbes produced much of his work in French,¹⁷⁷ and argues that 'in many ways his thought was a transplant of continental skepticism onto British soil.'¹⁷⁸ The question of Hobbes's own theological views remains a subject of some controversy, but his argument that belief in miracles among the masses was largely due to do their ignorance of natural causes was more than enough for some critics to accuse Hobbes of being a barely concealed atheist.¹⁷⁹ As with Spinoza, the stark either / or interpretation of Hobbes's theology / atheism is simplistic and unsupported by large portions of his most important work,¹⁸⁰ but Hobbes's religious views are beyond the scope of this review. What is important to mention when sketching the connections and contrasts in late seventeenth-century thought, given our previous discussion about the significance of the Scientific Revolution, is the gulf in intellectual sensibility between the great theoretical champion of natural (material) laws we find in Hobbes, and that which we find in the early giants of the Royal Society who were committed to the practical study of measuring and predicting such causes on the basis of observation and experimentation. Hobbes held inductive methods in low regard, an estimate that flew in the face of the seemingly irresistible rise of 'the experimental life' embodied by its most illustrious practitioners,¹⁸¹ including Robert Boyle, Robert Hook and Isaac Newton.¹⁸²

So if the major figures of theoretical and experimental science were inclined to leave biblically attested revelation well alone, how did it fall into disrepute? Brown agrees with Talbert in identifying the empirical philosophy of Locke as the basis for the development of 'criteria of authenticity' for testing the revelatory character of historical and biblical data,¹⁸³ and turns to the same fringe religious movements of the period, concluding that, 'It was Deism...which inspired the Fragments controversy.'¹⁸⁴ But what exactly are we to

¹⁷⁷ On this reading of European intellectual history, one could conceivably bolster the view that France (or at least French thinkers) was the birthplace of modern philosophy, and possibly the Enlightenment, with Descartes responding to the radical skepticism which was then prevalent (see Popkin, *Scepticism*, particularly chaps. 9 – 11).

¹⁷⁸ Brown, *Jesus*, p. 33.

¹⁷⁹ Hobbes discusses miracles in *Leviathan* (1651), London: Penguin Classics, 1985, chap. 37; one of his most persistent critics of this and other matters was Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (2 vols.), London: J. Walthoe and D. Midwinter et al, 1743.

¹⁸⁰ I am referring here to such texts as pts 3 and 4 of Hobbes, *Leviathan*; and chap. 11 of his (1640) *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, Gaskin (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

¹⁸¹ For a fascinating account of an intellectual dispute where the stakes were nothing less than the soul of scientific enquiry, see Schaffer and Steven Shapin, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*, Princeton, N J: Princeton University Press, 1985.

¹⁸² Boyle in particular was a strident Christian theist, establishing a lecture series to combat atheism. See Jacob, *Newtonians*, chaps. 4 – 5.

¹⁸³ Locke, quoted in Brown, *Jesus*, pp. 35 – 36.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 31.

understand by this 'deism' that we keep hearing about?

(iii) *Deism*

Brown quotes Dr Samuel Johnson's definition of deism as authoritative: 'The opinion of those that only acknowledge one God, without the reception of any revealed religion.'¹⁸⁵ Johnson's definition has proved an influential one: it has been reproduced with modifications ever since in philosophical and theological dictionaries;¹⁸⁶ it is what tends to be understood by the term as it is used today; and it is a religious form of identification that some have happily embraced.¹⁸⁷ The problem with applying the term to those Anglophone writers who influenced Reimarus is that, other than a commitment to the use of reason in all spheres of life, including biblical criticism, they did not all subscribe to Johnson's principle or to any other shared doctrines: they were, in the words of Peter Harrison, 'individual [religious] malcontents',¹⁸⁸ lacking anything like the doctrinal unity of a movement like Socinianism. The 'deist controversy' involved a sustained and heated exchange of divergent theological views, and those eighteenth-century thinkers usually referred to as 'deists' in early modern historiography often acquired that title in the course of polemic, regardless of lexicographical niceties,¹⁸⁹ and rarely did they embrace the term as indicative of their own religious identity. Recognition of this fact has led historians to try to propose different ways of conceptualizing these turbulent minds: Is deism first and foremost a theological position which dictates the way scripture is read?¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Samuel Johnson, quoted in *ibid*, p. 36.

¹⁸⁶ See Blackburn, 'Deism'; and Gaskin, 'Deism', in *OCP*, p. 182.

¹⁸⁷ One of the few writers who actually embraced the term was Thomas Morgan; ironically, he also self-identified as a Christian: see *The Moral Philosopher: In a Dialogue Between Philalethes a Christian Deist and Theophanes a Christian Jew* (3 vols.), London, 1737 – 1740. Contemporary writers who have embraced the label include the American biologist E. O. Wilson; more precisely, Wilson describes himself as a 'provisional deist': see Steve Paulson's article on and interview with Wilson, 'Religious Belief Itself is an Adaptation', *Salon* (on-line), 21 March 2006, accessed 30 March 2010: <http://www.salon.com/books/int/2006/03/21/wilson/>

¹⁸⁸ Harrison, 'Religion', p.62.

¹⁸⁹ This was true of other religious labels such as 'pantheist': see Schaffer's review of Robert E Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy: A Study in Adaptions*, in *The British Journal for the History of Science*, vol. 17, no. 1, March 1984, pp. 117 – 118. The term seems to have been coined as early as the mid sixteenth-century, by the Calvinist Pierre Viret. It was employed quite loosely to designate a brand of religious skepticism which did not necessarily commit to the divinity of Christ or the truth of all his teachings (see Robert Corfe, *Deism and Social Ethics: The Role of Religion in the Third Millennium*, Burry St Edmonds: Arena Books, p. 54); nevertheless, 'deism' only seems to have gained common currency in the middle of the following century, where it became prominent in an English context: see Justin I Champion, 'Deism', in *The Columbia History of Western Philosophy*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 437 – 444.

¹⁹⁰ This was the view of the first outstanding historian of deism, John Leyland, who charted its history from its supposed founder, Edward Herbert, through a succession of English speaking thinkers who kept the flame of dissent alive until 1730, by which time the movement had had its day as a vital force in English thought: see *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers that have Appeared in England in the Last and Present Century* (2 vols.), London: B. Dod, 1754 – 1755.

Is it best understood as a radical religio-political conscience, committed to challenging authority generally and the English establishment specifically through unorthodox readings of scripture?¹⁹¹ Or is it best understood as a rhetorical style, with no definite shared purpose, deployed against various intellectual, ecclesiastic and political elites?¹⁹² All three of these definitions have been suggested, either individually or in combination. If we take the first, which is closest to Johnson's understanding, then in the field of eighteenth-century biblical studies, Reimarus is the archetype deist: very few of the so called 'deists' who preceded Reimarus pressed the case against supernatural, revealed religion as consistently as he did. Indeed, Reimarus's theological outlook was perhaps closer to Voltaire's than to most of his English predecessors.¹⁹³ If by definition deists reject divine reflection, then they must necessarily reject the traditional religious picture of Jesus. The interesting question to ask is, why would someone like Reimarus become a deist? And the candidate answers must at least include the kind of considerations outlined about: the erosion of orthodoxy by non-Trinitarian readings of scripture, *how* one implicitly or explicitly applies certain epistemological rules when reading scripture, *how* one interprets the findings of empirical science, and, a more nebulous factor, how instinctively cynical one happens to be about the purported mediators of the divine.

Coming back to the so called 'deist controversy', however, perhaps all we have are those individual writers, from different parts of the British Isles who produced subversive religious and political writings which stressed such concepts as *reason*, *nature* and *morality*. Many eighteenth-century German biblical scholars, not considered deists, also stressed these concepts as constitutive of the intellectual court in which the Bible had to be validated.¹⁹⁴ German critics were not, as a rule, moved to ridicule those aspects of scripture which did not stand up to the canons of reason and morality, so perhaps it is less in matters of theology and more in matters of style and disruptive intent that constitutes the most consistent feature of the literature associated with the Anglophone 'deists', not least in their irreverence for the 'husk' of scripture over against the 'kernel'.¹⁹⁵ This much,

¹⁹¹ The political dimension is stressed by Champion in both his 'Deism' article, and *The Pillars of Priest Craft Shaken: The Church of England and Its Enemies, 1660 – 1730*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

¹⁹² This is the unifying themes of James A Herrick, *The Radical Rhetoric of the English Deists: The Discourse of Skepticism, 1680-1750*, Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1997.

¹⁹³ In a definition which echoes Dr Johnson's, Gaskin cites Voltaire as 'the archytpal deist' ('Deism', p. 182).

¹⁹⁴ Frei, *Eclipse*, p. 107.

¹⁹⁵ Extracting the 'kernel from the husk' has been a mainstay in the language of Christian theological responses to historical biblical criticism: see Edwin Abbott Abbott, *The Kernel and the Husk: Letters on*

at least, the 'deists' shared with Reimarus.

5. Conclusion

Schweitzer's *Reimarus zu Wrede* continues to exercise an influence over many scholars' perceptions of the history of the Quest. Nevertheless, the literature I have reviewed in this chapter takes us beyond Schweitzer's account in different but interconnected ways. Some of the research, identified with Fri's 'great reversal' (e.g. Kelber, Dawes and Meeks), identifies the macro historical and intellectual trends which meant that for many of Europe's cultivated minds in the early modern period, the historical veracity of biblical narratives, and the theological doctrines supported by those narratives, could no longer be taken for granted; instead, they came to be judged by the same canons of rationality and evidential discrimination as all other historical texts.

We have also seen, however, that despite the skeptical nature of this mode of enquiry, and the potentially destructive results of the Quest, there has been a determined effort by many modern scholars to use the fruits of historical enquiry as a means to reform Christianity: not simply to better understand the roots of Europe's spiritual history, but to seek out sources of moral and intellectual authority outside the traditional structures of the Church (Meeks). This reforming impulse continued to come, for the most part, from those working in a Protestant context, and the logic of their attempt to narrow and refine the sources of theological authority is not difficult to discern: there is a move by writers from orthodox Protestant affirmations of *sola scriptura*, to a heterodox *solus Christus* which conceives of the individual figure of Christ in no other terms than those which can be constructed from a close reading of the Gospels (a tendency among Socinianism) ; and then finally to the historical Jesus (Jesus free from all dogma, even the dogma of the Gospels), which becomes a preoccupation of scholars in the late eighteenth century through to Schweitzer's *Reimarus zu Wrede* and beyond: it is a form of religio-cultural affiliation characterised by two contemporary New Testament scholars, writing from an avowedly Christian perspective, as 'Jesusanity'.¹⁹⁶ The second phase of this trajectory is well represented by one of the author's already mentioned in this chapter: in his Preface to *Christianity Not Mysterious*, Toland writes, 'I am neither of Paul, nor of

Spiritual Christianity, London: MacMillan, 1886. The idea behind the phrase is of considerably older vintage.

¹⁹⁶ Darrel L Bock and Daniel B Wallace, *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture's Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007, p. 1.

Cephas, nor of Appolos, but of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, who is the Author and Finisher of my Faith.'¹⁹⁷ The early (apparent) Christian radicalism of Toland lay, in part, in his rejecting the confessional strictures which defined so much of Europe's religio-political culture, and, moreover, to do it through a direct engagement with the Gospels, purging them of their 'mysteries' and seeking an unmediated encounter with Christ. Although the details of his theology may have been very different, this is continuous with the aims of some radical Reformation sects, including the Socinians, for whom the nature, character and mission of the man Jesus was central.¹⁹⁸ In truth, this Jesus/Christ focussed religiosity has more orthodox origins, central it was to that beacon of Catholic reform, Desiderius Erasmus (see Chapter 7).

The Christocentric religion of Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious*, and of the Socinians, appears moderate compared with the approach of Reimarus in the final *Fragments*. For Reimarus, if scripture could not be trusted as a representational historical document informed by the literal sense of the text (Kelber), then neither could Christianity, key features of which seem to presuppose the factual truth of scripture's most problematic claims, such as those concerning prophecy and miracle. These claims were thrown into doubt for Reimarus and his Anglophone predecessors by, on the one hand, historical-critical study of the biblical texts themselves, taking into account both internal and external evidences; and, on the other, by new metaphysical assumptions—which could be used as a critical apparatus for theological-scriptural discrimination—from the philosophy of Locke and Wolff (Talbert and Brown).¹⁹⁹ For writers influenced by this rationalistic climate of opinion, if Jesus was to continue to be regarded as an authoritative figure in matters of religion, then it must be because of theologically and morally edifying characteristics he or his teachings possessed, and the most reliable way of determining what those characteristics were, was to isolate this individual person from the Church's doctrines and the biblical narratives they depended on. Historical reconstruction and conjecture was now at the service of modern theology, but positive results for the Church could not be guaranteed, and in the case of Reimarus, they were not delivered.

¹⁹⁷ Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious: or, A Treatise Shewing that There is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor Above it*, London, 1696, p. xxvi.

¹⁹⁸ See, especially sect. iv, and sect. v, chaps. 1 – 2 in Thomas Rees (ed. & trans.), *The Racovian Catechism*, London: Longman and Hurst et al, 1818.

¹⁹⁹ Locke's empiricist epistemology is evident in his own (1695) Gospel based defence of the faith: *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, I. T. Ramsey (ed.) Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1858. There is evidence that Reimarus was familiar with the work in English and French (1696): see Alexander, *Anmerkungen* (annotations), *Apologie* (vol. 1), p. 947, n. 114.

The literature I have reviewed here has also helped to furnish the story of historical Jesus studies with the names of marginalised figures in the history of New Testament studies, and episodes in intellectual history which lay outside and prior to that great German tradition of scholarship: the critique of orthodox Trinitarianism by Servetus, the metaphysics and biblical criticism of Spinoza, the pamphlet wars involving popular and influential public intellectuals, such as Toland, Whiston, Collins and Chubb—all contributed to creating the ‘climate of criticism’ into which Reimarus made his posthumous,²⁰⁰ and anonymous, entrance in the 1770s. There is more to say, however, about the development of Enlightenment historiography generally and biblical scholarship specifically, which created the critical context in which Reimarus the exegete and philologist worked.

In the following two chapters, I will presuppose the value of the ‘great reversal’ as a way of understanding changes which occurred at the macro level of early modern European intellectual history, transforming the way intellectuals understood the Bible, while focussing in closer detail on those figures of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who either anticipated or directly influenced some of the concrete critical achievements that Reimarus is often credited with in the field of historical Jesus scholarship and the study of Christian origins.

²⁰⁰ This phrase is borrowed from chap. 3 of Gay, *Modern Paganism*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Historical-Critical Trailblazers: Christian Erudition in the early Enlightenment

1. Historiography during the Enlightenment

(i) Schweitzer's Blind Spot

When reflecting on Albert Schweitzer's creation *ex nihilo* account of the origins of the Quest, a number of critics have taken him to task for the implausible assertion that H. S. Reimarus was a thinker without predecessors,¹ but there has been little attempt to make sense of Schweitzer's sins of omission. Why did he have such a blind spot when considering scholarship before Reimarus? His undoubted preference for the great tradition of German scholarship did not obscure the achievements of writers outside and before it when it came to considering the history of Pauline scholarship: 'Scholarly investigation of Paul's thought begins with Hugo Grotius',² he declared, in typically definitive style, referring to the latter's discussion of Paul's letters in the *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (1640).³ And Schweitzer was convinced of the critical, even destructive, work which had to be done to bring the historical Jesus back into the centre of European thought.

According to Schweitzer, the historical Jesus had been suppressed by a series of forces during Christianity's formative centuries, from Paul to the Council of Chalcedon; forces so effective in their suppression that the man disappeared as a subject of serious contemplation for almost thirteen hundred years:

When Paul...did not desire to know Christ after the flesh, that was the first expression of the impulse of self-preservation by which Christianity continued to be guided for centuries. It felt that with the introduction of the historic Jesus into its faith, there would arise something new, something which had not been foreseen in the thoughts of the Master Himself...The supra-mundane Christ and the historical Jesus of Nazareth had to be brought together into a single personality at once historical and raised above time. That was accomplished by Gnosticism and the Logos Christology...When at Chalcedon the West overcame the East, its doctrine of the two natures dissolved

¹ See Brown, *Jesus*, p. 29. Schweitzer argued that Reimarus 'had no predecessors; neither had he any disciples' (*Quest*, p. 26).

² Schweitzer, *Life and Thought*, p. 119.

³ See Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum: denuo emendatius editae* (9 vols. in 5.), Groningae: Zuidema, 1826-1834; for the Pauline epistles, vols. 6 - 7.

the unity of the Person, and thereby cut off the last possibility of a return to the historical Jesus.⁴

My discussion in the previous chapter of the Celsus-Origen confrontation and the early Franciscans should all be born in mind when we read this kind of 'just so' story about more than a millennium of Christian thought. On the other hand, in terms of capturing the general thrust of Christian theological priorities throughout the centuries, this is a concise account of the rise to prominence of some extremely powerful ideas which continue to shape Christian thinking today. In order for the historical Jesus to return to Western thought, Schweitzer thought that 'the doctrine of the two natures had first to be shattered...We can, at the present day, scarcely imagine the long agony in which the historical view of the life of Jesus came to birth.'⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter, the doctrine of the two natures was attacked from various angles in the Enlightenment by an assortment of Socinians, Arians, deists, theologically ambiguous free thinkers, and by influential thinkers from outside the Christian fold, such as Spinoza.⁶ None of this early critical work is documented by Schweitzer: the 'long agony' goes unrecorded. But Schweitzer may well have taken the view that however shattering this phase was, the work produced never amounted to the *Geschichtswissenschaft* he associated with the great German tradition, and this would not have been an usual judgement.

When reflecting on the inadequacies in Schweitzer's account, it is worth remembering that studies of the Enlightenment at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly sympathetic ones, were not in the rude health that we find them today. Schweitzer was writing decades before intellectual historians such as Paul Hazard, Ernst Cassirer and Peter Gay attempted to capture the philosophical sweep and grandeur of the Enlightenment, conceptualizing the era as a more or less coherent movement (or series of movements) in modern history, and, in many ways, marvelling at its achievements. Few epochs manage to completely escape the patricidal tendencies of their immediate offspring, and the Age of Reason was no different. With this in mind, one charitable explanation for Schweitzer's insistence on the work of a single visionary in the late German Enlightenment, is the influence of a common nineteenth-century judgement that

⁴ Schweitzer, *Quest*, pp. 2 - 3.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁶ Spinoza presented no arguments against central Christological doctrines; he claimed to find them incomprehensible: see *TPT*, p. 14.

intellectuals in the previous century had little genuine interest in, nor an adequate conception of, the historical world.⁷ One famous contributor to the nineteenth-century Quest, Ernest Renan, argued that Voltaire alone did ‘more damage to historical studies than an invasion by the barbarians’.⁸ Renan was writing less than a hundred years after the death of his illustrious compatriot, but more nuanced judgements in the same vein persisted well into the twentieth century. Carl L Becker’s provocative little volume on *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (1932)⁹ argues, among other things, that the thought forms of the leading thinkers of the eighteenth century were closer to the high medieval period than to the twentieth century, a truth disguised only by their employment of more familiar idioms. This is a judgement I have some sympathy with in some early Enlightenment contexts, but such a judgement seems more problematic within the context of historiography.

It is certainly true that philosophers became a major force in eighteenth-century history writing, and some were contemptuous of truffle hunting antiquarians. By contrast, the nineteenth century was more concerned with assembling masses of facts, which historians used to try and explain the origins and development of social and political institutions.¹⁰ Such an age was unlikely to forgive or have the patience to understand Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s infamous call in *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les homes* (1755), to begin our enquiries by ‘setting aside all the facts, because they do not affect the question.’¹¹ But the values of history transcend the collection of facts. In his survey of over two millennia of historical writing, Donald R Kelly identifies a consistent body of values which preserve at least some of their meanings beyond particular historical contexts: ‘truth, accuracy, relevance, explanatory power,

⁷ When first formulating this argument I was reminded by Dr Ward Blanton that Schweitzer was an enthusiast for the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and my future reading emphatically confirmed this: on the Enlightenment, as on so many subjects, Schweitzer did not swim with the intellectual tide of his time. It should be noted, however, that much of Schweitzer’s enthusiasm centred on the late Enlightenment philosophy of Kant, which is not noted for its historical perspective, and his high regard for the eighteenth century grows out of a respect for the rationalism and moralism he associated with the age, not for its historiography: see the first of his two volume *Kulturphilosophie*: see *The Philosophy of Civilisation: Civilisation and Ethics*, London: A & C Black, 1923, chaps. viii – ix.

⁸ Renan, quoted in Donald R Kelly, *Faces of History: Historical Enquiry from Herodotus to Herder*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 242.

⁹ See Carl L Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, New Haven, C T / London: Yale University Press, 1932.

¹⁰ The narrow preoccupation with facts in nineteenth-century English thought and education was satirised by Charles Dickens in his 1854 novel *Hard Times*—Kate Flint (ed.), London / New York: Penguin, 1995—see, especially, the opening to chaps. 1 – 2. More broadly, Dickens was concerned by the way statistics could be used by public intellectuals to legitimise social inequality and frustrate radical change.

¹¹ Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of the Inequality Among Men*, in *A Discourse on Inequality*, Maurice Cranston (trans.), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984, pp. 55 – 138: 78.

literary skill, political or philosophical utility, and scholarly or popular acceptance.¹² These values were all on display in the Enlightenment, although practitioners had a tendency to indulge some at the expense of others. Edward Gibbon may have possessed the greatest balance of those values and produced the most celebrated work of the era, but the priority he gave to wit and literary style in his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1772 – 1789) has conditioned his reputation ever since.¹³ Writers like Voltaire may indeed have ransacked the past to affirm a common eighteenth-century vision of a rational, benevolent, human nature—corrupted by religious superstition and political self-interest—correcting the follies of their own age by appeal to the ‘few’ beacons of rationality that came before them.¹⁴ Lord Bolingbroke’s mantra that ‘history is philosophy teaching by example’,¹⁵ was a cornerstone of eighteenth-century wisdom, but the lessons of history were often drawn from superb scholarship using advanced modes of investigation.

(ii) *The Dangerous Fruits of Christian Learning*

An irony concerning the origins of the kind of historical criticism which engulfed Christianity in the Enlightenment has been recognised by even the most sympathetic chroniclers of the era’s challenge to Christian hegemony: Christian intellectual culture was not simply a passive victim of developments in historical science born of an emerging critical mentality; critical history was turned against Christian orthodoxy having first been developed and deployed, at least in part, for apologetic purposes. As Gay reminds us:

Of all the Christian spoils the ones most consistently useful to the philosophes were the methods and the results of Christian erudition. In the latter half of the seventeenth century and early in the eighteenth an army of scholarly theologians employed the delicate and potent critical instruments developed in the Renaissance to advance the historical study and demonstrate the historical truth of the Christian religion. Learned Benedictines, Jesuits and Anglicans refined the canons of criticism, radically improved paleography, developed numismatics,

¹² Kelly, *Faces of History*, p. ix.

¹³ When Simon Schama nominated Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* as one of the greatest works of history ever written, he qualified his judgement with the admission that he was not actually choosing it for historical truth ‘but for the jokes and fantastic footnotes’: ‘Simon Schama’s Top Ten History Books’, *The Guardian* (online), 10 Dec. 1999, accessed 16 Apr. 2012:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/1999/dec/10/top10s.history.books>

¹⁴ Usually Greco-Roman philosophers and statesmen whose light flickered briefly before the forces of superstition reasserted themselves (see the discussion of Voltaire in Kelly, *Faces of History*, pp. 241–244).

¹⁵ Henry St John (Lord Viscount Bolingbroke), *Letters on the Study and Use of History* (new edn), London: A Millar, 1752, p. 48.

gathered vast collections of documents. These historians confronted their task with absolute honesty and devout industry—an industry never surpassed and rarely matched by the philosophes.¹⁶

Reimarus's radical reading of the Gospels did not require much by way of paleography or numismatics, but the *Fragments* controversy irrupted after more than a century of path breaking historical criticism. Gay does not devote much space to discussing major figures in the erudite and apologetic traditions he describes, but they are not hard to find: the four figures discussed below are selected 1) for their importance as pioneers of historical criticism in relation to the Bible, and 2) because they were all reference points for Reimarus.¹⁷

2. The Scholarship and Apologetics of Richard Simon and Hugo Grotius

(i) Simon

Richard Simon (1638-1712) was arguably the most learned and influential biblical scholar of the early Enlightenment. He combined monumental historical studies of the origin, variety and transmission of the texts of the Bible with apologetic works to demonstrate the truth of Christianity on the basis of central historical revelations in scripture.¹⁸ Simon

¹⁶ Gay, *Modern Paganism*, p. 359.

¹⁷ There are, of course, many others one could include in this story: much more could be said about his father in law Fabricius, perhaps Reimarus' most important overall influence, certainly in terms of his scholarly skillset, though mention should also be made of the distinguished Hebraist Johan Christoph Wolf, who also taught at Hamburg (see Groetsch, *Polyhistory to Subversion*, chap. 3). Within the context of classical learning, there is the interesting connection with the Florentine Angelo Maria Quirinian (1680 – 1755), who graduated from a Benedictine monastery to become Cardinal of Brescia, an internationally renowned scholar, and expert on the last Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Reginald Pole. Quirinian was a long-time correspondent of Reimarus, who collaborated on his *Cassius Dio (Polyhistory to Subversion*, chap. 4). Perhaps most conspicuous by his absence is Spinoza, given his all-pervasive presence in some recent studies of the Enlightenment and his impact on biblical scholarship. But I am inclined to agree with Popkin—see 'Spinoza and Bible Scholarship', in Don Garrett (ed.), *The Cambridge Guide to Spinoza*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 383 – 408: 204—and others who still judge that Spinoza's greatest and most original contribution to modern thought lies with his metaphysics, which he applied to the Bible. These metaphysics were so repellent to some scholars, including Reimarus, that his brilliant distillation of a historical-critical method in chap. 7 of the *TPT* was as liable to be ignored as absorbed. Reimarus did not ignore Spinoza, but it still seems justified to look elsewhere for the sources of Reimarus's historical-critical instincts, to writers who did not come with the metaphysical baggage of the Dutch philosopher: writers firmly located in that tradition of polyglot historians, classicist and bibliophiles, who fired Reimarus' critical imagination from childhood and remained central points of reference throughout his public and clandestine writing career.

¹⁸ On the Old Testament see Richard Simon, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, Paris, 1678. In the case of the New Testament, Simon brought his historical-critical approach to bear in a defense of the faith in *Histoire critique des versions du Nouveau Testament*, translated (anonymously) into English the same year: *A History of the Text of the New Testament; Wherein is Firmly Establish'd the Truth on which the Foundation of the Christian Religion is Laid*, London: R. Taylor, 1689. His last major work on the New Testament was a French translation with commentary: *Le Nouveau Testament de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ. Traduit sur l'ancienne Edition latine* (1702); in English, *The New Testament of Our Saviour Jesus Christ, According to the Ancient Latin Edition*, William Webster (trans.) London: J. Pemberton, 1730.

made his big entrance into European letters with the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678),¹⁹ where his command of classical and Semitic languages continue to amaze historians of biblical studies.²⁰ The Frenchman's erudition only seemed to make his excursions into matters theological all the more antagonistic: a betrayal of his scholarly brilliance, put to ends befitting heretical ignoramuses. Simon was an Oratorian, the same order of priests who educated the Cartesian philosopher Nicolas Malebranche; indeed, Simon is often cited as the man who tried unsuccessfully to teach Hebrew and Syriac to the intellectually curious but more theoretically inclined Malebranche.²¹ The Oratorians also gave sanctuary to the wildly controversial Isaac de La Peyrère, which brought him into direct contact with Simon in Paris.²² The French Oratorians were scarcely pious innocents, but in the case of Simon, the order is probably best remembered for its expulsion of one of the greatest scholars in the history of French letters.²³

Simon was by no means the first writer to deny or qualify Mosaic authorship of the whole Pentateuch (see below), nor was he the first to deny the verbal inspiration of scripture, but when these denials were delivered by a Catholic priest within the context of such a *tour de force* of scholarship, linguistic mastery and historical curiosity, they carried with them the dangerous prospect of plausibility. Moreover, they were delivered during the absolutist reign of Louis XIV, which was not impressed by theologically disruptive historical conjecture, and when the book was brought to the attention of the Bishop of Condom, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet—perhaps the most learned and influential cleric at the court of the Sun King—an intervention was made to 'reassess' the censors decision to pass the book for publication.²⁴ On reading no more than the index and the preface Bossuet concluded that the *Histoire critique* was 'amas d'impietes et un rempart du

¹⁹ See Simon, *A Critical History of the Old Testament*, translated by 'A Person of Quality' (sic), London: Walter Davies, 1682.

²⁰ See Baird, *Deism to Tübingen*, p. 18.

²¹ See Gustave Masson, 'The French Oratorians II: Nicolas Malebranche', in B. Harris Cowper (ed.), *The Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record: April 1867 – July 1867*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1868, pp. 265 – 298: 266.

²² For a book length study of the maverick Calvinist author see Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596-1676): His Life, Work and Influence*, Leiden: Brill, 1987.

²³ For an illuminating discussion of the suppression of the *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* within the context of French censorship practices of the time, see Patrick J Lambe, 'Biblical Criticism and Censorship in Ancien Régime France: The Case of Richard Simon', *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 78, no. 1/2, Jan. – Apr. 1985, pp. 149 – 177: Simon was officially expelled from the Oratorians on 12 May 1678 (see p. 158).

²⁴ Religious works were reviewed by two scholars who then gave their recommendations to the Lord Chancellor of France, who at this time was Michel Le Tellier. The evidence suggests that from the moment Bossuet got involved it was *fait accompli* for the French edition of Simon's book and membership of his religious order (see *ibid.*, pp. 157 – 158).

libertinage’;²⁵ anyone familiar with the book, which is scarcely a racy affair, would have to conclude that the ‘mass of impieties and rampart of libertinism’ it was charged with referred to an unfettered freedom of scholarly practice enjoyed by the author, but the offence caused was real enough: it marked the beginning of a personal and public crusade against Simon by Bossuet which lasted for decades and, as is so often the case, it did more to publicize the work of the accused author than the foiled campaign by the official publishers (Ballaine, in this case) could ever have managed on its own.²⁶

Simon had a similar curiosity about the history of New Testament scholarship to the one displayed by Schweitzer, and he liked to approach historical-critical problems by reviewing the best that had been written on a topic thus far; indeed, Simon produced an even more ambitious survey than Schweitzer’s reviews of modern scholarship on Jesus and Paul. In his *Histoire Critique des principaux Commentaires Du Nouveau Testament* (1693), Simon engages critically with New Testament commentators from Clement of Alexandria (c.150 – c 2.15) to the leading lights on his own century, making Schweitzer’s *Reimarus zu Wrede* seem like a rather parochial affair (historically, geographically and linguistically),²⁷ and it was one of many of Simon’s works kept by Reimarus in his private library.²⁸ It is often pointed out that Simon was theologically motivated:²⁹ laying bare, perhaps as no one before, the textual discrepancies in the manuscripts which preserved the biblical writings, detailing the unsatisfactory attempts to deal with those discrepancies by Christian interpreters down the ages, and all to show how the Protestant *Textus Receptus*—derived from Erasmus’s translation (based on just five manuscripts)—was inadequate to serve as the sole bearer of divine truth. For Simon the loyal Catholic (so the argument goes), the text of the Bible, which he demonstrated to be fallible, required the additional guidance of Church tradition to bring sacred doctrine to perfection. This may all be true, but the practise of historical criticism with a theological or political agenda does not mark Simon out from most other historians of the Enlightenment, and Simon’s work was scarcely appreciated by his Church. Even before the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* had truly got underway, Simon had sided with

²⁵ See Bossuet, *Correspondance de Bossuet: augmentée de lettres inédites et publiée avec des notes et des appendices* (vol. 13 of 14), C. Urbain and E. Levesque, Paris: Hachette, 1920, p. 309.

²⁶ The reason Bossuet became aware of the book was because a friend (M. Toinard) had seen some pre-publication materials released by Ballaine with a view to advertising the book abroad (see Lamb, ‘Biblical Criticism and Censorship’, p. 156).

²⁷ See Simon, *Histoire critique des principaux commentateurs deu Nouveau Testament*, Rotterdam, 1693. The main text runs to 926 pages, which is then followed by a 99 page ‘Dissertation Critique’.

²⁸ For this and Simon’s other *critiques* see Schetelig (ed.), *Auktionskatalog*, (vol. 1), pp. 9, 11, 14 – 15, 184.

²⁹ See Kummel, *New Testament*, p. 41.

the moderns over the ancient interpreters of scripture, which included judgements against the Church fathers.³⁰ For a Catholic writer like Bossuet, the Church fathers were integral to the living tradition of the Church, and an attack on them was an attack on Catholic tradition.

When arguing against Protestant theologians, Simon conceived of tradition as prior both to his own Church and to scripture, as a process whereby divine truths are preserved by historical communities: 'Before the law was writ by Moses the ancient Patriarchs preserv'd their Religion in its purity by Tradition only...As for the New Testament, the Gospel was established in many churches before anything was writ'.³¹ Reimarus would actually adopt a similar position in holding that 'true religion' has been passed on by human communities since the earliest times, and it was for the modern critic to give an account of its often precarious passage through history. Unlike Reimarus, however, for whom fundamental divine truths could always be grasped by those with the appropriate intellectual and moral virtues, Simon was clear that there is a tradition which extends beyond the history of scriptural composition, including the development of those doctrinal truths defined by the great councils of the Church.³² One of these councils, however, the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563), had 'ordain'd that we should not in the interpreting of scripture deviate from the explanations of the Fathers'.³³ The ruling by Trent may appear anything but a counterpoint to the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*: from one angle, it looks like a vast extension or transfer of it, embracing many more canons than the biblical. In a diplomatic gesture, however, Simon praises the wisdom of Trent's decision,³⁴ before reminding censorious readers that the council never 'prohibited private persons from searching out...new interpretations of the Scripture Text',³⁵ as long as such texts were 'not relating to matters of Faith'.³⁶ With the specific content of faith left undefined, Simon the 'private person' lays out his intention to examine the works of the Church fathers 'according to the Rules of Criticism',³⁷ taking note of 'failures and perfections'.³⁸ When Bossuet read Simon, it was surely the latter's

³⁰ See, especially, Simon, *History of the Old Testament*, bk 3.

³¹ *Ibid*, Preface (16 pages unpaginated, supplied by me in roman numerals), p. ix.

³² *Ibid*, pp. x – xi.

³³ *Ibid*, p. x.

³⁴ See *ibid*, p. x.

³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. x – xi.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. xi.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. xi.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. xi.

attention to the ‘failures’ which leapt from the page, and the impertinence of this monk passing critical judgement on the canons of biblical commentary could not be tolerated.

The Church-state suppression of the *Histoire critique* took place almost one hundred years before the climatic years of the *Fragmentenstreit*, and its author experienced the kind of public opprobrium, and loss of institutional affiliation, that Reimarus feared when he withheld the publication of the *Apologia*.³⁹ Simon’s writings on the Old and New Testament scandalised intellectual elites in France, and when one considers the critical judgements he made, it is not difficult to understand why: adopting an autonomous stance typical of the Enlightenment in undertaking to ‘side only with the truth and above all not to attach myself to any master’,⁴⁰ in his *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* Simon denied that the names attached to the Gospels were assigned by their authors;⁴¹ he pointed out that the Resurrection appearances recorded at the end of Mark’s Gospel was not in all the early Greek manuscripts;⁴² that the story of Jesus sparing the adulterous woman’s life was absent from the earliest version of John’s Gospel;⁴³ and, perhaps most doctrinally challenging of all, that the apparent reference to the Holy Trinity in 1 John 5:7 was not in the original text but supplied by a later copyist.⁴⁴ In addition to his highlighting of these theological irritants, however, there are interesting discussions of topics familiar to anyone who has studied the New Testament and the historical Jesus: the dating of the Gospels,⁴⁵ the potential textual sources of the Gospels as we have them, whether they were originally in Greek,⁴⁶ and what languages were used by Jesus and his contemporaries.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it is as much (if not more) for the destructive dimension of Simon’s scholarship that he is best remembered today: for any contemporary scholar with a taste for theological controversy who pours over the variations and corruptions to the texts of the New Testament, in an attempt to shake religious certainties, Père Simon can be seen as a trailblazing figure.⁴⁸

³⁹ Reimarus knew the case of Simon, followed his skirmishes with Jean LeClerc (see below), and he cited him specifically in relation to his enquiry into the canon of the Old Testament (see *Apologie* [vol. 1]), p. 828).

⁴⁰ Simon, quoted by Kummel, *ibid*, 41.

⁴¹ See Simon, *Text of the New Testament*, chap. ii.

⁴² See *ibid*, chap. xi.

⁴³ See *ibid*, chap. xiii.

⁴⁴ See *ibid*, chap. xviii.

⁴⁵ See *ibid*, chap. x.

⁴⁶ See *ibid*, chap. v, ix, xi – xii.

⁴⁷ See *ibid*, vi.

⁴⁸ Although today they are more likely to be former Evangelicals than Catholics: see Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story of Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), where Simon features prominently in chap. 4.

(ii) *Grotius*

Hugo Grotius (1583 – 1645) was an older contemporary of Richard Simon, and is perhaps best known today as one of the pioneers modern political and legal thought, primarily through his work in the natural law tradition.⁴⁹ Although no aristocrat, the Dutch Grotius was born into a family of relative prosperity who fostered his education; Grotius seems to have been a gifted Latinist, composing elegies at the age of eight and entering the University of Leiden at eleven.⁵⁰ The buccaneering Grotius was not content with being a theorist in the legal and political arts, but founded his own law firm and later became Attorney General.⁵¹ A Calvinist by upbringing, Grotius gravitated towards the reforming, or Remonstrant, wing of his Church which had been inspired by the theology of Jacobus Arminius (1569 – 1609), and which faced strong opposition in the seventeenth century from more traditional Calvinists. Moreover, as a political and legal thinker with a particular interest in security on the high seas and the development of international law, he became preoccupied with the goal of harmony (if not unity) within and between Christian traditions.⁵² What is more important for present purposes is that Grotius was also a fountainhead for historical-critical enquiry into biblical texts and historical-theological defences of the Christian faith. Even a tough critic like Père Simon gave him generally very favourable reviews in his exhaustive *Commentaire*,⁵³ and, looking forward into the eighteenth century, Reimarus judged him to have ‘accurately discovered the literal and historic sense of most of the Scripture Text.’⁵⁴ Grotius’s historical perspective yielded very different theological conclusions to Reimarus, however. As if to ensure his credentials as a Christian interpreter of scripture before making some less than typical proposals for analysing biblical texts, Grotius published *De veritate religionis Christiane*

⁴⁹ He is especially revered for his contribution to the field of international relations, and frequently cited as the ‘father of international law’, although see Charles J Reid Jr, ‘Hugo Grotius – A Case of Dubious Paternity’ (review of Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, Richard Tuck [ed]. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005) *Green Bag*, vol. 10, no. 2d, Autumn 2006, pp. 109 – 123. The intellectual tradition in which Grotius worked (natural law) will become relevant in future chapters.

⁵⁰ For an up to date biographical essay and survey of his work, see Jon Miller, ‘Hugo Grotius’, in *SEP*, fall 2011, accessed 31 May 2012: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/grotius/>

⁵¹ See *ibid.*

⁵² See *ibid.*

⁵³ Grotius appears again and again throughout the *Commentaire*. Simon had already indicated his admiration in his first landmark work, although he seemed reluctant to heap praise upon praise since Grotius’s notes on the Bible were already ‘esteemed by the whole world’, and, with some minor qualifications, Simon thought it right that we ‘ought chiefly to esteem them’ (*History of the Old Testament*, p.108).

⁵⁴ Reimarus, quoted by Israel, *Democratic*, p. 203.

(1627) prior to his annotated editions of the books of the Old and New Testaments with copious notes on authorship, compositional design and historical setting.⁵⁵

What is so interesting about *De veritate* is that it might easily be read as a concise but vigorous response to a battery of arguments against the truth of scripture and the authority of Christ by such critics as the British and Irish ‘deists’, French atheists like d’Holbach and, indeed, by Reimarus himself, if it weren’t for the fact that Grotius published his apology more than a century before most of these figures made their appearance on the stage of European letters: the truth of miracles and their evidential value for Christianity is not presupposed but defended against skeptical critique,⁵⁶ likewise the fulfilment of prophesy;⁵⁷ and there is a response to attacks on the integrity of the canon,⁵⁸ which would erupt among Anglophone scholars later that same century. Anticipating the controversy unleashed by Simon, Grotius also responds to any objections to Christianity based on the textual fallibility of scripture,⁵⁹ and defends the apostolic authorship of the named books of the New Testament.⁶⁰ Indeed, as early as 1627 Grotius is either responding to, or anticipating, the kind of extreme skepticism within the Quest which emerged / reemerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, devoting a section of Book II to a proof of the very historicity of Jesus, where he calls on such ‘independent’ textual witness as those provided by Suetonius, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger.⁶¹ One of the most provocative gestures against orthodoxy during the Enlightenment was to place Christianity and Christ alongside other ‘mere’ systems of religion and their alleged prophets: there was some traction for the orthodox in the idea of Jesus as a new Moses, but the notion that the Prophet Mohammed might have been another Jesus was especially antagonistic, and, as we will see in the next chapter, it was a favourite jibe by the heterodox of the eighteenth century. Grotius devotes the sixth and final book of *De veritate* to an unfavourable treatment of Islam over against Christianity, and terse sections ‘Comparing Mahomet with Christ’,⁶² and the ‘Works of each of them’,⁶³

⁵⁵ Grotius’s *Annotationes in Vetus Testamentum* were published in 1644 (3 vols.) his 8 vol. *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* between 1641 and 1650. Reimarus’s debts to Grotius are scattered liberally throughout the *Apologie* (vol. 1: pp. 56, 96, 314, 742, 803, 890, 905; and vol. 2: pp. 78, 81, 170, 217, 537, 658).

⁵⁶ See Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion In Six Books: Corrected and Illustrated with Notes by Mr [Jean] Le Clerc*, John Clarke London: J. Knapton, 1719, bk 1, sec. viii, xviii; bk 2, sec. iv – vii; bk 5, sec. 5.

⁵⁷ See *ibid*, bk. 5, sects. viii – xviii.

⁵⁸ See *ibid*, bk. 3.

⁵⁹ See *ibid*, bk. 3, sects. i – iii, xv – xvi.

⁶⁰ See *ibid* bk. 3, sect. ii.

⁶¹ See *ibid*, bk. 2, sect. ii.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 272. Jesus is ‘the Messiah promised by the Law and Prophets’, acknowledged by Mohammed himself as ‘the Word’, with ‘no Father amongst Men’; Mohammed, by contrast, was ‘begotten according to

attempting to repudiate, on historical grounds, any suggestion that the two might be considered on a par either theologically or morally. Long before Grotius made an impression on German giants of criticism, from Reimarus to Schweitzer, his *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* would inform an account of the life of Jesus written by another renowned biblical scholar, Jean LeClerc.

(iii) Simon and Grotius Against the Skeptics

In their roles as historical biblical scholars, both Simon and Grotius can be located within the wider context of an intellectual defence of history during a period when the discipline was suffering something of a crisis of confidence and identity.⁶⁴ This crisis was prior to, but also ran alongside,⁶⁵ the kind of historical realism presupposed by some of the Anglophone ‘deists’, French *philosophes* and by Reimarus himself, whereby history was conceived as a distant but accessible landscape, on which events could be judged to have been more or less probable on the basis of the textual evidence and an appropriate measure of gentleman’s incredulity (the latter ideally systematised by some criteria of sound judgement borrowed from the philosophy of Locke or Wolff). A combination of factors—including the re-emergence of ancient forms of philosophical skepticism,⁶⁶ the rise of experimental and mathematic sciences (modern natural philosophy), and, ironically, the success of historians in exposing fraudulent historical documents—⁶⁷had combined to create a climate of acute historical skepticism in some European Intellectual contexts.

the common course of Nature’ (p. 272). Morally, ‘*Jesus* led an innocent Life’, whereas ‘*Mahomet* was a long time Robber, and always Effeminate’ (p. 272). Grotius’s stated source for this unflattering picture of the prophet are Arabic works associated (in the West) with Peter the Venerable (1092 – 1156), who commissioned the translation and publication of many Arabic texts, Christian and Muslim, to shed light on Islam. Putting aside the polemical selections deployed by Grotius, Peter’s project is regarded as something of a watershed in Western perspectives on Islam (see Peter Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964).

⁶³ Ibid, p. 273. Jesus is said to have performed all manner of miracles, something that even Mohammed (now taken by Grotius to be a reliable witness) confirmed; Mohamed never claimed to perform miracles, but those attributed to him by others are ‘Confuted by their own Absurdity’ (p. 273).

⁶⁴ This can also be viewed within the context of the rise of modern philosophical skepticism, the classic treatment of which is Popkin’s *History of Scepticism*.

⁶⁵ It preoccupied eighteenth-century philosopher-historians such as Voltaire in his *Le pyrrhonisme de l’histoire*, Paris, 1769.

⁶⁶ On the ‘Influence of the New Pyrrhonism’ see Popkin, *Scepticism*, chap. 4; on the seventeenth century, see chap. 16.

⁶⁷ The most famous example is Lorenzo Valla’s exposure of the Donation of Constantine. This document, allegedly from the time of the famous Emperor, bestowed all manner of material and political privileges on Pope Sylvester I (who reigned from 314 to 335) and his successors. In *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio* (1440) Valla showed that the Latin in which the document was composed did not belong to the fourth century, but a much later period (probably the latter half of the eighth century): fatal linguistic anachronisms in the document were exposed by the emerging science of philology.

If mathematical and experimental methods were paradigmatic for the acquisition of *scientia*, then the textual and linguistic instruments of historical method could be regarded as relatively porous tools for the capture of knowledge. Then there was the question of bias, trumpeted during the Renaissance by that enigmatic occultist—and arch critic of intellectual pretension—Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim in his *exposé of De incertitudine et vanitate omnium scientiarum et atrium* (1530),⁶⁸ and carried into the seventeenth century by such figures as the skeptical belletrist and political commentator Francois de La Mothe Le Vayer.⁶⁹ From the perspective of these early modern skeptics, a military historian, for example, could be assumed to be more susceptible to the vice of bias than the experimental natural philosopher, since such a scholar usually had a dog in the fight they were chronicling. And if so many historical documents had already been shown to be forged or doctored after being taken seriously for centuries, how many more would survive future scrutiny? The cumulative exposure of literary deceit contributed to creating a climate of extreme skepticism, exemplified by the Jesuit writer Jean Hardouin's claim that 'all [classical] historical documents, with the possible exception of Tacitus, were medieval forgeries done by monks in the thirteen and fourteenth centuries.'⁷⁰ The cultural historian Peter Burke considers Hardouin to have been clinically paranoid,⁷¹ but acknowledges that 'he was only an extreme example of a general trend',⁷² and that by the late seventeenth century,

An increasing amount of what had been generally accepted as true history - the foundation of ancient Rome by Romulus, for example, the lives of certain saints, or the foundation of the French monarchy by Pharamond, was now dismissed as invention, as myth... Did Pharamond exist? Did Romulus exist? Did Aeneas ever go to Italy? Was pagan history reliable? Was anything at all certain in the first four centuries of Roman history?... Is history anything more than a novel?⁷³

⁶⁸ See Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *The Vanity of the Arts and Sciences*, London: printed by RE for RB, 1684.

⁶⁹ Peter Burke observes that in works such as *Du peu de certitude qu'il y a dans l'histoire* (Paris, 1668), La Mothe Le Vayer uses historical examples drawn from the period of the Roman Republic (especially the Gallic wars) with one eye trained on the way Spanish historians were inclined to skew their accounts of military campaigns against the French: see Burke, 'Two Crises of Historical Consciousness', *Historical Culture* (on-line), based on the Pierre Bayle lecture for 1993, pp. 1 – 24: 3, accessed 07 May 2012: http://www.culturahistorica.es/peter_burke/historical_consciousness.pdf

⁷⁰ Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, p. 270.

⁷¹ See Burke, 'Two Crises', p. 5.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 5.

With such pervasive historical doubt in the air, it is little wonder that Grotius started from historical first principles with his defence of Christianity: Jesus really had existed, and, what's more, he is mentioned by (Tacitus) the one ancient writer that even Hardouin thought was probably authentic! Nor is it any wonder that Bossuet did not recognise a friend of Christian history in Richard Simon when the very term *critic* 'had come into use in the late sixteenth century partly to refer to...exposures' of fraudulent histories:⁷⁴ the phrase *Histoire critique* which furnished the front pages of Simon's works on the Bible triggered a host of associations not immediately recognisable to the twenty-first-century reader. When we begin our story of the Quest with the late eighteenth century, *à la* Schweitzer, we miss not only the skeptical criticism of the Anglophone 'deists'; we miss out a crisis in classical and Christian historiography during the early Enlightenment which, followed through to its logical conclusion, had the potential to undermine the most basic premise of historical Jesus studies for very different reasons than the Chalcedon theological settlement.

Consciously or not, both Simon and Grotius worked against this skepticism through their commitment to a form of historical-empirical enquiry: textual comparison, contextualisation and explanatory hypothesis. In their apologetics, too, Simon and Grotius were both evidentialists, providing what seemed to them compelling arguments from textually attested historical facts to demonstrate the truth of Christianity. These are early Enlightenment examples of occasions where the Thomist insistence on the harmony between faith and reason is taken much further than many scholastics would have allowed: for Simon, and especially Grotius, the deliverances of faith are not just consistent with the affirmations of reason; rather, empirically orientated rationality infers the truth of Christianity from propositions drawn from scripture / history. The danger with this apologetic strategy, however, was that in the hands of future critics these propositions could not bear the epistemological burden placed on them, and the temptation to base the truth of Christianity on things like Jesus' miracles and his fulfilment of prophecies created an opportunity for the enemies of orthodoxy, who would hoist such pioneering scholars with their own apologetic petard by attacking the credibility of these very sources of evidence. Reimarus was one such critic, one such enemy of orthodoxy.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

3. Pierre Bayle, Jean LeClerc and the Critical Analysis of Biblical Narrative

Two other scholars who emerged in the late seventeenth century, in the same climate of historical skepticism, were the French historian and philosopher Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), and the Swiss biblical scholar, historian and theologian LeClerc (1657 – 1736). The two writers are connected on a number of counts: they received a formative intellectual stimulus from the independently minded theologian Louis Tronchin in Geneva, who was one point of introduction for them both to the philosophy Rene Descartes;⁷⁵ both men were exiled from their respective homelands due to religio-political controversy, and both made their homes in the Netherlands: LeClerc at The Remonstrant Seminar in the Dutch Republic's first city, Amsterdam;⁷⁶ the latter in the second city, where he earned the moniker 'the *philosophe* of Rotterdam'.⁷⁷ Both men penetrated the intellectual life of Reimarus.

(i) Bayle

It perhaps ironic that Bayle, a philosopher with deep rooted Cartesian sympathies,⁷⁸ should emerge as such a significant figure for modern historiography: the axioms most Cartesians considered paradigmatic of knowledge were such that, by comparison, the historical world, with all its vagaries and biases, was all but excluded from the realm of accessible truth.⁷⁹ On the other hand, Bayle is often portrayed as an inveterate skeptic,⁸⁰ more consistently doubtful of rational claims to knowledge than Descartes, and critical of so many philosophies and theologies that his own intellectual positions are extremely difficult to concern. But rationalism and skepticism seemed to come together in Bayle the

⁷⁵ See Martin I Klauber, 'Reason, Revelation and Cartesianism in Late Seventeenth-Century Geneva,' *Church History*, 1990, vol. 59, issue 3, pp. 326 – 339: 328.

⁷⁶ In the Preface to his *Liberii de Sancto Amore Epistolae Theologicae, in quibus varii scholasticorum errores castigantur* (Saumur, 1681), LeClerc had argued that disagreement over such matters as the Trinity should not be a barrier to Christian unity with such groups as the Socinians. The text was published anonymously, but the identity of its author soon became known; after making presentations to the Genevan Company of Pastors, he was permitted to leave Switzerland without official censor, although he was *persona non grata* in Geneva thereafter: see Klauber, 'Between Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism: Fundamental Articles in the Early Career of John LeClerc', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 54, no. 4, Oct. 1993, pp. 611 – 636.

⁷⁷ For a seminal analysis of Bayle's life and work, see Labrousse, *Bayle*.

⁷⁸ See Todd Ryan, *The Cartesian Metaphysics of Pierre Bayle: Rediscovering Early Modern Philosophy*, New York / London: Routledge, 2009

⁷⁹ On the impact of Cartesian thought on the status of historical knowledge, see Burke, 'Two Crises', pp. 2 – 12; on the irony surrounding Spinoza's contribution to biblical studies given the largely a-historical character of his own philosophy, see Cassirer, *Enlightenment*, pp. 201 – 209.

⁸⁰ See Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, where the whole final chapter (18) is devoted to Bayle's 'Superscepticism and the Beginnings of Enlightenment Dogmatism'.

historian: he was not satisfied with a rationalism that remained aloof from the historical world, but remained skeptical about most records of that world.⁸¹ Widening the scope of philosophically respectable pursuits so as to include the historical domain, Bayle carried the spirit of Cartesian doubt into his examination of history;⁸² indeed, it seems to have been Bayle's preoccupation with repudiating the false, and exposing the doubtful, which propelled his scholarly career.

In 1697 Bayle published the first edition of the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*,⁸³ which delivered a compilation of all the errors he detected in other historical writings, along with his own comprehensive amendments. Bayle's *Dictionnaire* is significant to the intellectual background of the Quest for at least two reasons. Firstly, the work is a biographical dictionary, consisting of factual and evaluative sketches of historical characters, based whenever possible on primary sources, including biblical figures. Bayle's *Dictionnaire* has been placed alongside *Who's Who?* and other famous encyclopaedic works.⁸⁴ But perhaps a more likely response from anyone surveying the subjects of Bayle's vast work today would be to ask, 'Who's that?' since this adopted son of the Netherlands eschews many of the obvious figures from the classical and Christian worlds—Plato, Aristotle, Jesus and Paul—in favour of a catalogue of relatively obscure sages, clerics, saints and heretics. Nevertheless, it was in his investigation of these marginal figures that he displayed his ruthless pursuit of errors, contradictions, and omissions in the historical record. The lack of popular interest that a profiled individual held only served to bludgeon the reader with his methodology, which was to put the historian and his interests in the background (or at least appear to do so), all the while sifting the sources, forming hypotheses and making critical judgements.⁸⁵ A second point of interest for chroniclers of the Quest is the anti-metaphysical dimension of Bayle's historical method.

As described in the previous chapter, the astronomical legacies of Copernicus and Galileo, and the great voyages of discovery, were vital factors in bringing about that 'great

⁸¹ Burke has argued that Bayle responded to skepticism through a form of historiography which revolved round the detection of bias and prejudice ('Two Crises', p. 4), but, as Burke also suggested, Bayle thought 'that by examining circumstances with care, it was possible to discover calumnies' (p. 9), and, in the case of such figures as King David, that is precisely what he did (see below).

⁸² See Popkin, *Scepticism*, chap. 18.

⁸³ A wide-ranging selection of articles from all the editions are collected in Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, Popkin (ed. & trans.), Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Inc., 1991.

⁸⁴ See Popkin, Introduction to *Critical Dictionary*, pp. viii – xxix: ix.

⁸⁵ For a detailed discussion of Bayle's historical method, see Ruth Whelan, *The Anatomy of Superstition: A Study of the Historical Theory and Practise of Pierre Bayle*, Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institute, 1989.

reversal': when more than ever before the Bible began to be understood within the context of a larger reality—terrestrial, cosmic and historical—rather than reality being understood in terms dictated by a biblical metanarrative. While Bayle often showed little interest in challenging the historical truth of specific biblical stories, his general method of criticism is evidence of the great reversal being carried into the historical domain. Cassirer offers a clear illustration of the significance of Bayle's work for the direction of historical writing, by comparing his *modus operandi* with the Christian-theological histories which were still prevalent during the age of Enlightenment; specifically, he contrasts the *Dictionnaire* with the *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* by the Simon's religio-political nemesis, Bossuet:⁸⁶

Here once more is a sublime plan of history, a religious interpretation of the universe. But this bold structure rests on feet of clay so far as its empirical foundations are concerned. For the truth of the facts on which Bossuet builds can only be assured by a logically vicious circle. The authority of all historical facts... is based on the authority of the Bible. The authority of the Bible in turn rests on that of the Church, whose authority rests on tradition. Thus tradition becomes the foundation of all historical certainty—but the content and value of tradition can only be proved on the basis of historical evidence. Bayle is the first modern thinker to reveal this circle with ruthless critical subtlety.⁸⁷

Bayle's critique of tradition was often a critique of certain facets of Catholicism, with which he had a youthful dalliance.⁸⁸ But he could be as unforgiving of Protestant crimes against historical veracity: his article on the myth of Pope Joan is one of the most notable examples of Bayle taking Protestant thinkers to task for betraying the Humanist and Reformation values of textual discrimination.⁸⁹ Bayle was amongst the first historians in Christian Europe to absorb the Cartesian and Spinozist attack on final causes,⁹⁰ and seek

⁸⁶ Although he has featured in this study as a grand villain of *the ancien regime*, Bossuet was rated by many as the finest French preacher of his day; brilliant as an orator and prose stylist. His most famous theological history, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, is available in many English editions: see *An Introduction to, or a Short Discourse Concerning, Universal History* (2 vols.), Richard Spencer (trans.) Richard Reily: London, 1728 – 1729.

⁸⁷ Cassirer, *Enlightenment*, p. 207.

⁸⁸ See Popkin, Introduction, pp. xi-xii. A conversion to Catholicism followed by a swift and fierce rejection of the Church of Rome is something Bayle shared with Gibbon, and there is a consistently anti-Catholic dimension to the work of both writers.

⁸⁹ For an analysis of this article see Whelan, *Anatomy of Superstition*, pp. 122, 134 - 136, 139.

⁹⁰ Descartes is celebrated for his seminal contribution to the removal of teleological explanation from scientific models of the universe in the fourth of his *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (1641), and in pt i of his *Principia philosophiae* (1644): see *Meditations*, in *Philosophical Writings* (vol. 2), pp. 1 – 62; *Principles of Philosophy*, in *ibid* (vol. 1), pp. 177 – 292. Spinoza applied the anti-teleological stance directly to the Bible in his *TPT*, although his most direct philosophical statement is probably the appendix to pt 1 of the *Ethics*.

proximate explanations for behaviour of historical actors, within their cultural context, as they carry out their projects replete with the moral and intellectual virtues and vices which aid or frustrate their progress. Bayle is not especially concerned with the historicity of Old Testament characters, nor the details of their lives; what he does is to tear these characters out of the grand theologian dramas of cosmic history of the kind produced by Bossuet, and subject them to a close analysis within the confines of the immanent narratives in which they exist. In Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, personal character, local cultural conditions and chance shape the projects that his subjects pursue, events explained by appeal to the proximate causes of aims and motives, and so it would be with Reimarus: when the aims of Jesus and the aims of his disciples are asserted and contrasted in the seventh *Fragment*, they are shaped by cultural inheritance and contingent circumstance.

In his entry on King David, Bayle makes predictably disapproving references to his adultery and polygamy before proceeding to offer a concise and systematic analysis of David's political and military career: his judgments, his strategies, his successes, and his excesses.⁹¹ By way of tantalising introduction to his judgement of the reign of the second King of Israel, Bayle informs his reader that, although it 'is commonly believed that his adultery with Bathsheba, the murder of Uriah, and the proscription of the people are the only faults with which he can be charged...this is a great mistake; for there are many other things in his life that deserve criticism'.⁹² And (qualified) criticism is precisely what he offers: of David's succession after the death of Saul;⁹³ of the treacherous circumstances of his victory over Ish Bosheth and his acquisition of the northern territories;⁹⁴ of his weakness for the extramarital company of young women, even in old age;⁹⁵ and his treatment of the conquered Moabites and Edomites—'Have not the Turks and the Tartars a little more humanity?' Bayle asks,⁹⁶ in a rhetorical question guaranteed to provoke those readers who instinctively associated civilisation with biblical / Christian values, over against the barbarism of 'the East'. His entry on David is recognizable as a

⁹¹ Bayle, 'David', in *Critical Dictionary*, pp. 45 – 63. In addition to a biographical outline, the first part of the article deals with David's 'faults...when he was a private person' (p. 56), the rest deals with 'the period when he was on the throne' (p. 56). There is a mischievousness about Bayle's treatment of David, not least because he clearly has one of his critical eyes on the behaviour of modern politicians: 'There are some rigid casuists who do not think that a Christian prince can lawfully engage in a war merely from a desire to aggrandize himself. These casuists only approve of defensive wars...[C]are should be taken lest, in declaiming against modern princes, our criticisms fall inadvertently on that great prophet' (p. 59).

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 56.

⁹³ See *ibid*, pp. 56 – 58.

⁹⁴ See *ibid*, pp. 57 – 58.

⁹⁵ See *ibid*, p. 58.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 60.

modern critical estimate of leadership and the uses and abuses of power. We should not underestimate the significance of Bayle's morally critical stance with respect to the Bible: in Christian Europe at the time, David was not considered fair game for this kind of clinical analysis because he was a hero of the Old Testament; on the contrary, the negative reaction to the article in 1697 was so strong that Bayle removed several sections of his evaluation for the second edition.⁹⁷ Reimarus was similarly critical of David in a book he devoted to the biblical king in his *Apologie*,⁹⁸ and although Reimarus does not actually acknowledge any debt to Bayle for his evaluation of David, Bayle is cited elsewhere in the *Apologie*, and his *Dictionnaire* sat on the bookshelves in Reimarus's library.⁹⁹

Like the previous authors discussed in this section, the connection between Bayle and Reimarus is not circumstantial: Reimarus showed a direct acquaintance with Bayle's work, and the unsparing moral judgements made of Old Testament figures by Bayle are evident throughout much of the *Apologie*, where he adopted the same kind of naturalistic analysis of biblical narratives that we find in the biographical sketches from the *philosophe* of Rotterdam. The reason why Bayle never wrote in quite the same spirit about key figures from the New Testament is still contested by historians, as is the nature of his own religious position,¹⁰⁰ but Bayle was by no means silent on the figure of Jesus; as we will see in the final chapter, Christ's words take centre stage in Bayle's work on the cause he is most closely associated with and celebrated for: the cause of religious toleration.

(ii) *LeClerc*

LeClerc was one of a number of important figures of the seventeenth century—along with Thomas Hobbes, Isaac La Peyrère, Samuel Fisher, Spinoza, and Richard Simon—to challenge or qualify Mosaic authorship of all or at least part of the Pentateuch.¹⁰¹ LeClerc's most celebrated contribution to biblical scholarship is probably his *Sentimens de quelques théologiens de Hollande* (1685). His critical target in this work is the doyen of

⁹⁷ See Popkin, *ibid*, editorial n., p. 45.

⁹⁸ See Reimarus, *Apologie* (vol. 1), pp. 586 - 623.

⁹⁹ See *ibid* (vol. 1), p. 233; and Schetelig (ed.), *Auktionskatalog* (vol. 2), p. 177.

¹⁰⁰ Bayle's religious position divides scholarly opinion: he has been characterised as a covert atheist, a rationalist critic of orthodox Christianity, a Christian skeptic and fideist, a radical Calvinist, and even a Judaizing Christian; some have sought to explain his relative lack of critical interest in the New Testament by an alleged fear of persecution; others insist that he had no such fears once safely ensconced in the Dutch Republic (see Popkin, Introduction, where he discusses such interpretations). I include him within the margins of Protestant Christianity, although I would not care to be more specific than that.

¹⁰¹ For a concise summary of this convergence of doubt about the origins of the Pentateuch, from scholars with very different religious and philosophical temperaments, see Popkin, 'Spinoza and Biblical Scholarship'.

seventeenth-century scholars, Père Simon, and his *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*. LeClerc shared Simon's enthusiasm for historical enquiry into the textual history of the Bible, and some of Simon's skeptical conclusions about Mosaic authorship. One of the areas where he parted company with his Catholic interlocutor /sparring partner,¹⁰² however, was with Simon's theory about the likely history behind the transmission of the Pentateuch. Simon proposed what is known as the 'public scribes' thesis, whereby Moses appointed a number of writers to produce (or complete) the Pentateuch, including, of course, the most problematic books, in which the life and death of Moses himself are recorded:¹⁰³ on this reading, the theological authority of the Pentateuch originally came from the authorisation of texts by a divinely chosen figure (Moses), the legislative father of a divinely chosen nation (Israel) with a tradition of prophetic annalists.¹⁰⁴ Simon's theory presupposed some orderly institutional authority to which Moses entrusted the task of supplementing his writings with the best records available. LeClerc, apparently piqued by Simon's graceless reception of his constructive response to the latter's *Novorum Bibliorum polyglotorum*,¹⁰⁵ rebelled against Simon's idealised reconstruction, pointed out that there was no evidence for an unbroken succession of prophet-scribes; instead, he proposed a looser history of transmission, whereby an Israelite could have independently collected any writings left by Moses and supplemented them with other records about the history of Israel.¹⁰⁶ Ironically, it was the Protestant LeClerc who is often regarded as making the more radical move because he dispenses with the idea that the actual *writing* of the Pentateuch, as opposed to the things recorded within it, was inspired by from God.¹⁰⁷ With both these interpreters of scripture, however, the locus of revelation has shifted away from the text of the Bible: in Simon, the authority of the Pentateuch comes from the divine inspiration of Moses who authorised (fallible) scribes to produce a record of divine revelation; in LeClerc, the authority of the Pentateuch, compiled by independent (fallible) scribes, lays in its recording of at least some instances

¹⁰² Simon came into literary contact with LeClerc having sought assistance from the community of scholars with a French polyglot Bible, although he seems to have been less than impressed with LeClerc's recommendations, and sent the young Swiss scholar a testy letter, upbraiding him for the quality of his Latin (see Klauber, 'Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism', pp. 625 – 626).

¹⁰³ Simon introduces the idea of these 'public writers' in the Preface to *History of the Old Testament*, p. 4

¹⁰⁴ See *ibid*, Preface; bk 1, chap. 2, sect. 2.

¹⁰⁵ This was an exploratory treatise by Simon in preparation for his polyglot Bible; for a discussion of the bitterness engendered by this clash of minds and personalities, see Klauber, 'Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism'.

¹⁰⁶ See LeClerc, *Sentimens de quelques théologiens de Hollande sur l'Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, Henri Desbordes: Amsterdam, 1685, pp. 128 - 130.

¹⁰⁷ In English, see the first letter of LeClerc, *Five Letters Concerning the Inspiration of the Holy Scripture*, anonymous translator (often attributed to John Locke), 1690, pp. 9 – 52.

of divine revelation. For LeClerc, certainly, there appears to be the possibility of discovering something about God's historical relationship to the world, or at least the Israelites, from sources other than the Bible: if the authors of the books of the Bible were fallible and the texts corrupted, that at least opens up the *possibility* of finding less corrupted texts by better informed authors who might give us a more accurate view of the history. As soon as the infallibility of the text of the Bible is overthrown (as demonstrated by Simon and others), and as soon as the authority of the Bible rests on its historical accuracy as an account of revelation rather than its divine origin as a text (LeClerc's position), this legitimises the use of profane (in the sense of none-biblical) scholarship to be brought to bear on the study of biblical texts which purport to witness divine revelation, enriching our understanding of the history behind them. In the case of LeClerc, that is precisely what he did, although he was following a path cleared for him by Grotius.

Decades earlier Grotius had peppered his commentaries on Bible with references to ancient writers from outside biblical history—deploying a *hermeneutica profana* that even the admiring Simon thought excessive.¹⁰⁸ LeClerc was one of Grotius's greatest champions, producing revised editions of his *De veritate* long after the Dutchman's death. Perhaps his greatest methodological tribute to Grotius, however, is his *Ars Critica*,¹⁰⁹ in which he provides guidelines for the scholarly study of ancient texts regardless of their sacred or profane provenance: whether in the language of ancient Hebrew or classical Greek,¹¹⁰ whether from the pens of New Testament authors, Roman poets or Hellenistic philosophers—they could all be illuminated through the same principles of philology, historical contextualisation and comparison. LeClerc practised what he preached, and, to a young Reimarus, who had the privilege of meeting the man himself during his *Peregrinatio Academica* in 1720—and discovering first-hand the critical sensibilities of the famous Swish scholar—LeClerc's approach to sacred texts was disconcerting: Reimarus expressed unease at the 'profane' practise of evaluating 'the Bible just as if he read

¹⁰⁸ See Simon, *History of the Old Testament*, pp. 108 – 109.

¹⁰⁹ See LeClerc, *Ars critica* (2 vols.), Amsterdam, 1697.

¹¹⁰ In his 'Dissertatio de Lingua Hebraica'—in *Commentarius in Mosis prophetae libros quinque* (vol. 1 of 2), Tübingen, 1733, pp. i - xii—LeClerc again follows the example of Grotius in not privileging Hebrew as the original language of humanity and treating it as if it were intrinsically more reliable than its many derivatives. This had a certain synergy with the theories of Isaac de La Peyrère who had argued in *Prae-Adamitae* (1655) that the Genesis account of creation was concerned only with the origins of the Jewish people, not with humanity per se: see *A Theological Systeme upon the Presupposition, that Men Were Before Adam*, anonymous translator, London, 1655.

Aristophanes',¹¹¹ which seems to have been LeClerc's preferred characterisation of his method. In terms of biblical scholarship, what exactly did that method mean?

Wading into biblical waters which others were inclined to leave undisturbed, LeClerc turned his critical attention to the history which lay behind one of the most famous events in the Pentateuch: the Israelites crossing of the Red Sea (or 'Sea of Reeds', as more recent commentators are inclined to translate $\eta\iota\omicron\delta\mu$ from Exodus 13:18). In his 'Dissertatio de Maris Idumaei Trajectione' LeClerc did not doubt the story, but argued that it was possible to conceive of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea without supposing some direct supernatural intervention.¹¹² Drawing from pagan history, he cited Alexander the Great's negotiation of Mount Climax as a parallel case of overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds without divine disruption of the natural order.¹¹³ The crossing is made more plausible, on LeClerc's account, by virtue of a shorter stretch of water than is usually assumed: using an estimate by the ancient Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, LeClerc judged it to be 16 *Stadia* (approx. 1.8 miles today).¹¹⁴ If fierce wind sufficiently disrupted the waters, LeClerc thought it conceivable that a mass crossing—on the proviso that people walked more or less side by side in a line—would be possible within a couple of hours. The worsening condition of the sodden ocean floor would then be sufficient to impede the progress of the Egyptians.¹¹⁵

One clear indication of the transformation which had occurred in Reimarus's hermeneutical sensibility, in the years after he met LeClerc, was that by the time he came to write the *Apologia*, he had also adopted the policy of reading the Bible along the same lines as he would Aristophanes, but in such a way that it delivered even more skeptical conclusions. The fourth *Fragment* published by Lessing was the essay *Durchgang der Israeliten durchs rote Meer* (1777), in which Reimarus also explored the crossing of the red sea, although he was not satisfied with the naturalistic reading of the story offered by the LeClerc. Whereas LeClerc had called upon one ancient and extra-biblical source to support his thesis that at the point of crossing the *rote Meer* was less than two miles in length, Reimarus was able to cite three other ancient sources who estimated the length

¹¹¹ Reimarus, quoted in Groetsch, *Polyhistory to Subversion*, p. 116: Reimarus had secured a meeting with LeClerc through his famous mentor Fabricius. For an excellent discussion of the significance of Reimarus's meeting with LeClerc and the subsequent radicalisation of Reimarus's hermeneutics, see Groetsche, *Polyhistory to Subversion*, chap. 4.

¹¹² See LeClerc, 'Dissertatio de Maris Idumaei Trajectione', in *Commentarius in Mosis prophetae libros quinque* (vol. 2 of 2), Tubingae: Cotta, 1733, pp. 613 – 621.

¹¹³ See *ibid*, p. 261.

¹¹⁴ Groetsche has 1.6 miles (see *Polyhistory to Subversion*, p. 174).

¹¹⁵ See LeClerc, 'Dissertatio', p. 615.

to be over three times that, and who considered the crossing a particularly dangerous one.¹¹⁶ Moreover, LeClerc's 'fast crossing' thesis took no account of the cross section of people who were said to be part of this journey: What of the elderly or the disabled among the Israelites? And is it credible to assume that the seabed remained sufficiently firm underfoot for *all* the Israelites to cross, but for the mud, reeds and seaweed to become obstructive just at the moment the Egyptians began their attempt to traverse the waterway? In short, Reimarus's use of ancient sources to shed light on the historical and geographical context under investigation, combined with the criterion of *prima facie* plausibility—against the background assumption that the universe operates according to regular principles—undermined the historicity of the crossing as depicted in the Bible. Reimarus took the author of the story at his word, in terms of the scale of the events depicted and the numbers of people involved, and rejected the scene as logistically 'unmöglich' (impossible).¹¹⁷ Reimarus thus followed the *hemenutica profana* of Grotius and LeClerc through to a skeptical and subversive conclusion, judging a key biblical narrative to be the 'errichtet' (constructed) work of the 'menschlichen Gehirn' (human mind).¹¹⁸

Skepticism about the historical veracity of Old Testament legends was scarcely unprecedented in the Enlightenment, but the same skeptical spirit often dissipated when it came to the New Testament. In the final two *Fragments* Reimarus's critical spirit is just as lively and pugnacious. LeClerc represents the former tradition, however. His denial that the text of the Bible itself originated in an act of God was accompanied by the firm conviction that God was present in human history, and that the Bible constitutes a record, however imperfect, of that history. One of the most striking examples of this is in a work which should be counted amongst the Enlightenment's earliest historical studies of Jesus: LeClerc's 1700 *Harmonia evangelica cui subjecta est historia Christi ex*.

(iii) *LeClerc's Life of Jesus*

Gospel harmonies are often regarded as the closest pre-modern writers got to forming historical conceptions of the life of Jesus,¹¹⁹ a literary tradition which goes back to Tatian's *Diatessaron* in the second century: historical in the sense that they had to deal

¹¹⁶ For Reimarus's comparison of Diodorus Siculus with Strabo and Theophrastus, and his critique of LeClerc, see *Durchgang der Israeliten durchs rote Meer*, pp. 242 – 245; he also cites travel writings of the poet Christoph Fürer (p. 243).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹¹⁹ See Powell, *Jesus Debate*, pp. 18 – 19.

with such rudimentary problems such as chronology and trying to make sense of apparently contradictory accounts of the same event. Although the form appealed to some of Christendom's greatest minds, including Augustine,¹²⁰ others deemed them superfluous to requirements. Reflecting on efforts in his own Lutheran tradition, Schweitzer noted that Martin Luther did not even care 'to gain a clear idea of the order of the recorded events... "The Gospels follow no order in recording the acts and miracles of Jesus, and the matter is not, after all, of much importance. If a difficulty arises in regard to the Holy Scripture and we cannot solve it, we must just let it alone."¹²¹ The Enlightenment, it is often argued, created the conditions for scholars to go 'beyond the production of Gospel harmonies to write biographies',¹²² which required more critical and discriminating judgements to be made by the scholar. LeClerc's *Harmonia evangelica* is a counter example to that assumption, in so far as it attempts to do both. The text of the Gospels is printed on the top half of the pages, in parallel columns, with a narrative biography written beneath. Perhaps more interesting than the narrative account, however, are the three dissertations included at the end, detailing the historical method that the author has used to produce his biographical account, and a defence of the critical judgements he has made. In conversation with a vast array of ancient sources, judgments are made on the date of Jesus' birth (4 BCE),¹²³ the number of Passovers during his public mission (four),¹²⁴ and the date of his death (29BCE).¹²⁵ There are critical judgements made of the sources, too, with Luke taken to be the most reliable guide to the temporal staging of Jesus' life with his evident concern, as LeClerc saw it, for the 'connexion and

¹²⁰ See Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels* in, Philip Schaff et al (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (first series, vol. 6 of 14), Edinburgh: T&T Clark / Grand Rapids, Mich: William B Eerdmans, 1994 – 1996.

¹²¹ Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 14.

¹²² Powell, *Jesus Debate*, p. 19.

¹²³ The year 749 on the Roman calendar: see LeClerc, *The Harmony of the Evangelists*, anonymous translator, London: 1701, p. 570. LeClerc calculates this after debating when to start counting the year of Herod the Great's reign—from the declaration of his kingship of Judea by the Roman Senate, or from the time he took control of Jerusalem; and then there is the question of Herod's death, which he places in the Roman year 750 after considering the evidence of Josephus and a range of astronomical data. When this data is taken alongside the testimony of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is judged to have been born one year prior to Herod's death (4BCD). The defence of this date continues for several more pages as he turns to consider the Roman evidence (from Dio Cassius) and establish when the reign of Tiberius is supposed to have begun (an important historical reference point for Luke's account of Jesus' ministry)—whether from his appointment as Colleague of the Empire by Augustus, or from the death of Augustus when he actually took full control over the empire (see pp. 571 – 573).

¹²⁴ See *ibid*, pp. 573 – 576 for the statement and defence of this thesis: the first Passover is from John 2:13; the second John 5:1, the third John 6:4; the fourth being the one that all Gospels report, when Jesus visited Judea and met his death.

¹²⁵ Jesus' death is covered within his defence of his account of the final Passover (see *ibid*, pp. 576 – 581), when he engages with a range of Greek and Latin sources.

order of things',¹²⁶ while Mark is judged to be the least reliable in this respect.¹²⁷ In the tradition of the later literary lives of Jesus, LeClerc even supplies details which the Evangelists leave out, but which he thinks we must presuppose to make sense of the history.¹²⁸

When it comes to the teachings of Jesus, there is no concern from LeClerc with the *ipsissima verba*, since he located the Gospel writers within an oral and literary tradition which was concerned to preserve 'the meaning' of a public pronouncement,¹²⁹ rather than 'the very Expressions' used to communicate that meaning.¹³⁰ Once the reader understands that the Apostles and the Evangelists were concerned with keeping to 'the Substance' of Jesus' teachings,¹³¹ they should not concern themselves with the variations in 'Phrase and Order'.¹³² For LeClerc, the distinction between the letter and spirit of New Testament teachings is not something discerned now, by the modern reader: such distinctions were already being made in the oral transmission of these teachings and in their translation to a literary form. But LeClerc is frank that the meaning was not always clear to Jesus' followers first time around, a fact compounded by the fallibility of human memory, which is why Jesus' teachings and warnings were likely delivered as repeat performances, with variations, during his public life: for LeClerc, the variety in the literary forms of the Gospels follows a variety of public performances by their historical subject.¹³³

But these performances were not merely those of a philosopher or rabbi: 'He did not dispute 'em into faith by subtle Reasonings, or draw proof from his own Expositions of obscure Texts in the old Testament, but convinced them by Miracles, and the Mission

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 582. This judgement is mostly derived from internal evidence (see pp. 582 – 584).

¹²⁷ See *ibid*, p. 582.

¹²⁸ See, in particular, *ibid*. pp. 586 – 588. There is also a fascinating critical engagement with Grotius on the famous scenes of Jesus being anointed by women (Matthew 27, Mark 14, Luke 7, John 12), which Grotius takes to be different accounts of the same event, correctly situated in time by John, but displaced by the other evangelists because of a desire to show the significance of the incident as a motivating factor behind Judas' betrayal of Jesus (Matthew and Mark), and to complement one of Jesus' discourses on repentance (Luke). For LeClerc, the distinguishing features of the account, especially the specific location of the anointing, the image of Jesus' feet being washed in the tears of the woman, and the immoral character of the woman doing this act (all part of Luke's distinctive account), mean that we are dealing with separate incidents (see pp. 590 – 591). The examination of these stories is an exercise familiar to many undergraduate students learning the historical-critical study on the Gospels.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 584.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 584.

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 584.

¹³² Ibid, p. 584: LeClerc does not seriously consider a literary dependence between any of the Gospels, but he acknowledges the individual input of each evangelist in the phrasing of Jesus' words, and the structuring of his discourses.

¹³³ See *ibid*, p. 591 – 593.

of the Holy Ghost'.¹³⁴ LeClerc's admission of miracles into the life of Jesus, and his conception of them as the confirmation of sound doctrine, is precisely what Reimarus (and later historians) rejected, but for LeClerc such displays were essential. Although LeClerc deemed Jesus' teachings to be 'consonant to right Reason, and excellently accommodated to the condition of our Nature',¹³⁵ he thought it would be a gross mistake to obey gospel precepts as if they belonged to 'Systems of Morality' rather than 'Divine Constitutions'.¹³⁶ To follow Jesus as a promulgator of a moral system would be to treat the gospel precepts as the 'Institutions of an excellent Politician, and follow them on no other obligation than as conducive to our own [earthly] good'.¹³⁷ But Jesus' precepts may require that we 'Hazard our lives',¹³⁸ that we subject ourselves to 'grievous Calamity for their sakes'.¹³⁹ For LeClerc, such a demand is unintelligible without the promise of a 'Resurrection and happy Immortality';¹⁴⁰ only God could possibly make such a promise, and only the kind of miraculous details characteristic of the history of Jesus could possibly lead reasonable men to see him as 'out Great Lawgiver',¹⁴¹ someone who 'carried himself as became a Teacher Commissioned by God'.¹⁴² What this 'Teacher' proclaimed was the Kingdom of God; those who are receptive to the Kingdom are those who repent of their sins and reorder their lives around that doctrine which 'breathes nothing but Love and Charity';¹⁴³ and in so doing they may partake 'of Celestial Happiness'.¹⁴⁴ Against Reimarus's later judgement, this is emphatically not a material Kingdom.

LeClerc draws heavily on Grotius in giving his account of the nature of Jesus' gospel and its relationship to Judaism. In contrast to many other writers of the Enlightenment, who were keen to show the continuity in true religion across the ages (including Reimarus), Grotius considered Jesus the bearer of a 'new Doctrine',¹⁴⁵ one intimated by John the Baptist but only fully developed by Jesus himself: a doctrine 'requiring sincere Repentance and promising Remission of Sins and Everlasting Life'.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 614.

¹³⁵ Some contemporary work on orality agrees with LeClerc on this point, and against the assumption of some form critics that it is possible to peel back theological and linguistic accretions and arrive at original speech acts: see Kelber, 'Quest for the Historical Jesus'.

¹³⁶ LeClerc, *Harmony*, p. 613.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 613.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 613.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 613.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 613.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 613.

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 613.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 213: this is LeClerc paraphrasing what he takes to be Jesus' teachings as contained in Matthew 10.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 60.

¹⁴⁵ Grotius, quoted by LeClerc, *ibid*, p. 612

¹⁴⁶ Grotius, *ibid*, p. 612.

LeClerc argues that this is a novelty because ‘the Mosaic law had no reserves of Pardon for the Contumelious Despisers of it, or those that violated a Precept enjoined upon a capital Penalty, tho they repented afterwards; whereas the Gospel, on the contrary, promises God’s pardon to every Sinner, requiring no expiation, only a sincere Conversion, and a new life.’¹⁴⁷ As such, Jesus removed ‘the intolerable yoke of the Mosaic Institutions’;¹⁴⁸ before which time, ‘no one was fully acquainted with God’s will’.¹⁴⁹ According to LeClerc, Jesus was under no illusions that the ‘new religion’ that Jesus wanted to establish would be readily accepted by his Jewish brethren,¹⁵⁰ since it ran counter to the popular expectations of the Messiah and an assumption of the eternal validity of the law of Moses.¹⁵¹ Whereas Reimarus would later point to Jesus’ failure to explicitly redefine the Kingdom of God as an indication that he must have been referring to an earthly Kingdom and himself as a kingly Messiah, LeClerc explains Jesus’ choice of wrapping ‘Truths in Parables’,¹⁵² which were often misunderstood by the crowd, as motivated by a desire not to alienate those who were not yet ready to ‘receive the naked truth’,¹⁵³ a truth he discussed more openly with those already loyal to him.¹⁵⁴

Schweitzer could no doubt have said of LeClerc’s study that ‘it retains so much supernaturalism and follows so much the lines of a paraphrase of the Gospels’ so as to be unfit for comparison with Reimarus as a critical reassessment of the historical Jesus,¹⁵⁵ and in some respects he would be correct: LeClerc’s study is, in large part, a life and times treatment of Jesus, from an avowedly Christian perspective, which freely incorporates all the supernatural elements Schweitzer thought unbecoming *Geschichtswissenschaft*. One would be hard pressed to find a life of Jesus produced by a scholar today as saturated with supernaturalism as that produced by LeClerc, but we should not exaggerate the gulf between his perspective and that of later scholars who also claim to give history its due: the positing of miracles as historical events, and, moreover, positing those events as sources of explanation for the original take up of Christianity (especially the Resurrection) is alive and well in the work of scholarly Christians with feet firmly in the Church and the

¹⁴⁷ LeClerc, *ibid*, 612.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 47

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.183.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 183.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p.183

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p.184: this ‘naked truth’ included the unsettling realisation that ‘their *Jewish* Rites were now to be abrogated’.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.187.

¹⁵⁵ Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 13.

academy.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the judgement that the Jesus represented in the Sermon on the Mount is the same Jesus as that depicted in the prologue to John's Gospel is held by Pope Benedict XVI no less than it was by Mr LeClerc.¹⁵⁷ This specific judgement is one that most New Testament scholars in the West abandoned long ago, but the more general notion underpinning such treatments, that theological affirmations can turn out to be historically warranted even after the Christian becomes the critical exegete, is one that purist practitioners of *Geschichtswissenschaft* have been unable to overturn, and not simply because books in this genre are consistently popular with the reading public: as one (not uncritical) reviewer of the Pope's methodology writes, 'To presuppose an irreconcilable gulf between Christian faith and secular historiography is simply to decide in advance that a distinctively *Christian* interpretation of the historical Jesus can never be legitimate.'¹⁵⁸

One of the reasons LeClerc is an interesting figure to consider here is that he was one of the most important figures of the Enlightenment when we consider the development of modern scholarship on ancient texts in their historical context, whether they be texts in the history of Christian theology or Greek philosophy;¹⁵⁹ and yet the same man produced one of the most theologically robust, supersessionist readings of the life of Jesus that one is likely to find from a renowned gentleman of reason in the early eighteenth century. Those who look to the Enlightenment as the key phase in the development of methodological naturalism, which is characteristic of modern academic history, have a good case (whether their reference points be Reimarus, Hume or Gibbon), but the production of theological interpretations of the life of Jesus within the context of a recognisably modern historical-critical apparatus is no less a legacy of the Enlightenment (whether their references be Simon, Grotius or LeClerc).

¹⁵⁶ The most impressive piece of scholarship in this vein in recent years is Wright's *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (vol. 3): *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, London: SPCK Press, 2003. Wright's book was the catalyst for a whole issue of the *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (3.2, Jun. 2005) devoted to the subject of resurrection and its relationship to Christian origins, with contributions from some major scholars from Europe and North America, including James Crossley, Larry W Hurtado Michael Goulder and Dale C Allison Jr.

¹⁵⁷ See Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (vol. 1), p. 110 – 111; compare with LeClerc, *Harmony*, chap. ix, on that 'Divine Wisdom' which dwells in Christ' (p. 44).

¹⁵⁸ Benjamin Myer, 'The Pope's Jesus: Gerd Lüdemann and Benedict XVI' (review of Lüdemann, *Das Jesusbild des Papstes*), *Faith and Theology* (on-line), 07 Aug. 2007, accessed 06 May 2012: <http://www.faith-theology.com/2007/08/popes-jesus-gerd-ludemann-and-benedict.html>

¹⁵⁹ LeClerc is recognised as a pioneer in the study of ancient philosophical works, and a fierce critic of their reception by many Renaissance Humanist scholars: see Israel, 'Philosophy, History of Philosophy, and l'Histoire de l'Esprit Humain: A Historiographical Question and Problem for Philosophers', in J. B. Schneewind (ed.), *Teaching New Histories of Philosophy*, Princeton, NJ: University Centre for Human Values, University of Princeton 1994, pp. 329 – 344.

Whatever set Reimarus apart from LeClerc in his judgement of Jesus and Christian origins cannot be explained by their respective investment in the latest historical methods. There was, it seems to me, honest disagreement between the two about Jesus' ambivalence about his messianic identity. For LeClerc, Jesus' proclamation about the Kingdom was so radically disruptive of popular Jewish sensibilities that to have declared his hand early in his mission would have been to end it prematurely.¹⁶⁰ For Reimarus, Jesus felt that anyone who wanted to wear the crown of David would be unwise to push himself forward prior to gaining the popular support capable of achieving political change, something he tried to achieve by emulating the best of Israel's prophets, and exploiting a nepotistic pact with John the Baptist to promote his reputation.¹⁶¹ In both their portraits, Jesus was a religio-political tactician, but only LeClerc's Jesus was successful (on his own terms). It is time now to look at Reimarus's view of the historical Jesus and Christian origins in greater detail, and to consider the often neglected contributions of other writers of the Enlightenment who were concerned with similar questions.

¹⁶⁰ See LeClerc, *Harmony*, pp. 175 – 176, 183 – 184, chap. xxxiii, pp. 391 – 394, 517 – 519, 614.

¹⁶¹ See Reimarus, *Fragments (7)*, pp. 135 – 150.

CHAPTER SIX

Reimarus Revisited:

The Historical Jesus and Christian Origins

1. The Teachings of Jesus and the Invention of Christian Dogma

(i) *Distinguishing the Aims of Jesus from the Aims of His Disciples: Reimarus and Thomas Chubb*

H. S. Reimarus's great achievement in New Testament studies is often boiled down to a paraphrase of the very project he outlined for himself in the opening passages of *Vom dem Zwecke*.¹ As the reader may recall from the previous chapter, his project is crystallized by the late Robert Funk and his colleagues at the Jesus Seminar thus: 'A close study of the...gospels convinced Reimarus that what the gospels said about Jesus could be distinguished from what Jesus himself said. It was with this basic distinction between the man Jesus and the Christ of the creeds that the quest of the historical Jesus began.' But the *basic* distinction between the man Jesus and the Christ of the creeds certainly did not begin with Reimarus. Reimarus stands in a long tradition of theological dissent in the early modern period, sometimes ending in the flaying flesh of those who proposed such a distinction: we can recall the case of the Spanish theologian Michael Servetus, burnt at the stake for heresy in 1553, with the approval of Jean Calvin, for his contrast between the human Jesus and his heavenly father.² But as other historians have noted, these early modern dissidents were of a different order: Servetus did not seriously question the historicity of the Gospels or try to drive a wedge between Jesus and the early Church, but, like the later Socinians, he was in favour of the rational interpretation of Scripture, and he argued that a non-Trinitarian Christology represented a more rational reading of the Gospels. The argument for a radical discontinuity between Jesus and his disciples found its most erudite eighteenth-century form in Reimarus, but he was by no means the first to draw the distinction.

Thomas Chubb (1679 - 1747), was a glove maker and lens grinder by training, but a prolific philosopher, biblical critic and political pamphleteer by inclination and reputation.³

¹ Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), p. 64.

² See David Cuthbertson, *A Tragedy of the Reformation: Being the Authentic Narrative of the History and Burning of the "Christianismi Restitutio"*, Edinburgh / London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1912.

³ One of the best (and relatively recent) biographical sketches of Chubb's life and work within the context of the Enlightenment is T. L. Bushell's *The Sage of Salisbury: Thomas Chubb*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1967, chap. 1. One should also consult the anonymous *A Short and Faithful Account of the Life and*

Born in Salisbury, the son of a malster, Chubb was raised in a family which encouraged home schooling and wide reading; and Thomas, the youngest of the four Chubb children, was unusually receptive to this piece of good fortune. Commencing his gloving apprenticeship at fifteen, however, the close stitching which was integral to his work, combined with voracious reading by candle light, damaged his already weak vision, such that by the age of twenty two he was unable to work on a full time basis. Chubb's agile mind and powers of conversation had endeared him not only to the type of gentleman who made fine gloves, but to the type who bought them. Through these contacts, Chubb secured accommodation and a less burdensome workload;⁴ in time, such patronage would enable him to devote himself entirely to his studies.⁵ Chubb founded his own reading club and debating society, in imitation of the famed literary coffee-shops of London, with their taste for controversial texts and dangerous ideas. One text that seems to have made an impression on Chubb was a prefatory appetiser to William Whiston's as yet unpublished *Primitive Christianity Revived*.⁶ Whiston had already lost his position at Cambridge because of his unorthodox leanings,⁷ and, if any doubt remained at all about the justice of that verdict on his theology, the aforementioned book would settle the matter: Whiston proceeded over the course of five volumes to make the case for Arianism as the primitive and true Christian faith. Chubb and his Salisbury reading set were divided over the soundness of Whiston's theories, and Chubb worked through his own thoughts on paper, producing a short text which he arranged to be delivered to Whiston himself. Chubb's piece was well received, and Whiston volunteered himself as editor and publisher of Chubb's first tract written for public consumption.⁸ The title is a clear indication either of the former's inspiration by the latter, or a happy convergence between two likeminded theological controversialists: *The Supremacy of the Father Asserted* (1715).⁹ Chubb's debut in English letters would set the tone for a writing career characterised by rigorous

Character of the Celebrated Mr Thomas Chubb, London: John Noon, 1747; and Chubb's autobiographical sketch, 'The Author's Account of Himself', in *The Posthumous Works of Mr. Thomas Chubb* (vol. 1 of 2), London: R. Baldwin, 1748, pp. ii – viii.

⁴ He was taken into the home and business of a tallow chandler, John Lawrence; reducing the number of hours he had to work as a glover (see Chubb, 'Author's Account of Himself', pp. iii – iv).

⁵ In addition to the support of Lawrence, he was later to receive the patronage of Sir Joseph Jekyll MP (with whom he lived in London of two years), and who provided him with an annual salary to live out his days with the Lawrence family in Salisbury (see Bushell, *Sage of Salisbury*, pp. 7 – 13).

⁶ See Whiston, *An Historical Preface to Primitive Christianity Reviv'd*, London, 1711.

⁷ See *ibid*: the subtitle to that work is *With an Appendix Containing an Account of the Author's Prosecution at, and Banishment from, the University of Cambridge*.

⁸ See Chubb, 'Author's Account of Himself', pp. v – viii.

⁹ See Chubb, *The Supremacy of the Father Asserted: or Eight Arguments from Scripture, to Prove, that the Son is a Being, Inferior and Subordinate to the Father*, London, 1715.

and earnest defences of clearly defined theses across of range of theological, political and moral subjects, and he returned repeatedly to the controversy of the status of ‘the Son’ with respect to ‘the Father’,¹⁰ but he wrote for over two decades before showing signs of a developed position with respect to Jesus and Christian origins.

In 1738 Chubb published a book with an inelegant but wonderfully transparent title: *The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Asserted: Wherein is Shown What Is and What is Not that Gospel*. Chubb’s project, like Reimarus’s, aimed at separating Jesus’ teachings from later Christian dogma.¹¹ But whereas Reimarus understood the essence of Christianity to be doctrines about Jesus—atonement, resurrection, *parousia*, etc.—and sought to undermine Christianity by destroying the historical credibility of those doctrines,¹² Chubb reproduced a tendency in Erasmus and anticipated many modern theologians by offering an account of Christianity whereby membership is guaranteed by adherence to Christ’s teachings properly understood: ‘to submit to be governed by the laws of Christ, is what and what alone constitutes a Christian’.¹³ ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ’, he continues,

is not *an historical account of matters of fact*. As thus. Christ suffered, died, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, &c. These are *historical facts* the credibility of which arises from the strength of those evidences which are, or can be offered in their favour: but then those facts are not the *gospel of Jesus Christ*, neither in whole, nor in part.¹⁴

Although they differed on the essence of Christianity, Reimarus and Chubb agreed on much of the content of Jesus’ own gospel, and against that of their older contemporary Jean LeClerc, who took the view that ‘an account of the Miracles of *Christ*, his Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven, is a not inconsiderable portion of the Gospel’.¹⁵ Following Grotius, LeClerc thought that the New Testament makes it clear that the gospel encompasses the words and deeds of Jesus, and, moreover, that it is the *events* in Jesus’ life, not just his teachings, which demonstrate that the will of God is active in history and authorising a change in religious orientation. Chubb, in the spirit of much later scholars, was not content to allow the evangelists to have the last word on the content of Jesus’

¹⁰ See Chubb, for example, *the Supremacy of the Father Vindicated; or Observations on Mr Claggett’s Book Entitled Arianism Anatomised*, London: J. Roberts, 1718.

¹¹ The earliest example I have found of a scholar arguing for parallels between Reimarus and Chubb is Lechler, *Geschichte des englischen Deismus*, pp. 343 - 358.

¹² Reimarus, *Fragments* (6), pp. 229 – 230.

¹³ Chubb, *The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Asserted Wherein is Shown What Is and What is Not that Gospel*, London, Tho. Cox.1738, p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 43.

¹⁵ LeClerc, *Harmony*, p.613

teachings, but thought that distinctions can be made between the mission of the historical Jesus and the theological priorities of the evangelists, that is to say, the '*particular private opinion* of...the writers of the history of his life and ministry'.¹⁶ Chubb thus posits a level of personal agency in the Gospel writers which goes well beyond the concessions that LeClerc made to the evangelists rephrasing and restructuring of Jesus' teachings and ministry. With those working assumptions in place, Chubb proceeds to consign an array of New Testament passages, particularly large sections from John's Gospel and the letters of St Paul, to the categories of the historically suspect and the theologically irrelevant; just by way of example, John's *logos* theology in the prologue and Paul's discussion of the relationship between Israel and the gospel in Romans 11 are both treated as individual theological speculations.¹⁷ And to fall back on the view that '*St John was divinely inspired* in writing his history is...groundlessly to assume to presume a point which is devoid of proof'.¹⁸ So what is the true gospel of Jesus Christ? The true gospel is to be found exclusively in the Gospels,¹⁹ and, anticipating Reimarus, Chubb sees Jesus' essential mission as one of calling men to repentance and directing them to eternal salvation.

According to Reimarus, 'there can be no doubt that Jesus in his teaching referred man to the true great goal of religion, namely, eternal salvation.'²⁰ He continues,

we immediately find the entire content and intention of Jesus' teaching in his own words: "Repent and believe the Gospel" [Mark. 1:15], Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand [Matt. 4:17]...Both these things, the kingdom of heaven and repentance, are so connected that the kingdom is the goal, while repentance is the means or preparation for this kingdom.²¹

Forty years before the publication of the seventh *Fragment*, Chubb argued that, 'The *great end* and *professed design* of our Lord Jesus Christ as to his coming into the world...is manifestly and apparently this, *viz, to save men's souls*; that is, it is to prepare men for,

¹⁶ Chubb, *True Gospel*, p.46

¹⁷ On John's Gospel see *ibid*, pp. 46 - 48; on Paul, see pp. 48 -9.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 48.

¹⁹ It has been suggested by some commentators that Chubb judged Mark to be the oldest and most historically reliable Gospel (see Bushell, *Sage of Salisbury*, p.121), but I can find no compelling evidence in the text cited: 'Of Divine Revelation in General', in *Posthumous Works* (vol. 2),1748, pp. 3 – 137: 73 – 83. This judgement seems to depend on an unwarranted interpretation of Chubb's reflections on the authority of the Gospels, where he simply takes the author of Mark as an example of a source of information, about Jesus' life and work, whose identity and trustworthiness we ought to investigate, and whose book needs to be examined for corruptions in the course of its transmission and translation; he then makes the same point about the other Gospels: 'they all are upon a foot in these respects' (p. 75).

²⁰ Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), p. 64.

²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 65 – 6.

and to insure to them the *favour* of *God*, and their *happiness* in another world'.²² According to Chubb, this 'great end' of Jesus' mission was intimately related to his call for repentance: 'Christ not only called upon sinners to repent and turn to God...but he also plainly and expressly declared this was the very purpose of his coming, *viz.* to call sinners to repentance and to assure them that except they did repent they would all perish'.²³ Some of the scriptural passages Chubb offers as evidence are different,²⁴ but the message is basically the same: 'That Christ requires and recommends [of his followers] *repentance* and *reformation* of their *evil* ways as the *only*, and the *sure ground* of the divine *mercy* and *forgiveness*'.²⁵ On the question of Jesus' originality, in substance there is none:

I would also desire my reader to observe, that our Lord Christ did not propose or point out any *new way* to God's favour and eternal life, but on the contrary he recommended that good old way which always was, and always will be the true way to life eternal; *viz.* the keeping the commandments, or the loving God and our neighbour which is the same thing, and is the sum and substance of the moral law.²⁶

Reimarus later echoed these sentiments in comments which could easily have been directed at LeClerc:

I cannot avoid revealing a common error of Christians who imagine because of the confusion or the teachings of the apostles with Jesus' teaching that the latter's purpose...was to reveal certain articles of faith...thus establishing a new system of religion, while on the other hand doing away with the Jewish religion in regard to its special customs...He urged nothing more than purely moral duties, a true love of God and of one's neighbor; on these points he based the whole content of the law and the prophets and commanded that the hope of gaining his kingdom and salvation be constructed on them.²⁷

Neither Chubb nor Reimarus wanted to attribute that which they considered valuable in Jesus' teaching to the cultural soil of Second Temple Judaism; on the contrary, Jesus' moral commands are universally true, but they have been obscured by the mutations

²² Chubb, *True Gospel*, p.1

²³ *Ibid*, pp. 33 – 34.

²⁴ Chubb draws from Matthew 18:11, Luke 9:10, John 3:16-17, 6:40, 10:10, and 12:47 (see *ibid*, pp. 1 -2); and from Luke 24:46-37 (p. 34).

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.18.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 30.

²⁷ Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), p. 71.

which inevitably occurred when his salvific message was encountered by different audiences. For instance, Chubb tried to sketch a historical trajectory whereby the doctrine of atonement grew out of a need to link Jesus' gospel with the themes of sacrifice in the Old Testament,²⁸ in order to appeal to a traditional Jewish audience; while he reads the Incarnation as growing out of the need to bind Jesus' gospel to pagan notions of deity, when confronted by a Greco-Roman audience.²⁹ In Reimarus's study, Jesus' salvific message is thought to be obscured by something else, and an obscurity that Jesus himself is implicated in: eschatology.

(ii) Eschatology: Ethical, Political, or Apocalyptic?

One of the main differences between the analyses of Chubb and Reimarus is that Chubb does not recognise the eschatological and messianic context of Jesus' teaching; more precisely, he does not take seriously the possibility that Jesus was either working towards a new political age in the tradition of the divinely favoured kingly messiah, or in preparation for an apocalyptic intervention by God. Schweitzer attributed to Reimarus 'perhaps the most splendid achievement in the whole course of the historical investigation of the life of Jesus',³⁰ because 'he was the first to grasp the fact that the world of thought in which Jesus moved was essentially eschatological.'³¹ Reimarus identified two strands of eschatology in the Gospel tradition: one issuing in a new political age in the history of Israel,³² the other in a redemptive act of salvation for all mankind.³³ He assigned the first form of eschatology to Jesus and his disciples during Jesus' own lifetime, and the second to the disciples when the first failed to materialise. In Reimarus's acutely cynical account, because Jesus had not delivered the earthly kingdom that the disciples saw as their destiny, they moved to cement their own religio-political power through a transformation of the eschatological meaning of his life:

The Apostles were chiefly men of the lower class and of small means, who gained their livelihood by fishing and other trades...Now when they resolved upon following Jesus, they entirely forsook their trade...Here we do not require deductions or inferences as to what may have induced the apostles to forsake all...because the evangelists distinctly inform us that they entertained hopes

²⁸ Chubb, *True Gospel*, p. 47.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 47.

³⁰ Schweitzer, *Quest*, pp. 22 – 23.

³¹ *Ibid*, pp. 22 - 23.

³² Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), pp. 123 – 7.

³³ Reimarus, *Fragments* (6), pp. 240-2.

that the Messiah would establish a kingdom...But this weary waiting only lasted until the execution of Jesus, which at once dashed all their idle hopes, and then they complain, 'But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel!' (Luke 24:21). [W]e cannot believe otherwise than that the apostles of Jesus retained their previous aims and purposes, and sought to bring about their fulfilment...although in a different manner.³⁴

Whereas Reimarus implicitly treats Jesus as deluded with respect to his own political destiny, and his disciples initially deluded and then mendacious, Chubb, anticipating J. S. Semler, insists that the urgency of Jesus' message and his talk of a Kingdom of God was best understood morally: an ethical kingdom of God without concrete political or supernatural form.³⁵ Chubb argues that there was a misunderstanding of Jesus' concept of a Kingdom of God, whereby both Jews and Romans assumed that Christ was claiming

*such temporal power and jurisdiction over the persons and properties of men as the princes and potentates of the earth exercise over their subjects, and in this view of the case they considered him as an enemy to Cesar: but he assured them...that...his temporal kingdom was not of this age...What I observe is that as Christ, as yet, has not assumed nor exercised temporal dominion over his people, but only a dominion over their consciences.*³⁶

When Chubb writes about Christ exercising 'a dominion over their consciences', he is talking about more than the adoption of a set of moral instructions by his followers. He seems to be thinking about some kind of transformation in a person's whole outlook; as T. L. Bushell, puts it:

Chubb abhors hearing the religious individual speak of "Christ's kingdom", as if this were either now, or should later come to be, something co-terminus with an earthly realm... To be "created anew in or according to Jesus," means that one has gone beyond simply apprising oneself of the ethical aspects of the gospels; it bespeaks that a man has undergone a liberation of the heart and has acquired an inner freedom allowing him truly to love his fellow men.³⁷

This kind of interpretation became a mainstay of nineteenth-century scholarship,

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 240 – 242.

³⁵ See Semler, *Beantwortung der Fragmente eines Ungenanten insbesondere vom Zweck Jesu und seiner Jünger*, Halle, 1779; for his account of 'Lehre Jesu vom Reich Gottes' (Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of God' see pp. 210 – 219; on the discussion of the 'Reich Gottes' with regard to the relationship between Jesus, his follows, and the Judaism of their time, see pp. 30 – 59.

³⁶ Chubb, *True Gospel*, pp. 13 - 14.

³⁷ Busshel, *Sage of Salisbury*, p. 139.

and moral paradigms remain central to many reconstructions of early Christianity, some of which are favoured by readers dissatisfied with orthodox Christian theology, and skeptical about New Testament scholarship which emphasises apocalypticism: one thinks, for instance, of J. D. Crossan's 'ethical eschatology'.³⁸ Perhaps Chubb did not fail to recognize the eschatological character of Jesus' mission,³⁹ but was one of the earliest modern writers to insist on a sapiential reading of its meaning:⁴⁰ reflecting on the Lord's prayer, Chubb writes, 'Christians are given to understand that the *foundation* of God's *moral* government amongst men, and the *foundation* of *Christian* obedience is laid in the heart; by mens being possessed with a just and worthy sense of the moral character of their maker.'⁴¹

In terms of the eschatological context of Jesus' teachings, Reimarus's contribution stands out for his insistence on a consistently political reading of Jesus' gospel. This is perhaps best illustrated by one of the few occasions when Reimarus doubts the reporting of Jesus' sayings. The apocalyptic Son of Man discourses in Matthew 24 are treated by Reimarus as self-serving attributions by the apostles and Gospel writers: 'The sayings also which they *impute* to Christ point to his return before that generation of Jews has passed away' (my emphasis).⁴² Having presented the disciples questioning Jesus on the time of his (second) coming and the end of the age (Matt. 24:3), 'the apostles and the evangelists *impute* to their master an answer which commences by warning them against false Christs or Messiahs who might pretend to be himself before the end came' (24:4-5) [my emphasis].⁴³ But awareness of the potential historical significance of such discourses was not new.

One earlier writer who neither moralised nor spiritualised early Christian eschatology is another of the so called English 'deists', the lawyer and fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, Matthew Tindal (c.1657-1733).⁴⁴ In his *Christianity as Old as Creation*,

³⁸ Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, p. 278.

³⁹ In one sense, he certainly does not: Chubb considers eternal life to be the true *end* of the religious life, and associated Jesus with that message. He also quotes apocalyptic material concerning the Son of Man arriving in glory (Matthew 25:31), but he associates it with the final judgement of God under general providence, rather than the return of Jesus in the not too distant future (see *True Gospel*, pp. 38 – 41).

⁴⁰ Crossan takes Schweitzer's survey as the point of departure for his own sapiential reading (see *ibid*, pp. 227 – 228).

⁴¹ Chubb, *True Gospel*, p.76.

⁴² Reimarus, *Fragments* (6), p. 216.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 216.

⁴⁴ Reimarus possessed the 1732 edition of Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (see Schetelig (ed.), *Auktionskatalog* [vol. 1], p. 79).

Tindal emphasized the misguided apocalyptic lens through which the primitive Christian community viewed the world:

And as to those prophecies, if they be so called, in the New Testament, relating to the *Second Coming of Christ*, and the *End of the World*, the best Interpreters and Commentators own, the Apostles themselves were grossly mistaken; there scarce being an Epistle, but where they fortell that those Times they wrote in, were Tempora novissima; and the then Age the last Age, and those Days the last Days; and that the End of the World was nigh, and *the Coming of Christ at hand*, as is plain, among other Texts, from 1 Cor. 10. 11. Rom. 13. 11, 12. Heb. 9.26. Jam. 5. 7, 8. I John 2. 18. II Pet. 3, 12, 13. And they do not assert this as mere Matter of Speculation, but build Motives and Arguments upon it, to excite People to the Practise of Piety.⁴⁵

Shortly afterwards, Tindal proceeds to investigate the source of these misguided expectations: 'Divines are at a Loss how to account for the Apostles so frequently declaring, the *End of All Things to be at hand, and Christ to be then a coming...* Those divines wou'd not make these Reflections, did they but consider what our Saviour declared to his Disciples, when they came to him privately.'⁴⁶ Referring to the same text as Reimarus, Tindal finds the explanation for the apocalyptic expectations in primitive Christianity in the teachings of Jesus himself; for when they ask him about the signs and the time of the end of the age (Matt. 24:3), Jesus not only provides a clear account of such signs,⁴⁷ but he adds (24:34), 'ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη ἕως ἂν πάντα ταῦτα γένηται' (Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things have been accomplished). Tindal is conscious that the 'Divines' who wrestle with this problem may think that they can take refuge in Jesus' words in Matthew 24:36, where he warns against any claims to precise knowledge of the end times, but Tindal insists that this 'was not meant to contradict what he just before declar'd...but to warn his Disciples not to be surprised as the old World was, *when the Flood came, and swept that all away*'.⁴⁸ Then, in a surprising move from this famous 'deist', Tindal appeals to Jesus' conversation with the disciples *after* the Resurrection and prior his ascension (Acts 1:6-7) when the disciples ask him again about the time of the coming Kingdom, and suggests that the apostles would understand his answer through the prism of Jesus' words at the Last Supper (Matt. 26-29): 'And by our Saviour's saying, when the last Supper

⁴⁵ Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, London, 1730, 258 - 259.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 261.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 261, possibly referring to Matthew 24:27-31.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 261, referring to Matthew 24:38-42.

was ended, *I will not drink henceforth of the Fruits of the Vine, until that Day I drink it with you in my Father's Kingdom*. They no doubt believ'd this happy Time was not far off.⁴⁹ And in a final twist, having concentrated on the apocalyptic *parousia* in early Christian preaching, Tindal now acknowledges more than one possible interpretation of Jesus' words about the impending end of the age, insisting that 'the answer he gave them is very consistent with the Kingdom, even the temporal Kingdom of Israel's being restor'd again during their lives'.⁵⁰

So whereas Reimarus was unwilling to accept the authenticity of Jesus's apocalyptic discourses (something he shares with many later scholars), Tindal seems to accept their authenticity but allow for potentially conflicting interpretations: apocalyptic or political. But when we consider the passages we examined earlier on Tindal's view of early Christian theology in the wake of the Accession, it seems clear which interpretation he sees as the dominant one. Moreover, in maintaining that the apostles were simply misguided in their apocalyptic mentality, rather than consciously fraudulent—and implying the same of Jesus—Tindal is in some respects closer than Reimarus was to Schweitzer's own understanding of early Christian apocalyptic.⁵¹

(iii) *Chubb: The Real Instigator of the Quest for the Historical Jesus?*

Given the influence of Schweitzer's account among New Testament specialists working in the universities of Europe and North America, it is perhaps not surprising that the case for a single alternative founder of the Quest has been made most forcibly in recent years by someone working outside the academy. In her well researched study *The Human Christ*, Charlotte Allen charts the cultural and intellectual reception of Jesus' humanity over two thousand years.⁵² As noted in the previous chapter, Allen locates the Quest within the context of a paradigm shift in modern Western thought, with Isaac Newton at the centre, but she gives due attention to changes in biblical hermeneutics which were already firmly

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 262.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 262.

⁵¹ Like Tindal, Schweitzer saw the Last Supper as key to unlocking the apocalyptic mentality of the historical Jesus.

⁵² See Allen, *Human Christ*, chaps. 3 -11. Allen is a journalist, but her work has attracted the attention of notable academic figures in the field of biblical and religious studies: see, for instance, Dunn, *Christianity in the Making* (vol. 1 of 3): *Jesus Remembered*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, p. 29. n. 13); Powell, *Jesus Debate*, pp. 45, 83, 86, 93, 200 n. 53, 203 n. 4, 204 n.50; Timothy Beal, *The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of an Accidental Book*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011, p. 200; and Luke Timothy Johnson's review of *Human Christ*, *First Things*, no. 86, Oct. 1998, pp. 60 – 63.

established before the Scientific Revolution.⁵³ Having covered these large intellectual changes, Allen narrows her focus to the contribution of a single individual, arguing that Chubb was 'probably the originator of the quest for the historical Jesus'.⁵⁴ The texts called on to support this thesis are *The True Gospel* and 'The Personal Character of Jesus Christ' (1748).⁵⁵ Allen might also have mentioned *The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Vindicated* (1739) in which Chubb replied to critics of his earlier work.⁵⁶ According to Allen,

Chubb limned a historical Jesus who bore a remarkable resemblance to Reimarus's Jesus of two or three decades later: a teacher of simple moral truths who "walked by the seas of Galilee" dispensing maxims to his disciples and comforts to the poor. Like his successor Reimarus, Chubb did not believe in miracles...He mocked the Gospel accounts of the virgin birth, and declared that Jesus' resurrection from the dead was impossible...Once again like Reimarus, he concluded that Jesus had never intended to found a religion, and that his disciples should be held responsible for the spread of Christianity after his death.⁵⁷

As I have already shown, there are certainly uncanny parallels between the work of Chubb and Reimarus. Reimarus possessed some of Chubb's work,⁵⁸ and there is circumstantial evidence that we would be aware of the most relevant texts on Jesus,⁵⁹ though the absence of definitive evidence in the *Apologia* and his private library means that I stop short of arguing for direct dependence. But what of the intellectual resources which enabled Chubb to make this supposedly decisive intervention in the history of New Testament criticism?

Allen is concerned to show that the Quest was not born out of a deeper understanding of history and the Bible, but out of a change in the outlook of the Bible's readers: '[T]he preoccupation with disentangling the "historical" Jesus from Christian faith was not the result of more sophisticated research during the late 17th and early 18th

⁵³ See Allen, *Human Christ*, pp. 82 – 91. Some of the observations here echo the more detailed work of Kelber and Frei discussed in Chapter Three.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵⁵ See Chubb, *True Gospel*; and Chubb, 'The Personal Character of Jesus Christ', in *Posthumous Works* (vol. 2), pp. 265 – 311.

⁵⁶ See Chubb, *The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Vindicated*, London: T. Cox, 1739.

⁵⁷ Allen, *Human Christ*, p. 76

⁵⁸ Although I have only been able to identify Chubb's 1743 *Enquiry Concerning Redemption* within Reimarus's own book collection (see Schetelig (ed.), *Auktionskatalog* [vol. 1], p. 78).

⁵⁹ John Leland's *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers that Have Appeared in England in the Last and Present Century* (London, 1754), which contains discussion of Chubb's work, was quickly translated into German by H. G. Schmidt, *Abriss der vornehmsten deistischen Schriften, die in dem vorigen und gegenwärtigen Jahrhunderte in Engeland bekannt geworden sind*, Hannover, 1756. So a comprehensive overview of Chubb's work was potentially available to Reimarus, in German, in the years he was probably still working on the *Apologie*.

centuries, but rather the reflection of a dramatic and all-encompassing change of mindset that accompanied, or perhaps fuelled, the rise of what we call modernity.⁶⁰ Allen makes the point that many of the greatest historical critics of scripture in the Enlightenment were Christians who would never have identified with the kind of skeptical results associated first with the British and Irish 'deists', and later still with Reimarus.⁶¹ This is true, but, as I have already shown, the work of Christian scholars actually helped to create the intellectual conditions for more skeptical readings of the Bible and heterodox readings of the life of Jesus; indeed, it is demonstrable in some cases that the skeptical enquirers who feature in Allen's study were all too familiar with work produced by more orthodox scholars, which they feely drew upon while pursuing very different theological agendas.⁶²

Just as Allen underestimates the contribution of biblical scholarship to the 'climate of criticism' which produced the Quest,⁶³ so she underestimates the critical acumen and erudition at work in the specific writings which served as the catalyst:

As can be seen from Chubb's example, one did not need to be an intellectual or professional biblical scholar to embark on the quest for Jesus the mere man...Reimarus was a genuine (and prolific) scholar...However, in his writings on the historical Jesus, Reimarus was playing an amateur's game. He did not need his vast learning in order to have written his incendiary seventh *Fragment*. He needed only Thomas Chubb's equipment: a copy of the New Testament and a thoroughly deist outlook.⁶⁴

Allen is right to remind us that ideology—in this case deistic theology—is often at work in unorthodox treatments of Jesus:⁶⁵ representations of Jesus by non-Christian scholars, or heterodox-Christian ones, can be as partisan and apologetic in character as those

⁶⁰ Allen, *Human Christ*, p. 77.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 74 – 75: Allen points to the work of Simon, and the German Pietist Johann A Bengel.

⁶² See Champion's discussion of Toland's use / abuse of such scholarship in his editorial Introduction to Toland, *Nazarenes*, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, University of Oxford, 1991, pp. 1 – 106.

⁶³ This phrase is taken from the title of chap. 3 of Gay's *Modern Paganism*.

⁶⁴ Allen, *Human Christ*, p. 77.

⁶⁵ But the Jesus of Chubb's *True Gospel* was not necessarily the work of a deist. In commentary on the British and Irish deists, there is often little consideration given to the possibility of fluidity within an individual's thinking. On the front cover of its first publication (*Supremacy of the Father*), Chubb advertised himself as a 'Lay-Member of the CHURCH of England', and although he articulated an Arian position in that document, Arianism had its (uneasy) place within the matrix of English Christianity, in a way that Socinianism did not (see Pocock, 'Definitions of Orthodoxy', p. 48). Indeed, when he wrote the *True Gospel*, Jesus' historical mission, though distinct from the theology of the Gospel writers, is still understood providentially: Chubb was clarifying the content of 'that good news which he was sent of God to acquaint the world with' (p. iii – iv). By the time his 'Personal Character of Jesus' appeared posthumously, the providential outlook is absent. I suspect Chubb passed through Arianism on his way from Anglicanism to deism.

produced by the orthodox.⁶⁶ But the seventh *Fragment* (and, I would add, the sixth) had few hall marks of an 'armature's game'. Reimarus attempted to track the use of concepts such as the Kingdom of God (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) and Kingdom of Heaven (βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν),⁶⁷ Son of God (υἱοῦ θεοῦ),⁶⁸ Messiah (Χριστός)⁶⁹—and key eschatological pronouncements used by Jesus such as 'this generation will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled'—⁷⁰as they appear in the Greek New Testament, tracing them back into the Hebrew scriptures, and examining their use in none Christian sources, to determine the sense in which those expressions were used by Jesus. The dogged pursuit of the meaning of Jesus' words has become the bread and butter of professional historical Jesus research, requiring linguistic and philological skill. It is true that Chubb did have had any formal training in these disciplines, a fact he readily concedes,⁷¹ but Allen's conclusion pushes this much too far: 'Chubb', she writes, 'who probably knew less about the Bible than the average country vicar of his time, propounded his theories not on the basis of historical evidence—for he conducted no research—but rather on *blind faith* in the power of reason.'⁷² There is a tension here in Allen's own evaluation of Chubb: elsewhere she describes *The True Gospel* as 'Heavily influenced by Erasmus and Spinoza'.⁷³ Perhaps Allen has an unusually high estimation of eighteenth-century country vicars, with a working

⁶⁶ Even Schweitzer had to acknowledge this of Reimarus (*Quest*, p. 4, 22). The view that ideology gets in the way of our understanding of the historical Jesus, both because of deep attachments and oppositions to Christianity, is evident in Maurice Casey's even-fisted review of recent work in the field: Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of His Life and Teaching*, London / New York, T&T Clark, 2010, chap. 1.

⁶⁷ See Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), pp. 65 – 74. The documentary evidence here is actually quite thin, most of it coming from the Gospels themselves, with Reimarus making much of Jesus' failure to clarify or redefine the meaning of the Kingdom of God, and taking this to mean that he *must* have been referring to an earthly Kingdom of prophetic tradition, 'for which they [the Jews] had long since been given cause for hope' (p. 72), a Kingdom 'that Jesus would soon found' (p. 74). Later, however, Reimarus considers the *Targum* (an Aramaic translation and interpretation of Hebrew scripture) in relation to Micah 4:7 (p. 124), along with the *Yalkut Shimoni* (a midrashic anthology dating to the thirteenth century) on Zechariah 14: 9.

⁶⁸ See *ibid*, pp. 76 – 88. The evidence here is drawn mainly from the Hebrew Bible checked against New Testament usage: passages from the Pentateuch, 2 Samuel, the Wisdom books, the Prophets and Psalms; compared with the Gospels, Galatians and Hebrews.

⁶⁹ See *ibid* pp. 211 – 214: he considers the Gospels in conversation with Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, with the Talmud, and the Book of Daniel.

⁷⁰ See *ibid*, pp. 215 – 229: when considering the meaning of γενεὰ αὕτη (this generation) in Matt 24:34, in just one paragraph of text Reimarus refers his reader to usage in the Septuagint, the Apocrypha, Philo, Josephus, Ecclesiastes, Numbers, Deuteronomy and Judges (p. 220).

⁷¹ See Chubb, *True Gospel Vindicated*, p. 22: 'I readily acknowledge to my admonisher, that I do not understand *Greek*, and I *Submit* to his *Rebuke*.' Chubb nevertheless goes on to show his working habit of seeking advice from classicists and checking the various translations made by some of the most revered 'Commentators and Lexicographers' (p. 23) to have worked on the New Testament since the Reformation, including Erasmus, Johann Franz Buddeus, Conrad Vorstius, Grotius, and Edward Leigh (see pp. 23 – 24).

⁷² Allen, *Human Christ*, p. 109.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 108.

knowledge of Erasmus and Spinoza.⁷⁴ Of course, some scholars do rely on secondary rather than primary sources, but if we are to believe that Chubb wrestled with the biblical hermeneutics of Spinoza and Erasmus, it seems implausible to be so dismissive of his knowledge of the Bible. A more subtle problem with Allen's argument concerns the nature of historical enquiry itself.

Modern historical investigation of the ancient world, in this case the study of early Christianity, has never simply been a matter of the scholar immersing themselves in antique languages and literature: this is, of course, a large part of the work of the historian, but the Western intellectual tradition has always had linguistic experts, dedicated readers and intelligent interpreters. The practise of modern historical scholarship is intimately connected to particular habits of mind, patterns of thought, and disciplinary presumptions which are characteristic of what is often described as 'modern critical history'. As a summary and development of these features, already touched on in the previous chapter, we should note the recognition that all texts are historically conditioned by the author's social, cultural and political context; that one should, wherever possible, try to explain historical events by an appeal to natural causes, broadly conceived to include everything from large scale economic conditions to the idiosyncrasies of a single personality; and that explanatory hypotheses stand or fall on the basis of the evidence which can be brought in their favour, not on the basis of any prior commitment to the authority of any texts, persons or institutions.⁷⁵ For better or worse, Chubb brought these working assumptions to bear in his analysis of the Gospels, even if he did so in English translation and without deep reading of ancient non-Christian sources. While Allen seems reluctant to accord Chubb much recognition as a historical-critic, her estimation of his influence on subsequent historical Jesus studies, and the enduring power of his ideas about Christian origins, is remarkable:

The True Gospel has served as a template for nearly every subsequent

⁷⁴ According to Harrison, drawing on the work of George Macaulay Trevelyan (1876 – 1962), there is 'ample evidence of the material and intellectual impoverishment of the country clergy' during this period (*Religion and the Religions*, p. 81), when 'As a rule, the country parson, in addition to being poor and ignorant, was conservative to the core' (p.81), which is not something that can be said of Mr Chubb.

⁷⁵ This is not intended to be a thorough account of the canons of modern historical investigation. I have merely highlighted some of those features which seem important to the discussion at hand. For a very influential and ambitious vision of the nature of history from the mid twentieth century, the reader can turn to E. A. Carr, *What is History?*, London: Macmillan, 1961; or the more recent Cannadine (ed.) *What is History Now?*, which stands as a critical tribute to, and updating of, Carr's classic; for a more American perspective, see Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History*, London / New York: W. W. Norton, 1994.

reconstruction of the historical Jesus, from Reimarus's seventh *Fragment* of the 1760s [possible period of composition] to the Jesus Seminars of the 1980s and 1990s. The “historical” Jesus is *almost always* a version of Chubb's: a nonsupernatural ethical teacher born in Nazareth—and not of a virgin—who offended the reigning religious authorities in Jerusalem and found himself in political trouble. Mark's is almost always the first Gospel. Paul of Tarsus is almost always the real founder of Christianity.⁷⁶

While this greatly exaggerates the dominance of moral paradigms in historical Jesus scholarship, it is certainly true that these ideas about Jesus and the birth of Christianity are found again and again in historical reconstructions, and in some cases with very good reason: that Jesus 'offended the reigning religious authorities in Jerusalem and found himself in political trouble' is discernible to any literate person confronted with the Gospels. Many later scholars have indeed thought that Paul 'concocted the doctrine of atonement and invented Christianity',⁷⁷ and Chubb may indeed have held both positions by the end of his life. At the time of his *True Gospel*, Chubb identified Christianity with the gospel of Jesus, not Paul, although the latter may very well have had his own.⁷⁸ Indeed, Chubb's acceptance of different, and possibly rival, accounts of the *εὐαγγέλιον* within the New Testament, and his attempt to separate Jesus' *εὐαγγέλιον* from the theologies of the evangelists, is one of his more striking procedures and anticipates the act of separating the teachings of Jesus from those of his disciples, which is one of Reimarus's most frequently cited achievements. By the time the more skeptical 'Personal Character of Jesus Christ' appeared posthumously, however, Chubb shows a reduced appetite to defend a purified Christianity based on the gospel of Jesus: even the teachings expounded in the Sermon on the Mount have to be qualified because, taken literally—with their implications of unconditional forgiveness and limitless love—they constitute an ethic which could be 'greatly *injurious* to mankind, as it saps the foundations of civil society'.⁷⁹ By the end of his life, the common sense rationalism which characterised all Chubb's writings could not accept the radical, potentially life negating demands of Jesus' teachings (unlike that other scriptural controversialist, LeClerc). Indeed, his skepticism about Jesus'

⁷⁶ Allen, *Human Christ*, p. 109.

⁷⁷ The examples are many, but two notable ones from the late twentieth century were penned by a historian of ancient Jewish history and literature Hyman Maccoby (*The Myth Maker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986) and the biographer and novelist A. N. Wilson (*Paul: The Mind of the Apostle*, New York / London: Norton, 1997). While both books caused a stir in the public sphere, it seems fair to say that neither book made a great impression on Jesus or Pauline specialists in the academy, such is the careworn nature of the thesis.

⁷⁸ See Chubb, *True Gospel*, pp. 48 – 49, 149 – 151; and *True Gospel Vindicated*, p. 15, 20, 22.

⁷⁹ Chubb, 'Personal Character of Jesus', p. 291.

injunction to love one's enemies shares some of the substance of Baron d'Holbach's complaint later than century.⁸⁰

So Chubb was certainly quite advanced in his theorising, but there remains the question of influence. For something to serve as an *actual* template suggests that future thinkers have access to the original model. From my understanding of historical Jesus scholars past and present, few seem to have even heard of Chubb, let alone digested his writings.⁸¹ Influence can be indirect, of course: most New Testament scholars are familiar with Reimarus, so Chubb's influence could be directed through him, but this only works on some themes and with important qualifications: 1) Reimarus's Jesus did preach sound morals, but his primary *raison d'être* was political eschatology, whereas Chubb's Jesus was first and foremost a moral teacher with no worldly political ambition; 2) by virtue of theological-philosophical conviction, Reimarus would not have believed in the virgin birth, but he does not actually address the birth narratives in any of the *Fragments*;⁸² 3) unlike Chubb, Reimarus does not make any critical judgments about the relative reliability of the different Gospels.⁸³ Indeed, Reimarus freely splices together incidents as recorded in the synoptic Gospels and in John, subtly harmonising the accounts, in a less critical manner than LeClerc's narrative account of the ministry of Jesus.⁸⁴ Chubb was definitely prophetic in some of his theorising about Jesus and Christian origins, but there is little evidence that his most striking conclusions made a discernible impact on later scholarship; in truth, later scholarship slowly and unknowingly came into line with some of Chubb's own intuitions about these matters.

2. Reconstructing Christian Origins

In one of the finest sketches of the intellectual background to the *Fragmentenstreit*, Colin

⁸⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 292 – 296. Chubb differs from those later authors by finding the literal interpretation absurd in relation to theological as well as natural justice.

⁸¹ Chubb's work is usually acknowledged in thorough histories of modern New Testament Studies (see Kummel, *New Testament*, pp. 55 – 56; and Baird, *Deism to Tübingen*, pp. 54 - 56).

⁸² On the other hand, in 'The Personal Character of Jesus' (pp. 271 – 278) Chubb rejects the testimony of Matthew and Luke, with their appeals to dreams and angelic visitations, as wholly lacking the evidential value necessary to affirm such an extraordinary event as a virginal conception.

⁸³ Indeed, in the seventh *Fragment* Reimarus tells us that 'the four evangelists represent themselves only as historians who have reported the most important things that Jesus said as well as did...Now since there are four of them and since all agree on the sum total of Jesus' teaching, the integrity of their reports is not to be doubted, nor should it be thought that they might have forgotten or suppressed any important point or essential portion of Jesus' teaching' (*Fragments* [6], pp. 64 – 65). Few critical scholars of subsequent generations, Christian or not, would be quite so trusting.

⁸⁴ See, for instance, Talbet's editorial observations concerning Reimarus's 'unconscious harmonizing of the Gospel accounts' (*Fragments* [7], p. 92, n. 19) when discussing Jesus' baptism; Reimarus also combines, without explanation, the Gospels' different accounts of Jesus' death (see p. 150).

Brown credits Reimarus with going beyond earlier writers by ‘developing a comprehensive alternative account of the origin of Christianity;’⁸⁵ according to Brown, ‘The Deists had contented themselves with raising specific objections. Reimarus put forward an alternative explanation that introduced eschatology as the key to understanding the mistaken and fraudulent character of Christianity.’⁸⁶ But there was at least one eighteenth-century precedent for producing an alternative historical reconstruction of Christian origins, from an author we know Reimarus was familiar with, and there were many precedents for citing fraud as an essential component of early Christianity. The fraud hypothesis and the project of reimagining early Christianity through reasoned historical conjecture are closely connected in Reimarus’s own work, but I will discuss the two separately.

(i) Imposture Theory

Reimarus’s view that the early Christian proclamation was born of conscious duplicity coheres with one of the dominant theories about the historical causes of revealed religion during the Enlightenment: the theory of religious imposture. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, natural explanations for the origin and development of religion were almost all taken from the ancient world; part of what Peter Gay called the Enlightenment’s ‘appeal to antiquity.’⁸⁷ Time and again writers found parallels between the intellectual traumas of their own time and those experienced by the ancients, and it was to the ancients that they often turned for solutions.

In the fourth century BCE, Cynics and other wandering intellectuals returned to their native Athens with stories of breathtaking religious diversity.⁸⁸ This diversity troubled the intellectual and political elites of Athenian society, who were scandalised by the suggestion of relativism, and, even worse, by materialist—for practical purposes, godless—theories offered by some philosophers as explanations for this diversity. Four popular theories at that time were fear, projection, euhemerism and imposture.⁸⁹ All four explanations were rehashed in one form or the other during the Enlightenment. Chubb, for example, adopted euhemerism: within the context of perhaps his fiercest attack on the Incarnation, he reminds Christians of how they revelled in exposing ‘the *weakness* and

⁸⁵ Brown, *Jesus*, p. 53.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 53.

⁸⁷ Bushell, *Sage of Salisbury*, p. 29.

⁸⁸ See Harrison, ‘*Religion*’, pp. 14 -18.

⁸⁹ See *ibid*, pp. 14 - 18.

superstition of the *Pagans* in *deifying*, making Demi-Gods of their heroes and benefactors', before going on to charge Christians with exceeding them 'in making their great benefactor, viz. Jesus Christ, not a Demi-God, but the very *supreme God himself*; than which, surely, nothing was ever more *extravagant*.'⁹⁰ Unflattering comparisons with pagans had been a tactic in Catholic baiting since the Reformation, but by the eighteenth century it could be deployed against any Christian who subscribed to the traditional creeds. But the theory of religious imposture probably had an even stronger and more enduring appeal than the deification of mortals posited by euhemerism, not least because it had much wider application: to revealed religion per se.

The resurgence of these antique theories in the seventeenth-century was occasioned by the increasing diversity in Christianity and, more disquieting still, the variety of religious belief and practice discovered by explorers of the New World. To explain this, Walter Raleigh (c.1552 – 1618), one such explorer, appealed to demonic influences on the human mind as a supplement to the standard early modern appeals to the fateful consequences of the fall:⁹¹ for many Christian writers, the biblical tragedy of the fall, supplemented by the doctrine of original sin, was a key response to theologically problematic observations concerning the diversity of religious and moral values across cultures.⁹² But as the 'great reversal' began to take effect on European thought, explanations drawn from a spirit world understood within a biblical framework were superseded by universal explanations: causes which transcended particular sacred histories. The ancient theory of imposture—the view that individuals self-consciously pose as religious leaders, mediating between the human and divine, for reasons of personal advancement and group domination—also found expression in early seventeenth-century anti-Catholic polemic,⁹³ but it quickly became the among the most frequently cited natural explanation for the rise of all reputedly deviant religion. When the republican writer and deist Charles Blount sought patterns of religious thought in antiquity, he concluded:

Before Religion, that is to say, Sacrifices, Rites, Ceremonies, pretended Revelations, and the like, were invented amongst the heathens, there was no worship of God but in a rational way. Whereof the Philosophers pretending to be Masters, did to this end, not only teach Virtue and Piety but were also themselves great examples

⁹⁰ Chubb, 'Personal Character of Jesus', p. 261.

⁹¹ See Harrison, '*Religion*', *ibid*, p.102.

⁹² See *ibid*, pp. 101 – 12.

⁹³ See Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, London: James Roberts, 1603.

of it. . .[and] whom the people chiefly follow'd 'till they were seduced by their crafty and covetous Sacerdotal Order who, instead of the said Virtue and Piety; introduced Fables and Fictions of their own.⁹⁴

In the background of Blount's speculations about religious history is the then widespread assumption, explicitly articulated by Matthew Hale, that 'truth is more ancient than error,'⁹⁵ and that pure ancient theology, which taught appropriate worship of the one true God (primitive monotheism), had been corrupted by nefarious human intervention.⁹⁶ This would still be evident, to some degree, in Reimarus during the high Enlightenment: Reimarus considered the universal truth of Jesus' teaching to be obscured by eschatological delusion on the part of Jesus, and eschatological manipulation on the part of his followers. For Blount, writing in much more general terms than Reimarus, manipulation was the only serious candidate to explain religious diversity: 'The general decay of Piety hath in most religions whatsoever proceeded from the exemplary viciousness of their Clergy'.⁹⁷ When Blount considered the collective followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, he reckoned that either all three religions are false and all their collective followers deceived, or only one is true and the majority of them are deceived.⁹⁸ This glaring non sequitur, that deception can be inferred from a plurality of suspect beliefs, was surprisingly pervasive among the self-styled rational worshippers of God at the turn of the eighteenth century; indeed, it was repeated *ad nauseam* in publication after publication.⁹⁹ Despite the warnings of men like Simon, Grotius and LeClerk, who held that the Bible was insufficient as a basis for universal history, the Welsh writer and self-styled 'Christian deist' Thomas Morgan proceeded to locate the genesis of global religious corruption in Egypt, taking as primary evidence the fateful turn of the Jews during their Egyptian captivity: 'This great Degeneracy, Inversion of nature, and gross corruption of Religion, happened...in Egypt, when *Joseph* had established an hereditary Priesthood there, endow'd with vast Revenues in Lands, and made independent of the Crown.'¹⁰⁰ Morgan speculated that it was in Egypt that Moses had learnt magic and, together, with

⁹⁴ Harrison, 'Religion', p.73.

⁹⁵ Matthew Hale, *The Primitive Organisation of Mankind Considered and Examined According to the Light of Nature*, London: W. Shrowsbury, 1677, p. 168. Reimarus had access to some of Hale's work (see Schetelig [ed.], *Auktionskatalog* [vol. 1], p. 78).

⁹⁶ On the commitment to ancient theology (primitive monotheism), see Harrison, 'Religion', pp. 131 - 38.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 74).

⁹⁸ Charles Blount, *The Oracles of Reason*, London, 1695, p. 123.

⁹⁹ See Harrison, 'Religion', pp. 73 - 85.

¹⁰⁰ Morgan, *Moral Philosopher* (vol. 3), p. 93.

Aaron, manipulated the people of Israel in the pursuit of power.¹⁰¹ This conception of Moses as an imposture, seduced by the magical arts, is one that Reimarus adopted in his accounts of the prophet in his chapter ‘von den Handlungen Mosis in Egypten’ (On the Actions of Moses in Egypt) in the *Apologie*; indeed, the overlaps between the accounts offered by Morgan and Reimarus have prompted some scholars to suggest Reimarus mined his critique of Moses, and the religion of the Old Testament, from Morgan directly, with A. C. Lundsteen proposing outright plagiarism (‘Plagiates’) by Reimarus in his use of Morgan and other Anglophone ‘deists.’¹⁰²

It was no coincidence that this kind of attack on historical religion, through the paradigm of priestly imposture, coincided with rising anti-clericalism in modern Europe: imposture was not just a theory of religious origins; it was frequently expanded into a theory of how diverse religious traditions were sustained, usually through a form of priest craft whereby clerical elites would conspire with, and adapt to, the monarchies of Europe in order to retain their influence. Among British and Irish Whig writers in the early Enlightenment, it was not uncommon to find a threefold commitment to an imposture theory of religious degeneration, contemporary anti-clericalism and republicanism.¹⁰³ These three preoccupations were rarely presented together in one overarching critique of the monarchy and established Church, but this was scarcely necessary: readers were more than capable of joining the dots. The satirist Jonathan Swift, who had a finely tuned disdain for the whigish republicans who tended to propagate these subversive views during the Augustan Age, regarded any silence on the part of imposture advocates as to the exact relationship between ancient imposture and the modern priesthood to be an implicit attack on the Church of England, and he targeted a number of their leading lights for vituperative literary treatment.¹⁰⁴ This polemic seems to have been effective: the implicit attack on the moral character of Anglican clergy was met with some closely argued critical work, and some direct *ad hominem* attacks on

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 93.

¹⁰² See Lundsteen, *Die Anfänge der Leben-Jesu Forschung*, p. 138; for less strongly worded views along the same lines, see Max Loeser, *Die Kritik des Hermann Samuel Reimarus am Alten Testament*, Berlin 1941, p. 112; and more recently Reventlow, ‘Das Arsenal der Bibelkritik des Reimarus’, p. 59, n. 12. For a skeptical view of these confident assertions that Reimarus *benutzte* (used) Morgan, see Jan Van Den Berg, ‘Did Reimarus Use (Implicitly) the Work of the English Deist Thomas Morgan? Some Methodological Questions’, *Notes and Queries*, vol. 56, issue 2, 2009, pp. 243 – 245. The reader can compare both writings for themselves, and in the knowledge that Reimarus possessed all three volumes of Morgan’s *Moral Philosopher* (see Schetelig [ed.], *Auktionskatalog* [vol. 1], p.162).

¹⁰³ See Harrison, ‘*Religion*’, pp. 73 – 85.

¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the most significant was Jonathan Swift’s *Mr C---s’s Discourse of Free-Thinking, Put into Plain English, by way of Abstract for Use of the Poor*, London: John Morphew, 1713. This was written in response to Collin’s *Discourse of Free-Thinking: a cause celebre* in early eighteenth-century English letters.

their detractors, and when the rowdy popularism of the ‘deists’ was confronted in print by the best prose writers and most erudite men in England—Swift, Richard Bentley, Edward Stillingfleet et al—the ‘deists’ found it difficult to maintain the moral and intellectual high ground.¹⁰⁵

Reimarus knew from the case of the ‘deists’ in England and from other examples closer to home (such as J. L. Schmidt), that he would not have been able to maintain the moral high ground—not to mention his social and professional status—had his views on biblical imposters become public knowledge, especially when it was accompanied by the kind of unsparing criticism of the clergy, who were presented as fear mongering enemies of reason in his *Von der Verschreitung der Vernunft auf den Kanzeln* (the second *Fragment*). But in the sixth and seventh *Fragments*, the theory of religious imposture was brought to the door of primitive Christendom. Although Reimarus recognised in Jesus’ teaching the reflection of that natural religion of which he approved—which had very clear echoes of Blunt’s ancient theology—the Christ cult itself was born of deception, plain and simple: ‘It is clear, by their own account...that the apostles and all the disciples were induced by ambitious motives, by hopes of future wealth and power, land and worldly goods...Jesus himself gave them his promise that they should sit upon twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel.’¹⁰⁶ And when the promises of worldly exaltation failed to materialise, the apostles ‘built up a new doctrine’, that of ‘Jesus as a spiritual, suffering Savior’,^{107a} teaching ‘which has every appearance of fictitious invention.’¹⁰⁸ Reimarus’s reconstruction constitutes a particularly sustained and detailed application of a form of explanation which had been advanced with monotonous regularity in European intellectual circles.¹⁰⁹

As early as 1512, Herman van Rijswijck was burnt alive for holding that ‘Christ was a confused spirit, a seducer of other confused spirits, that he was not the son of God, and that he had condemned everyone and saved no one.’¹¹⁰ This was clearly not a well worked out historical reconstruction, but it is worth noting that there were writers before Reimarus, also working in a Christian culture, who were prepared to go even further than he did in the *Apologie*, by proposing that Christianity’s fraudulent character had its origins

¹⁰⁵ See Harrison, ‘Religion’, pp. 77 – 85.

¹⁰⁶ Reimarus, *Fragments* (6), p. 241.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 242.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 242.

¹⁰⁹ Silvia Berti, ‘Unmasking the Truth: The Theme of Imposture in Early Modern European Culture, 1660 – 1730’, in Force and Katz (eds.), *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H Popkin*, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1998, pp. 19 - 36.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 26 - 27.

in Jesus himself. The seventeenth century witnessed the scandalous theories of Lucilio (Giulio Cesare) Vanini (1585 – 1619), another martyr to theological heterodoxy, who suggested that Jesus was not only an impostor, but that he had actually invented the concept of the anti-Christ as a bulwark against all future impostors who threatened his pre-eminence in the deceptive arts!¹¹¹ But perhaps the most notorious piece of imposture literature—of uncertain origin, but possibly pre-dating the Enlightenment—made its greatest impact in the eighteenth century.

Like the *Fragments*, *Le Traité des trois imposteurs* was an anonymous work;¹¹² unlike the *Fragments*, the author remains unknown (or at least contested).¹¹³ Like the *Fragments*, *Le Traité* claimed that Christianity was fraudulent from its very beginnings, but it sought to indict Judaism and Islam with the same charge, and to implicate the key figures in these revealed religions in the deception: the three impostors being Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. To place all three religions on an equal footing would be considered outrageous in itself, but to suggest that their commonality was located in deception made *Le Traité* the most seductive and reviled underground document of the eighteenth century. *Le Traité* is a piece of political and religious propaganda rather than an historical argument, but it shows once again that there was little especially ground breaking in Reimarus's basic contention.¹¹⁴ And while Reimarus did, in the course of articulating his imposture theory, make a serious attempt to distinguish between different forms of eschatological expectation within first-century Judaism, his thesis that an apparent shift in conception, from worldly to spiritual, could only be explained by fraud has not fared well even among his admirers.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ See *ibid*, p.30.

¹¹² The most influential version during the Enlightenment (the French) and the (possibly earlier) Latin version, *De Tribus Impostoribus*, are both available in English: Alcofribas Nasier, (trans.), *Three Imposters*, Whitefish, MA: Kessinger, 2003. Reimarus was certainly acquainted with imposture literature on Islam, citing Humphrey Prideaux's *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display'd in the Life of Mahomet* (London, William Rogers, 1697) in his *Apologie*, (vol. 2), p. 667.

¹¹³ The first French edition of the text seems to have been published at The Hague in 1719 under the title *La Vie et L'Esprit de Spinoza*, and a number of reputed Spinozist thinkers have been suggested in connection with authorship, including John Toland: see Champion, 'Toland and the *Traité des trois imposteurs* c.1709 - 1718', in *International Archives of the History of Ideas*, vol. 148, 1990, pp. 333 – 356.

¹¹⁴ I have been unable to establish whether or not Reimarus read *Le Traité* in any of its incarnations, but we know he was acquainted with imposture literature on Islam, and Reimarus has been included within the context of the kind of underground networks, which dealt in clandestine manuscripts, and through which *Le Traité* made its intellectual impact: see Mulso, *Monadenlehre, Hermetik und Deismus. Georg Schade's geheime Aufklärungsgesellschaft, 1747-1760*, Hamburg: Meiner, 1998, pp. 163 - 187.

¹¹⁵ See Strauss, 'Reimarus and His Apology', p. 44.

(ii) Reimagining Christian Origins

Almost everything Reimarus wrote about Christian origins after the death of Jesus flows from the imposture hypothesis. Reimarus the religious polemicist was concerned to refute the central doctrines of Christianity, so Reimarus the conjectural historian was largely focussed on refuting the historical basis for those doctrines. On the historicity of the Resurrection, Reimarus raises three main objections: (1) a rationalist theological intuition that authentic divine revelations, such as Jesus' alleged messiahship, should be convincing to all men, in and of themselves, without the need for some supernatural confirmation to a select few;¹¹⁶ (2) implausibilities and contradictions within and between the Resurrection narratives themselves;¹¹⁷ and (3), following in the wake of English criticism of the apologetic value of prophecy, especially that of Anthony Collins, Reimarus rejects appeals to Old Testament prophecy as evidence that Jesus' Resurrection was foretold in Jewish sacred history.¹¹⁸ This challenge to the centrepiece of the Christian revelation may have scandalized sections of the German intelligentsia, but surely only those who were not aware of the New Testament criticism produced in the English language throughout the eighteenth century, much of which had been translated into German.¹¹⁹ The question of the historicity of the Resurrection narratives had probably been the most explosive subject during the deist controversy in England, where many in the reading public had been captivated (often in appalled amazement) by the pitiless, mocking deconstruction of the Resurrection by the uproarious Thomas Woolston in his *Sixth Discourse on the Miracles of our Saviour* (1729),¹²⁰ and the mighty counter offensive which followed, a high point of which was Thomas Sherlock's *Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus* (1729).¹²¹ Once again, Reimarus was revisiting, in a particularly detailed and systematic way, arguments which had raged elsewhere in Europe throughout the Enlightenment. Indeed, this could help to explain why Lessing chose to change Reimarus' seemingly preferred ordering of material, and publish *Über die Auferstehungsgeschicht* (On the

¹¹⁶ See Reimarus, *Fragments* (6), pp. 232 – 235.

¹¹⁷ See *ibid*, pp. 153 – 200.

¹¹⁸ See *ibid* pp. 202 – 211. In the *Apologie* Reimarus refers to two English authors, Collins and Samuel Clarke, who were noted, among other things, for their controversial work on the difficulty of taking events in the New Testament as literal fulfilments of prophecies in the Old Testament, and he cites both men on this very subject (on Collins see vol. 1, pp. 728, 742, and vol. 2, p. 271; on Clarke see vol. 2, 271).

¹¹⁹ See Talbert, Introduction, pp. 15 – 16.

¹²⁰ Woolston, who served time in prison for his blasphemous works, proposed an allegorical interpretation of the miracles which some scholars have seen as a precursor to the mythological model employed by Strauss in the nineteenth century (see Herrick, *Radical Rhetoric*, p. 100).

¹²¹ It was Woolston, the accuser, who would end up on trial: in the law courts, not just the court of pamphleteers' opinion. On the rise and fall of this turbulent priest and his rhetorical career, see *ibid*, chap. 4. Reimarus possessed no less than five volumes of Woolston's writings (see Schetelig [ed.], *Auktionskatalog* [vol. 1], p. 80).

Resurrection Narratives) as the sixth *Fragment*, before the seventh dealing with Jesus' ministry, realising that the most original aspect of the whole thesis about Christian origins, if not the most sensationalist, was in the earlier material in *the Apologie*, which he held back until the end.

Having rejected the Resurrection as a historical factor in the origins of Christianity, Reimarus redoubles his attack on Trinitarian theology by deconstructing the story in Acts of the Apostles underpinning the Christian feast of Pentecost.¹²² Reimarus offers some qualification to his imposture hypothesis when he acknowledges that by the time the author relates this story of the descent of the Holy Spirit, at least some Christians were sincere believers in the risen Lord, the original deception having done its work. Nevertheless, the miracle of Pentecost, with wind, fire and the speaking of tongues, is rejected on three counts: 1) the aforementioned philosophical / theological judgement that any genuine divine revelation, in this case Jesus' supposed Resurrection, should not require a subsequent miracle to make it more credible;¹²³ 2) internal contradictions and implausibilities in the account;¹²⁴ and 3) the apparent repudiation of at least elements of the miracle within the early Christian community itself.¹²⁵ 'The whole description', writes Reimarus,

is more that of a prophetic vision to represent the prompting of foreign languages by the Holy Spirit. The mighty wind represents the Holy Spirit blowing into the apostles and kindling a blazing fire which shoots forth in forked flames from their mouths, signifying the gift of many languages. It is a good picture of the imaginary vision of the prophetic writer, but we cannot by any possible means make it rhyme with a true history. And why should some of those present have mocked at the apostles, and supposed them to be drunken with wine if these miraculous tongues were indeed visible to the spectators? The thing contradicts itself.¹²⁶

The most authoritative Christian opposition that Reimarus detects is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

[H]e has not the courage to utterly forbid the speaking with tongues, as such a command would have been equivalent to accusing the apostles—with all their miraculous Corinthian gifts—of juggling and imposition, but, nevertheless he gives

¹²² Reimarus had already attacked the Christian concept of the Holy Spirit as a divine person in *Fragments* (7), pp. 88 - 112.

¹²³ See *ibid*, pp. 261 – 262.

¹²⁴ See *ibid*, pp. 260 – 269.

¹²⁵ See *ibid*, pp. 263 – 264.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 262 – 263.

them to understanding, that he deems it advisable to refrain from speaking in unknown tongues which no man understands, and which, unless they be interpreted, are not edifying to the Church.¹²⁷

Reimarus does attempt to draw attention to possible tensions in the early Church, in this case over the question of appropriate modes of religious practice and evangelisation, but they are all put to the service of undermining key Christian doctrines, so the scope of his reconstruction is narrow and largely guided by his own theological preferences. One earlier scholar we have already encountered began his publishing career with a definite concern with Christian doctrines, but he moved quickly onto other questions (perhaps more advanced ones in terms of the history of New Testament studies), including the question of how the earliest Christian communities defined themselves and their relationship to the Jewish law: the Irish-born writer, John Toland.

Toland rose to infamy with the publication of *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696), discussed in the previous chapter, where the focus is squarely on the reasonableness of that Christian doctrine which can be derived from the Gospels without appeal to mystery. But in the clandestine *Christianisme Judaïque et Mahometan* and the later published English version of 1718, *Nazarenus, or Jewish, Gentile and Mohometan Christianity*,¹²⁸ Toland rewrites the history of Christianity in Ireland, rejecting Catholicism as a temporary imposition, and, more significantly for our enquiry, proposes the *Gospel of Barnabas* as a source capable of explaining the close historic relationship between elements in primitive Christian thought, as he understood it, and Islamic views of Jesus.¹²⁹ As noted already, the comparison between Islam and Christianity was a dangerous one, and Toland supplemented this by connecting the argument with an alternative Gospel: it was common for many Protestant writers to equate primitive Christianity with true and noble religion—the unsullied instantiation of the gospel of Christ in the belief and practise of a historical community—so any comparison with Islam supported by a non-canonical text

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 264.

¹²⁸ French and English versions of the work are collected in Champion (ed.), *Nazarenus*.

¹²⁹ The oldest known texts are an Italian manuscript dating from approximately the end of the sixteenth century and a Spanish one from the eighteenth century, although there is some dispute over the original language of composition: see Jan Joosten, 'The *Gospel of Barnabas* and the Diatessaron', *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 9, issue 01, Jan 2002, pp. 73 – 96: 73 – 74. Toland had access to the Italian version, then kept in Amsterdam, and later sold to Prince Eugène of Savoy; today it resides in the Austrian National Library in Vienna: see Jan Joosten, 'The Date and Provenance of the *Gospel of Barnabas*', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 61, pt 1, April 2010, pp. 200 - 221: 201 - 202. The dates suggested by scholars for the original composition of *Barnabas* range from antiquity to the seventeenth century, but most scholars prefer a late medieval or early modern date (see Joosten, '*Gospel of Barnabas* and the Diatessaron', pp. 73 – 74). For an English translation see Lonsdale Ragg and Laura Ragg (eds. & trans.), *The Gospel of Barnabas*, Oxford, 1907.

would challenge both theological orthodoxy and the historical monopoly of the New Testament canon. Why should this relatively obscure text, the apocryphal *Barnabas*, have captured the interest of radical writers in the early Enlightenment?

Amidst the mass of anti-Islamic literature in the seventeenth century, Henry Stubbe circulated a sympathetic account of the Prophet Muhammad and the rise of Islam.¹³⁰ One of Stubbe's arguments concerned a connection between the Ebionite Christian heresy and some aspects of Islamic theology, including the Islamic conception of Jesus: a messenger of God, but not divine. Toland appears to have accepted a similar comparative argument, or at least adopted it for a time,¹³¹ and, armed with *Barnabas*, set out to show that this text reflected the belief and practice of the Ebionite community (which he equated with an early Christian movement called 'the Nazarens'). Perhaps the most controversial twist in Toland's theorising was his argument that, contrary to the judgement of the Church fathers—not to mention almost every Christian historian in early-modern Europe—the Ebionites were the closest of all early Christian sects to the religious practises envisaged by Jesus in his preaching, practises which were continuous with the law of Moses:

JESUS did not, as tis universally believed, abolish the law of Moses, neither in whole nor in part, not in the letter no more than in the spirit: with other uncommon particulars, concerning The True And Original Christianity. Finally, you'll discover some of the fundamental doctrines of Mohometanism to have their rise...from the earliest monuments of the Christian religion.¹³²

Apart from the argument about Mohammed, Reimarus would make the same claim about Jesus and the law of Moses many years later.¹³³

Toland's account of the derivation of the name Nazarens is the obvious one: 'these Jewish converts were term'd Nazarens from JESUS of Nazareth.'¹³⁴ More interesting is the assumption that those from Nazareth, in Galilee, were closely bound to the Jewish law and resisted the influence of Hellenistic culture. Whether this is a safe assumption to

¹³⁰ Henry Stubbe was a librarian at the University of Oxford, a medical doctor and political controversialist; for a more recent edition of his work on the prophet Muhammad, Islam and what he took to be their misrepresentation in the Christian world, see Stubbe, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism*, M. K. Shairani (ed.), London: Luzac, 1911. On the connections between the work of Stubbe and Toland, see Champion, 'Legislators, Impostors, and the Political Origin of Religion: English Theories of "Imposture" from Stubbe to Toland', in Silvia Berti, Françoise Charles-Daubert and Popkin (eds.), *Heterodoxy, Spinozism and Free Thought in Early Eighteenth-Century Europe*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996, pp. 333 – 356; and his Introduction to *Nazarenus*, p. 86.

¹³¹ See Toland, *Nazarenus*, English version pp. 114 – 245: 152 – 153.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.135.

¹³³ See Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), pp. 71 – 72.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.151.

make is among the most contested issues in the reconstruction of the Holy Land in the time of Jesus.¹³⁵ Toland thought that it was safe, and, in so far as *Barnabas* could have emanated from this community and impacted upon the Islamic world,¹³⁶ Toland also considers it safe to conclude that Islam is a 'sort of sect of Christianity, as Christianity was first esteem'd a branch of Judaism.'¹³⁷ Although Toland offered a radically antagonistic challenge to his contemporaries' notions about the historical relationship between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, his motives and results were not necessarily destructive, at least not wholly so. Toland seizes on the diversity in early Christianity, and, instead of either trying to impose unity or suggest that plurality undermines revelation, he argues that this diversity was 'design'd in The Original Plan of Christianity';¹³⁸ indeed, he claims that

FROM the history of the NAZARENS, and more particularly from the evident words of Scripture, I infer in this discourse a distinction of two sorts of Christianity, viz., those from among the Jews, and those from among the Gentiles: not only that in fact there was such a distinction (which no body denies) but likewise that of right it ought to have been so (which everybody denies)...I mean that the Jews, tho associating with the converted Gentiles, and acknowledging them for brethren, were still to observe their own Law...and that the Gentiles, who became so far Jews as to acknowledge ONE GOD, were not however to observe the Jewish law...This fellowship in Piety and Virtue is the Mystery that PAUL rightly says was hid from all other ages, till the manifestation of it by JESUS; and this Union without Uniformity, between Jew and Gentile, is the admirable Economy of the Gospel.¹³⁹

According to Toland, the explanatory power of his reconstruction is vast:

I judge it to be most right and true, the genuine primary Christianity; and therefore producing the promis'd effects of the Gospel, GLORY TO GOD ON HIGH, PEACE ON

¹³⁵ For good general surveys, see Moxnes, 'The Construction of Galilee as a Place for the Historical Jesus, Part I', *British Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture*, no. 31, no. 1, Feb. 2001, pp. 27 – 37; and 'Part II', in vol. 31, no. 2, May 2001, pp. 64 – 77.

¹³⁶ See Toland, *Nazarenus*, p. 135.

¹³⁷ Toland tried to prove his case by comparing the picture in *Barnabas* with Islamic notions about Jesus (presumably drawn from the Qur'an, although there is no substantial engagement with the text) and references to the Ebionites in patristic sources (see *ibid*, pp.136 - 152). There does indeed seem to have been an early Jewish Christian sect known as the Ebionites ('poor ones'), but they were probably a second-century phenomenon (see Ehrman, *New Testament*, p. 3) which Toland conflated with the oldest Jewish-Christian movement. More recent scholarship has indicated that the Ebionites and the Nazoraeans (probably Toland's 'Nazarens') were distinct Jewish-Christian groups, possibly with their own Gospels: see William L Petersen, 'Ebionites, Gospel of the', in *ABD* (vol. 2), pp. 261 - 262; and Petersen, 'Nazoraeans, Gospel of the', in *ABD* (vol. 4), pp.1051 – 1052. Contemporary scholars generally hold that *Barnabas* contains material *from* Islamic sources, not, as Toland seemed to suggest, from early Jewish Christian sources which later informed or corresponded to Islamic thinking; indeed, *Barnabas* is actually thought to contain material culled from all three religious traditions (see Joosten, 'Date and Provenance', p. 200).

¹³⁸ Toland, *Nazarenus*, p. 117.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 117.

EARTH, GOODWILL TOWARDS MEN...I have moreover prov'd, that the distinction of Jewish and Gentile Christians...reconciles PETER and PAUL about Circumcision and the other Legal ceremonies, as it does PAUL and JAMES about Justification by Faith, or... by Works; it makes the Gospels to agree with the Acts and the Epistles...but, what is more than all, it shows a perfect accord between the Old Testament and the New; and proves that God did not give two Laws, whereof the one was to cancel the other, which is no small stumbling block to the opposers of Christianity...¹⁴⁰

Toland's apparent acceptance of the heretical Ebionites as those closest in spirit to the religion of the historical Jesus, along with his acceptance of pluralism as inherent to primitive Christianity, provided little comfort for theologians seeking a single, consistent doctrinal picture rooted in the first century. But traditional Christian theology was not Toland's primary concern. In his Introduction to *Nazarenus*, Justin Champion writes,

Having reconstructed the historical milieu of early Judaeo-Christianity, Toland then proceeded to reinterpret the scriptural accounts of disputes between Peter, Paul and James about the relationship between Jewish ceremony and the soteriological efficiency of faith, not as theological systems, but as practical injunctions about how different types of believer, (Jewish, Nazarene, Gentile) could co-exist in civil society...This was part of the reasoning behind advancing the *Gospel of Barnabas* as a Scriptural text that was used by Jewish-Christians and Muslims: Scripture was effective not for its doctrinal content (foisted by priests) but because it enables communities to live a virtuous life.¹⁴¹

Toland's insistence that the earliest Christians were located within Judaism was starkly different to LeClerc's theory of legal abrogation, but it has since become common currency in the academic study of Christian origins, and Toland should be more widely recognised for confronting head-on the diversity of belief and practise in early Christianity.¹⁴² In terms of methodology Toland confronted this diversity historically, however inadequately: Toland's scholarship—apparently intended to legitimise

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 119.

¹⁴¹ Champion, Introduction, pp. 75, 77.

¹⁴² The seminal work for this is usually thought to be Ferdinand Christian Baur's *Christentum Und Die Christliche Kirche: Der Drei Ersten Jahrhunderte* (1853 – 1864): *The Church History of the First Three Centuries* (2 vols.), Allan Menzies (trans.), 3rd edn, London: Williams and Norgate, 1887. It is also possible to make a case for Morgan being something of a precursor here, if we are able to see beyond his polemical intent to vindicate one form of religion over another: Morgan's presentational device in *Moral Philosopher*, which is to present his arguments in a dialogue between Philaethes (a Christian Deist) and Theophanes (a Christian Jew) reflects his historical judgement that, from the outset, Christianity has been characterised by internal theological conflict, not least between Pauline and Petrine factions. Going against an emerging tendency to marginalise Paul as a figure of on-going religious importance (rather than merely historical significance) in favour of a strict focus on Jesus, Morgan is an unabashed fan of the Apostle (see vol. 3, p. 325).

Barnabas—¹⁴³was soon subjected to massive and decisive criticism in England.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Toland's willingness to consider non-canonical documents to try to establish the history of early Christian communities, even the historical truth about Jesus himself, is now established practise in the study of Christian origins.¹⁴⁵ In his history of New Testament criticism, W. G. Kummel rightly praises Grotius's 'bold conjectures concerning the historical situation of some New Testament letters... What is important in this connection is not whether Grotius's hypotheses are convincing (they are hardly that!), but that Grotius makes any use at all of historical conjecture as a tool of New Testament interpretation'.¹⁴⁶ If only from this methodological point of view—bracketing his ambiguous religious motives and dubious use of sources—¹⁴⁷Toland's importance as a conjectural historian of Christian origins is perhaps more significant for New Testament studies than his better known critique of theological dogmas in *Christianity not Mysterious*.

4. Conclusion

Like many intellectual monuments in the humanities, Reimarus's writings on the historical Jesus and Christian origins are works of synthesis. The sixth and seventh *Fragments* of his *magnum opus* followed established lines of argument which had already made critical inroads into the orthodox picture of Jesus: the attack on miracles, including the Resurrection (Woolston); the denial of historically realised prophecy (Collins); the distinction between the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of his followers (Chubb); recognition of the central importance of political and apocalyptic eschatology in primitive Christianity (Tindal); and the use of conjectural historical hypotheses to understand the communities behind the literature of early Christianity (Toland).

All these writers worked in the traumatic early phase of the 'great reversal': an intellectual reorientation that would change the way Christian history was written forever. In the literary form of biography, those changes were most evident in the work of Piere

¹⁴³ Toland later denied that he had ever really promoted *Barnabas* as an authentic ancient source (see Champion, Introduction, p. 95).

¹⁴⁴ Champion, Introduction, pp. 89 – 96.

¹⁴⁵ Since the nineteenth century, the vast majority of scholars have focussed their attention on the synoptic Gospels, but non biblical sources have become an increasingly important feature of the Quest: from our vantage point today, Elaine Pagels's *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), and Crossan's *Four Other Gospels: Ghosts on the Corridors of Canon* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985) can be seen as indicative of the importance that at least some late twentieth-century scholars would soon accord to non-canonical sources in their reconstructions.

¹⁴⁶ See Kummel, *New Testament*, pp. 35 – 6.

¹⁴⁷ Champion's Introduction is the best discussion I have read on this, especially pp. 96 – 106.

Bayle, as he ranged over a bewildering number of historical subjects, debunking the myths which had grown around these figures in pursuit of a probable historical core. Some of the other seventeenth and eighteenth-century writers profiled in this part of my thesis, broke new ground by daring to take the most iconic figure in Western culture, and Christian piety, as one of those historical subjects. Whether Jesus was wholly and only human (Reimarus and the later Chubb) or, as Christian orthodoxy insists, human and divine (Grotius, Simon and LeClerc), his human story could now be studied like any other person of his time and place.

(i) Postscript to Schweitzer's Account: A Tale of Two Messiahs

I began the previous two chapters by reflecting on the relatively abrupt start Schweitzer made to his history of the Quest. Such a singular emphasis on the work of Reimarus is justified neither by the general state of Enlightenment historiography—which had passed successfully from a state of radical skepticism to relative epistemological confidence *vis a vis* the past—nor of biblical scholarship, which showed every sign that the critical methods applied to the texts of the Bible would eventually be applied to Jesus, and in the case of LeClerc and Chubb, the practise was already underway.

Although we should resist repeating his mistake, perhaps we should be too hard on Schweitzer for his silence with respect to Reimarus's forerunners, especially the Anglophone ones. The 'deists' did not necessarily loom large in perspectives on the Enlightenment and biblical scholarship at the turn of the twentieth century; indeed, if Edmund Burke is to be believed, some of the figures discussed in these three chapters were marginal in their own time, and by the final decade of the eighteenth century they were the justly forgotten men of the Enlightenment:

Who, born within the last forty years [since c. 1750], has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb, and Morgan, and that whole race who called themselves freethinkers?...Who now reads Bolingbroke? Whoever read him right through? Ask the booksellers of London what has become of these leading lights of the world.¹⁴⁸

Burke was exaggerating, although the question of just how much is a live debate.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France: And on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event* (2nd edn.), J. Dodsley: London: 1790, p. 133.

¹⁴⁹ See Lund, editorial Introduction to *Margins of Orthodoxy*, pp. 1 – 19; and Barnett, *Enlightenment and Religion*, chaps. 1 – 3.

Putting aside the question of whether Schweitzer knew about the Anglophone 'deists' of the early eighteenth-century, there seem to have been at least two factors which made the beginning (and end) of Schweitzer's story so irresistible to him: 1) the German monopoly of all significant moments in the history of the Quest, and 2), perhaps more importantly, to begin with Reimarus ensured an interpretive symmetry between the beginning and the end of his story. Schweitzer was able to finish his study by returning to a redeemed version of the revolutionary insight which German scholarship had, as he saw it, done its best to forget.

To the casual or occasional student of the history of New Testament scholarship, the emphasis on *Eschatologie*, the concept which Schweitzer regarded as Reimarus's greatest discovery, may suggest a greater degree of scholarly innovation than is strictly justified. After all, in this context it is just a technical term used to denote a climate of messianic expectation. When reflecting on his work on Jesus years after *Reimarus zu Wrede*, Schweitzer wrote,

Just as Jesus announces the Kingdom of God not as something already beginning but as something of the future, He does not think that He is already the Messiah. He is convinced that only at the appearance of the Messianic Kingdom, when those predestined enter the supernatural existence intended for them, will He be manifested as the Messiah. This knowledge about His future dignity remains His secret.¹⁵⁰

Although Jesus is in error in his announcement of an imminent supernatural reordering of the world, with his messianic self-consciousness and vision of a final judgement, Schweitzer preserves a good deal of the pre-modern theological picture of Christ, the cosmic King of Kings, in terms of Jesus' self-understanding: Schweitzer's Jesus thought of himself as an 'imperious ruler';¹⁵¹ and, more striking still, that 'It was because He was so in His inmost being that He could think of Himself as the Son of Man.'¹⁵² He reminds readers of his earlier work who have been disconcerted by what they found, that the form of *eschatologie* he attributed to Jesus is 'in accordance with the traditional Jewish-Christian doctrine concerning the events leading to the end of the world.'¹⁵³ But what of the man who 'started' it all? For Reimarus, too, Jesus sees himself as a Messiah. Although

¹⁵⁰ Schweitzer, *Life and Thought*, p. 39.

¹⁵¹ Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 403.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 403.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

he never actually uses the term *Eschatologie* in the sixth or seventh *Fragments*, Reimarus is credited (by Schweitzer) with grasping the eschatological thought world of Jesus, but corrected for making the mistake of attributing to Jesus the expectation that he would be recognised as a kingly Messiah by his fellow men, presumably signalling a popular uprising (with or without divine support). This reading is certainly born out my Reimarus's own writings:

[H]e rides through the gate into the city of Jerusalem, upon which there ensues a crowd, an uproar, and the whole town is thrown into a state of excitement. This extraordinary public procession, which was not only tolerated by Jesus, but had been diligently encouraged by him, could not have aimed at anything but a worldly kingdom. He wished that all the people of Israel who were there gathered together should unanimously proclaim him king.¹⁵⁴

Both Reimarus and Schweitzer are understood (not unreasonably) as offering accounts of Jesus which are radically disruptive of Christianity, and yet both understand Jesus in terms of messianic categories which retain much of the orthodox picture. For example, in Reimarus's account John the Baptist really does understand Jesus to be a messianic descendent of David, the one foretold by scripture; the subversive element being that, as cousins they already knew each other long before their public relationship, and were secretly working together to garner support by behaving in the manner of the prophets and announcing the Kingdom. In Schweitzer's account, Jesus really does take on the role of the suffering saviour, who lays down his life to do the will of the father and fulfil the word of the prophets; the subversive element being that this was supposed to be an act which ushered in the apocalypse, with no self-conscious regard for the souls of those men and women in future generations, as yet unborn, who would regard come to regard this tragic folly as the atoning death of God-incarnate.

One of the interesting consequences of writing Chubb into the story is not just because it challenges a commonplace in scholarship. It also unsettles the familiar pattern of a disturbing eschatological insight (political in the case of Reimarus), followed by a period of resistance by well-intentioned liberal modernisers who refuse to leave the historical Jesus in the first-century, and then climaxing with the triumphant return of the eschatological hypothesis (apocalyptic in the case of Schweitzer): the same kind of pattern which has sometimes been identified with the (on-going) Third Quest of our own time,

¹⁵⁴ Reimarus, *Fragments* (6), p. 146.

which returns to the insight of Schweitzer and reinstates Jewish eschatology after a period of wrongful neglect during the New Quest; the very pattern which Crossan is so suspicious of. It unsettles that pattern by installing a picture of the historical Jesus which does not rely on messianic categories as historically *prior* to the period of German scholarship when this pattern is supposed to have manifested itself. Of course this does not make any difference to its historical persuasiveness, and this is not the place to start passing judgement on any of the candidate perspectives, but the way the history of a discipline is written can impact on how rival hypotheses are perceived, and, in the case of the Quest, an insistence on a primarily ethical concept of the Kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus, who saw himself neither as a political nor apocalyptic Messiah, is all too readily dismissed as a return to the ‘liberal Jesus’ who was the popular but ultimately unsuccessful response to the grandiose self-image, material ambition, or supernatural excesses implied by messianic eschatologies. If we take Chubb as prior, and there are good grounds for doing so, we see that ‘ethical eschatology’ is of even older vintage among modern critics than those messianic versions of the historical Jesus which are, in no small part, subverted takeovers of traditional Christian conceptions.¹⁵⁵

So moral conceptions of the historical Jesus were dominant at the outset of the Quest. But how did morality become so central to the critical reimagining of Jesus during the Enlightenment? The historical plausibility of moral readings of Jesus is only part of the story. It is the task of the next part of this study to illuminate other factors in the rise of the ethical Christ.

¹⁵⁵ Chubb also depended on some traditional aspects of Christian theology. He accepted that the Gospels give reason to believe that Jesus predicted his own return (see *True Gospel*, p. 13 – 14), and he interprets that as Jesus envisaging a temporally ambiguous role for himself in a future judgement (something Christianity had to learn to accept overtime). Where he differs from Reimarus and Schweitzer, is that Jesus’ eschatological self-understanding, whatever that may have been, did *not* condition his teaching about the Kingdom, which Chubb linked to God’s general providence—rather than an imminent historical intervention—which requires the same life of righteousness that was *always* God’s expectation. For Chubb, the whole point of Jesus’ mission, ‘the very end and purpose of his coming’ (p. 33), which he ‘plainly expressly declared’ (p. 33), was to call sinners to that life (see pp. 33 – 34). Chubb even argues that it ‘behoved’ Jesus ‘to rise again from the dead’ (p. 33) to further that message, which is not the same as arguing that he did rise, and Chubb’s other writings show his skepticism concerning miracles. But if Chubb was still an Arian when he wrote the *True Gospel*, then supernaturalism need not be excluded from the Gospels, and belief in a final judgement would have been at home in eighteenth-century Arianism.

PART III: MORALITY

CHAPTER SEVEN

Reimarus and the Ethical Christ:

Some Theological and Philosophical Contexts

1. Moral Perspectives on Jesus

(i) *Liberalism as Ethical Religion*

A 'liberal stance' towards religion has been characterised by one contemporary philosopher as placing 'the ethics of religion before its doctrines and historical myths.'¹ There is surely more to liberal conceptions of religion than this, not least a commitment to the use of reason, an openness to scientific discovery, freedom of religious conscience, a rejection of theological absolutism (whether institutional or scriptural), and the acceptance of fluidity in the interpretation of texts and traditional doctrines. Nevertheless, it seems correct to say that an emphasis on ethics (or moral theology) over against other doctrinal preoccupations is a common feature of the religion of writers who either define themselves as liberal,² or who have tended to be defined as such by intellectual historians.³ Perhaps the most distinguished and influential Enlightenment thinker to adopt this liberal/ethical stance was Immanuel Kant, who characterised God as a postulate of practical reason in his *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788),⁴ and continued his moral emphasis in *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen* (1793), where the figure of Jesus comes to the fore as the moral exemplar *par excellence*.⁵ Although it should be noted that Jean-Jacques Rousseau had already adopted a comparable position on Jesus,

¹ Peter Byrne, *The Moral Interpretation of Religion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p. 1.

² The work of the philosopher-theologian Keith Ward embodies all the features I identified; writing from a more explicitly Christian theological perspective than Byrne, he gives a broader view: 'If the heart of liberalism lies in not accepting the authority of humans or of scriptural texts as unquestionably binding, a liberal must have some account of revelation which is not propositional (consisting in divine provision of inerrant sentences). An account in terms of a unique type of faith discernments closely associated with personal value commitment and with a tradition of such discernments preserved in a distinctive community. And that is precisely what the classical liberal theologians provided': Ward, 'The Importance of Liberal Theology', in Mark D Chapman (ed.) *The Future of Liberal Theology*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2002, pp. 39 – 53: 49.

³ Ethics was certainly central to the concerns of many of those thinkers in the German liberal theological tradition of H. J. Holtzmann and Albert Ritschl.

⁴ See Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Mary Gregor (ed. & trans.), Andrews Reath, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pt i, bk 1, chap. 2.

⁵ See Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries*, especially, pt. ii, pp. 79 – 93; and pt. iii, pp. 129 – 147.

and Kant's moral thought owed much to the Swiss philosopher.⁶ Kant undoubtedly exerted influence on many of those New Testament scholars reviewed by Albert Schweitzer in *Reimarus zu Wrede*, who are celebrated examples of Christian liberalism and its associated moral focus.⁷ But there is a problem with any exclusive identification between this liberal tradition and the philosophy of Kant.

A commitment to the historical enterprise was never one of the Prussian moralist's priorities, and Kant's relative indifference to history in matters of religious truth is taken to be a virtue by some of those who understand their approach to religion as continuous with his. In his preliminary remarks to his Kantian inspired study, Peter Byrne writes, 'The modern writers who will be the focus of the bulk of this book are heirs to a rejection of history and historical beliefs as the locus for making sense of God and God's relation to the world.'⁸ But thinking of history as a way of 'making sense of God and God's relationship to the world' was *not* rejected by most of those nineteenth and early twentieth-century New Testament writers identified with the liberal tradition;⁹ on the contrary, some of the best scholars in this tradition emphatically affirmed the historical method as a way of investigating, refining and clarifying the character of the Christian revelation.¹⁰ And because of this long and continuing tradition of liberal theology's attachment to history as a fitting focus for theological reflection, it is understandable that some scholars are inclined to see the origins of liberal theology in the work of Frederick

⁶ See Vincent A McCarthy, *Quest for a Philosophical Jesus: Christianity and Philosophy in Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Schelling*, Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986, especially chaps. 1 – 2.

⁷ The pervasive influence of Kant and his contested legacy among liberal theologians is discussed in Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology: Religion and Cultural Synthesis in Wilhelmine Germany*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

⁸ Byrne, *Moral Interpretation*, p. 2. This rejection is said to arise because as a result of, 'Historical criticism of the Biblical narratives', which 'fuels scepticism about the certainty of any beliefs about divine action in history' (p. 2); more generally, there is the recognition that 'revelation in history is, by definition, historically and geographically situated' (p.2), whereas the idea of 'divine perfection would preclude the divine from being more closely related to one portion of the world and its history than another' (p. 3).

⁹ Byrne may want to distinguish between 'liberal religion' (his philosophical concern) and 'liberal theology' (a tendency among some Christian intellectuals), but among moral interpreters of religion, there is so much engagement with the Christian tradition, and by some avowedly Christian intellectuals, that any sharp distinction seems untenable: Kant is Byrne's preferred (but not only) point of departure for the moral interpretation of religion (see *ibid*, p. 1- 2), and the great philosopher's relationship to Christian theology is complex, but he revises rather than dismisses a variety of Christian theological doctrines in *Religion with the Boundaries*, reserves a unique place for Christ, and does not seem to countenance truth in any other religion.

¹⁰ This is one of the themes of Harnack's *What is Christianity?*

Schleiermacher:¹¹ in addition to having a strong emphasis on the ethical, Schleiermacher was also immersed in the historical study of scripture.¹²

(ii) *The Ethical Christ: From Schweitzer to Reimarus*

Schweitzer seems to have had an ambivalent relationship to liberalism: on the one hand, ethics was at the heart of his own religious thought and practice;¹³ on the other hand, with the exception of Karl Barth, he is perhaps the most famous critic of liberal thinkers in German theology.¹⁴ Perhaps this ambivalence is only apparent, however. In *Reimarus zu Wrede*, Schweitzer is critical of the liberal stance whenever it manifests itself in interpretations of the historical Jesus. Schweitzer regarded this as an instance of modern theology intruding into the domain of ancient history:

The study of the Life of Jesus has had a curious history...It loosed the bands by which He had been riveted for centuries to the stony rocks of ecclesiastical doctrine, and rejoiced to see life and movement coming into the figure once more, and the historical Jesus advancing, as it seemed, to meet it. But He does not stay; He passes by our time and returns to His own.¹⁵

Schweitzer's Jesus 'was not a teacher, not a casuist',¹⁶ and the Jesus of any serious historical criticism in the future will 'not be a Jesus Christ to whom the religion of the

¹¹ See James M Byrne, 'A Reasonable Passion: The Revival of Liberal Theology' (review of Chapman [ed.], *The Future of Liberal Theology*; and Michael J Langford, *A Liberal Theology for the Twenty-First Century: A Passion for Reason*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), *Reviews in Religion and Theology*, vol. 10, issue 1, Feb. 2003, pp. 6 – 13: 10.

¹² Byrne argues that 'from Schleiermacher [sic] onwards modern liberal theology, while indebted to Kant, has attempted to overcome the Kantian critique by deepening what we understand by reason; that which is rationally defensible is not merely that which can be accepted on a narrow *rationalist* agenda' ('A Reasonable Passion', p. 10). And however flawed Schleiermacher's methodological assumptions in *Das Leben Jesu*, there can be no doubt about his commitment to history, and especially biography, as source of theological insight.

¹³ Schweitzer's intellectual commitment to ethical concerns are found in *Philosophy of Civilisation*, and his collection of sermons *Reverence for Life*, Reginald H Fuller (trans.), New York: Harper & Row, 1969; while the relationship between this and his practical commitment is illuminated in his autobiographical writings, most notably *Life and Thought*, as well as and in the secondary material: see Mike W Martin, *Albert Schweitzer's Reverence for Life: Ethical Idealism and Self-Realization*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 2007; and David C Miller and James Poulliard, *The Relevance of Albert Schweitzer at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America. 1992.

¹⁴ Karl Barth saw in theological liberalism a dangerous readiness to accommodate Christian faith to the world, and thus to become a servant of the world before Christ: a seminal moment for Barth was the support of a number of liberal-theologians for the German war effort in the early phase of hostilities in 1914, most notably (or notoriously) the September *Manifesto of the Ninety Three Intellectuals*, which identified the conflict with the preservation of the magnificent culture of Goethe, Kant and Beethoven. One of the signatories to this document was Barth's former teacher, Harnack. Barth's insistence on a commitment to God as 'wholly other', a reality which could never be captured by any human culture, was given vivid expression in his famous commentary *Der Römerbrief* (1919): see *The Epistle to the Romans* (6th edn), Edwyn C Hoskyns (trans.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

¹⁵ Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 399.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 399.

present can ascribe, according to its long-cherished custom, its own thoughts and ideas'.¹⁷

Schweitzer showed that it was possible, however, to reject an overtly moral emphasis in the biographical reconstructions of major figures in religious history while nevertheless insisting that it is, after all, the ethics in religious traditions which are of abiding significance. For Schweitzer, the historical Jesus acted as an 'imperious ruler' in a climate of apocalyptic religion,¹⁸ not as a moral sage offering wisdom for ethical living throughout the ages. Yet even on Schweitzer's account, it is because of the historical Jesus, not in spite of him, that Christianity yields to an ethical interpretation and demands an on-going ethical response.¹⁹ In the second edition of *Reimarus zu Wrede*, Schweitzer is explicit in articulating the historical core which shows the liberal stance to be, in some sense, continuous with the mission of the historical Jesus:

Jesus' action consists in the way in which his natural and profound moral consciousness adopts late Jewish eschatology...[S]o a period can have a real and living relationship with Jesus only to the extent that it thinks ethically and eschatologically with its own categories, and can produce within its own world-view the equivalents of those desires and expectations which hold such a prominent position in his, that is, when it is dominated by ideas which correspond to those that govern Jesus' conception of the kingdom of God.²⁰

For Schweitzer, Jesus inhabited a mental world where the space-time universe was reaching its divinely ordained conclusion, and, as such, there is an uncommon radicalism in his will to set in motion the transformation of the world. On this reading, the extraordinary will of Jesus constitutes the timeless feature of his historical personality, and Schweitzer believed that this could and should be harnessed by his followers in the modern world, a world which Schweitzer thought had lost confidence in the Enlightenment's promise of radical progress in human affairs.²¹

Like the liberal theologians, Schweitzer was preoccupied with the moral and social progress of humanity, but in his desire to capture the energy of one (Jesus) who was dedicated to nothing less than leading humanity out of a fallen world and into a world where the justice of God would reign for eternity, Schweitzer envisaged a rather more

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 398 – 399.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 403.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 402.

²⁰ Schweitzer, *Quest: FCE*, p 482 – 483.

²¹ Ibid, p. 485.

radical response to the historical Jesus than many liberal Christians of his time: social propriety, charitable giving or a more redistributive form of government did not exhaust his vision of Christian moral action. Schweitzer's radical reading of the ethical demand implicit in Jesus' example manifested itself in his own life choices, which, for long periods, took him away from the comfortable world of European elite society and into the humanitarian work for which he is most famous to many today. It is for this work that he would eventually be awarded the Noble Peace Prize, and become a by word for public virtue on the lips of other illustrious figures of the twentieth century.²²

At the close of *Reimarus zu Wrede*, Schweitzer leaves his reader with the following reflection on the historical subject of his book:

He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.²³

This kind of existential response to Jesus, recommended at the end of one of the most famously hardnosed historical treatments of Jesus, might explain why Schweitzer has been understood as by some commentators as a modern 'mystic',²⁴ an interpretation he rather encouraged in his own writings.²⁵ But however we conceptualise Schweitzer's distinctive approach to religion, it is clear than he thought that the liberal Quest to find in

²² Schweitzer won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952 for his humanitarian work, outstripping his renown as an intellectual: the 11 July 1949 edition of *TIME* magazine ran with Schweitzer on the front cover, describing him as 'one of the world's great humanitarians', and, having then off a broad brush, but nevertheless impressive, list of his academic and artistic accomplishments, returned to his moral credentials: 'Above all, he is a man who decided to turn his back on the dazzling rewards the world wanted to give him in order to serve his fellow man' (*TIME* on-line archive), accessed 16 May 2012:

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,853820,00.html> pp. 1-8: 1). Schweitzer has won praise from the great and the good of twentieth-century history, including fellow Nobel Prize winners President Jimmy Carter and Albert Einstein: 'He is the only Westerner who has had a moral effect on this generation comparable to Ghandi's. As in the case of Ghandi, the extent of this is overwhelmingly due to the example he gave by his own life's work': *The New Quotable Einstein*, Alice Calaprice (ed.), Freeman Dyson (fore.), Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 97. He has not been without his detractors, however. The same magazine who hailed him in the first half of the twentieth century turned against him as the climate of opinion shifted on the whole subject of the European presence in Africa, however noble the intentions: see John Randal, 'Albert Schweitzer: An Anachronism', in *TIME* (on-line archive), 21 Jun. 1963, accessed 18 Jul. 2012:

<http://www.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,874897-1,00.html>

²³ Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 403.

²⁴ Baird, *Edwards to Bultmann* p. 230. And see the analysis in Henry B Clark, *The Ethical Mysticism of Albert Schweitzer*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1962.

²⁵ In *Life and Thought*, Schwitzer writes, 'All thinking that penetrates to the bottom arrives at ethical mysticism. What is rational reaches eventually the nonrational. The ethical mysticism of Reverence for Life is rational thought that derives its power from the spiritual nature of our being' (p. 204).

Jesus a kindred spirit—a visionary prophet of civilised, liberal modernity, communicated through a spiritualised conception of the Kingdom of God—had only served to rob him of his moral vitality. And Schweitzer judged that scholars of his own generation had actually lost sight of the radicalism of moral will which was such a striking feature of the historical Jesus: ‘Despite all advances in historical insight, he [Jesus] in fact remained more alien to them than he had been to the rationalism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which in its ardent belief in an imminent moral advance of mankind had more in common with him.’²⁶ Schweitzer does not specify exactly which thinkers he has in mind here, but a commitment to the ethical betterment of humanity during the Enlightenment is extremely well documented,²⁷ and Schweitzer is right to draw our attention to moral readings of Jesus in the early history of the Quest. Our point of departure for such readings will be a familiar one: H. S. Reimarus. I have had cause to criticise Schweitzer in this study for overestimating the originality of Reimarus’s contribution to the historical study of Jesus, but he is also guilty of largely ignoring Reimarus’s conception of Jesus as a moralist, and, therefore, as a reference for liberal, ethical religion; after all, this reading has proved a much more enduring paradigm for the study of Jesus than Reimarus’s concurrent thesis that Jesus was a failed political claimant to a restored throne of Israel.

(iii) Reimarus on the Religious Significance of Jesus: What is He Good For?

It is rare for Reimarus to be associated with anything other than destructive results with respect to Jesus, but this is due to a rather one dimension reading of his work. Jonathan Israel notes how his ‘belittling depiction of Jesus in fact contrasted dramatically with the moral greatness and universalism Lessing himself, much like Spinoza, Herder, Semler, Eberhard, Goethe, and Bahrdt, attributed to the Christ figure.’²⁸ Compared to those figures, Reimarus does operate with a double edged sword, but it is important not to forget both sides of the blade. We have already seen that by the latter stages of his life, Reimarus had come to hold Christianity in very low regard: his posthumously published writings testify to his judgement that its central doctrines are contrary to reason and to

²⁶ Schweitzer, *Quest: FCE*, p. 483

²⁷ See throughout Gay’s *Modern Paganism*, pp. 178 – 196, and vol. 2, *The Science of Freedom*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970, chaps. 8 – 10; Cassirer, *Enlightenment*, chap. vi; Porter, *Creation*, chaps. 15, 18 – 19; and Israel’s *Radical*, chaps. 4, 15, *Contested*, chaps. 10, 21 – 23, 26, and *Democratic*, chaps. 4, 9, 18, 23, 34.

²⁸ Israel, *Democratic*, p. 319.

true (rational and natural) religion,²⁹ and, in the hands of some, socially pernicious.³⁰ But Jesus never bore the brunt of Reimarus's polemic, and for good reason: on his reading, what became orthodox Christianity had very little to do with anything the historical Jesus ever said or did. And although Reimarus tried to expose what he saw as the political-eschatological delusions under which Jesus was living, thereby driving a wedge between Jesus' vision of worldly deliverance and the Christian doctrine of spiritual salvation, Jesus' religious significance is altered (and reduced) rather than extinguished. So what is Jesus' abiding religious significance?

In his *Duldung der Deisten* (first *Fragment*) Reimarus advances an argument which has proven to be remarkably popular in modern European thought. Indeed, it has been present in one form or another from Rousseau's *Émile ou De l'éducation* (1762) through to *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979):³¹ the idea is the familiar one that if one traces Christianity back to Jesus, it begins promisingly (even gloriously), but quickly falls into disrepute and has yet to recover. According to Reimarus, 'Die reine Lehre Christi' (the pure teachings of Christ) consists of a 'vernünftige' (rational) and 'praktische' (practical) religion.³² This quickly degenerated, however, when the essential message was distorted by Jesus' followers, who subordinated his teachings to the 'jüdisches System von dem Messias' (Jewish system of the Messiah),³³ built on 'der Schriften Moses und der Propheten' (the writings of Moses and the prophets); as such, the original integrity of this *vernünftige* and *praktische* religion was lost. The Church fathers and popes later piled doctrine upon doctrine, making the religion increasingly difficult to assent to on rational grounds.³⁴

There seems to be a real tension here in Reimarus's position: as we saw in previous chapters, in the seventh *Fragment*, Jesus's own preaching was messianic and

²⁹ This is one of the central complaints running throughout the *Fragments*, but especially the third *Unmöglichkeit einer Offenbarung Von*, sixth *Über die Auferstehungsgeschichte*, and seventh *Von dem Zwecke*.

³⁰ This is perhaps most evident in the first and second *Fragments*: see *Duldung der Deisten*, where the focus is on the spillage of fanatical opposition to natural religion into civil unrest and violent persecution (pp. 119 – 130), and *Verschreitung der Vernunft*, the first section of which concerns the dangers of religious *Vorurteilen* (prejudice) of the kind fermented by the clergy and theologians (see pp. 175 – 176).

³¹ See bk 4 of Rousseau's *Émile or, On Education*, Barbara Foxley (trans.) London: Dent, 1911, and bk iv, sec. 8 of *Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique* (1762): *The Social Contract*, Maurice Cranston (trans.), Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1968. See *Monty Python's Life of Brian*, Terry Jones (dir.), HandMade Films, 1979. In the latter, Jesus is played by a straight actor (Kenneth Colley) who only appears briefly to deliver part of the Sermon on the Mount. The fanatical messianism surrounding the character of Brian is a persistent comic target, however.

³² Reimarus, *Duldung der Deisten*, p. 116.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 116 - 117.

³⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 117.

quite consistent with *der Schriften Moses und der Propheten*. But Reimarus does not just present different visions of Jesus in these two texts, which could then be explained either as the result of a development in Reimarus's thinking or a difference in his rhetorical aims. The situation is actually more complex. The image of Jesus developed in *Von dem Zwecke* preserves the Jesus of rational and practical religion that we find in *Duldung der Deisten*, but Reimarus presents this facet of his teaching running parallel to that part of Jesus' public career which was intent on establishing the Davidic kingdom. J. S. Semler criticised the seventh *Fragment* on this very point, and questioned the motives of the author in wanting to find some *additional* purpose to Jesus' teachings beyond the dissemination of the *vernünftige* and *praktische* religion he conceded was plainly evident in his teaching.³⁵ What does Reimarus say about the teachings of the historical Jesus which concern ethics or moral-theology?

(vi) Reimarus and the Pedagogical Bible

In the seventh *Fragment* Reimarus insists that Jesus' mission had little to do with inculcating theological beliefs, especially new ones;³⁶ rather, he stood for a demanding ethic which found expression in a life lived in accordance with love: love of God, love of humanity.³⁷ This position is developed as Reimarus considers the Gospels' depiction of Jesus as a man in sustained conflict with other first-century Jewish teachers, particularly the Pharisees:

Now when Jesus began to teach he undertook primarily to castigate and reform the trifling matters and the misuse committed by the Pharisees and to preach a better righteousness than theirs...From a reading of the New Testament it can be obvious to everyone that a great portion of Jesus' sayings is directed against the distorted sanctimoniousness of the scribes and Pharisees in outward ceremonies.³⁸

What did Jesus propose in place of the Pharisees' teachings? According to Reimarus,

[A]ll of Jesus' teaching was concerned with meekness, gentleness, mercy, peaceableness, reconciliation, generosity, the willingness to serve, uprightness,

³⁵ See Semler, *Beantwortung*, p. 15.

³⁶ Although Reimarus did acknowledge some faith commitment demanded by Jesus: to 'simply trust in him' (*Fragments* [7], p. 72) and in 'the joyful news of the true kingdom of the Messiah' (p. 73).

³⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 67 - 70.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

true love and faith in God, prayer, renunciation of all hatred, even of one's enemies, the avoidance of evil desires and vain speech, denial of the self.³⁹

There are many intellectual and cultural backdrops to help illuminate Reimarus's moral reading of Jesus, from the classical to the modern. One modern context is suggested by Jonathan Sheehan's *Enlightenment Bible*. Sheehan shows how certain intellectual and social trends in the Enlightenment helped the Bible to endure the corrosive effects of modernity by reimagining the Bible as a cultural document with a vitality which could survive its decline as a salvific text. One of the ways he proposes that this was achieved is through the pedagogical use of the Bible,⁴⁰ whereby scripture was employed for the purposes of moral education. This strategy was supported both by Christians and the devotees of natural religion,⁴¹ and emerged in an era when there was considerable dissatisfaction, particularly in English and German settings, with standard forms of religious instruction and the arcane language of traditional translations of the Bible.⁴² John Locke, influential in both these cultural contexts, insisted that the cultivation of virtue was central to the role of the pedagogue,⁴³ and feared that simply equipping children with the skills to read the Bible independently was insufficient for Christian learning and moral tutelage, and, indeed, was liable to cause confusion.⁴⁴ These educational priorities, in conjunction with a rise in skepticism surrounding the miraculous features of scripture, began to influence the way the Bible was read, translated and interpreted. But in a Christian context, a hierarchy quickly emerged in the value accorded to the books and persons of the Bible: the books of the New Testament were preferred, and the texts representing Jesus most of all.⁴⁵ In one of the many controversial translations produced by German scholars,⁴⁶ the classical philologist Christian Tobias Damm summed up the view of many heterodox Christian thinkers when he wrote, 'God does not demand that we believe what for us is inconceivable: he cares about the main

³⁹ Ibid, p.67.

⁴⁰ See Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, chap. 5.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 119.

⁴² See *ibid*, pp. 118 – 136.

⁴³ For a comprehensive view of his educational philosophy, see James L Axtel (ed.), *The Educational Writings of John Locke: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

⁴⁴ See Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, p. 128.

⁴⁵ See *ibid*, 136 – 144.

⁴⁶ Vernacular and stylistically liberal translations, characterised by modern idioms and paraphrase, were considered the most suitable vehicles for education in the essential moral lessons of the Bible. In German speaking states, this proved extremely controversial. Those committed to moral pedagogy, but not so committed to Christianity, rendered the scriptures in such a way that that Christ was decentred from the biblical canon: in his rightful place, the New Testament, but not alluded to throughout the Old Testament. The most notorious example of such a translation was Schmidt's Wertheimer Bible.

issue, our adherence to the simple and reasonable teachings of Jesus.¹⁴⁷ When he wrote this, Damm was actually reflecting on no less an event than the discovery of the empty tomb, but Damm's Jesus did not compel belief by miracles, he 'was endowed by God with insight, wisdom, and courage',⁴⁸ and his mission was the proclamation of a 'universal and simple religion, one useful to all mankind.'⁴⁹ In this pedagogical and utilitarian context, Jesus emerges from the Bible as the eternal teacher of moral ideals, and it was as a 'Lehrer der allgemeinen Menschenliebe' (teacher of universal love) that Reimarus had characterised Jesus in the first *Fragment*.⁵⁰ But this prioritising of Jesus as an *individual*, preaching a universal ethic of love, threatened the integrity of the pedagogical Bible as a single authoritative source, a threat seemingly welcomed by Reimarus's literary executor, G. E. Lessing.

One of the many distinctive features of Lessing's intellectual positioning, within the German Enlightenment, was his ability to maintain the widely shared commitment to preserving religion, venerating Jesus and promoting education as a transformative social good, while rejecting the centrality of the Bible in defence of these causes. As a renowned critic of *Bibliolatrie*—⁵¹a scriptural fetishism which seemed to him an unfortunate legacy of the Reformation—Lessing was happy to liberate religion from scripture, just as the early reformers had once liberated religion from papal control. In 1780 Lessing published *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*,⁵² which imagined the perfectibility of humanity via various educational monuments, including the Bible. But in this vision of humanity's education throughout history, we outgrow the authority of the biblical tradition, and are compelled to look elsewhere for moral and spiritual growth. According to Sheehan, the work he acquired from the Reimarus family 'provided an opportunity for Lessing to distinguish strictly between the word of God and the Bible...The *Fragments* showed, for Lessing, that Christianity's dependence on the Bible was perilous. Better to jettison the Bible, and salvage religion, than to lose both.'⁵³ So Jesus was swept up in this religious

⁴⁷ Christian Tobias Damm, quoted by Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, p. 137; from *Das Neuen Testament unsers Heern Jesu Christi Erster Theil, der die Evangelisten in sich enthält*, no named publisher, 1765, a3.

⁴⁸ Damm, quoted in *ibid*, p. 137; from *Betrachtungen über die Religion*, no named publisher, 1773, p. 78.

⁴⁹ Damm, quoted in *ibid*, p. 137; *Betrachtungen über die Religion*, p. 78.

⁵⁰ Reimarus, *Duldung der Deisten*, p. 116.

⁵¹ Lessing launched his fiercest attack on bibliolatry during his dispute with Goeze; some of his writings on this theme are collected in Isaac Bernard (ed.), *Cambridge Free Thought and Letters on Bibliolatry*, (ed.), H. H. Bernard (trans.), London: Trübner and Co., 1862.

⁵² See Lessing, *The Education of the Human Race* (4th edn), Fred W Robertson (trans.), London: Kegan Paul, 1896.

⁵³ Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, pp. 134 – 135.

salvage operation, taken up as an 'exemplary world historical...figure,'⁵⁴ a key point of reference for education in moral virtue and non-dogmatic religion, rather than someone to be understood within the limiting framework of biblical theology. It may be a coincidence, but it is interesting to note that Lessing actually appends his editorial postscript to the first *Fragment* just after Reimarus had warned of the dangers inherent in depriving children of a 'vernünftigen Erziehung' (rational education):⁵⁵ traditional dogmatic training from childhood, Reimarus argued, is liable to cultivate either 'Aberglauben' (superstition) in matters of piety,⁵⁶ or 'böartig' (malevolence) in moral character.⁵⁷ Given Reimarus's desire to link at least facets of Jesus' legacy with rational and practical religion, which he distinguished from both Jewish messianism and orthodox Christian theology, Lessing's later project does indeed seem to cohere with this feature of his work, even if Lessing was already thinking along the same lines before he read the *Apologie* and commenced his 'play with the theologians.'

Having just considered the way that Reimarus's biblical criticism in the *Fragments* could be understood as a contribution to the pedagogical Bible project, with its emphasis on 'ethical religion'—or as a rhetorical resource for its undoing through the exclusive promotion of Jesus as the universal moral saviour—it may seem odd to consider the more mainstream Lutheran background to Reimarus's work, less still Luther himself. But intellectual contexts for the incarnation of ideas are rarely straightforward. It is commonly acknowledged in the scholarly literature that Reimarus was born into the Lutheran Church, that he was educated in the traditions of that Church and remained an active participant until his death,⁵⁸ but this is often mentioned without significant comment, left hanging as if it were just an irony of his personal biography: another twist in the story of the *Fragmentenstreit*, but not a key feature of his intellectual development. Reimarus's outward observances in the Lutheran Church do seem to have been a charade in his later years; nevertheless, it would seem a dereliction of duty for the historian not to consider possible traces of a writer's formative religious tradition in their mature and most famous work.⁵⁹ It is to these traces that I now turn, again with the focus

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 138,

⁵⁵ Reimarus, *Duldung der Deisten*, p. 129.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 129.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 129.

⁵⁸ See Talbert, Introduction, p. 7; and Brown, *Jesus*, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Reimarus's journey from Lutheran principles of exegesis to theologically destructive historical criticism—from a *hermeneutica sacra* to a *hermeneutica profana*—has been discussed by a number of German scholars: see and Hans Hübner, 'Die 'orthodoxe' hermeneutica sacra des Hermann Samuel Reimarus', in Manfred

on the moral edification of Jesus. If nothing else, this comparative approach will serve as a heuristic device for teasing out some of the lesser known facets of Reimarus' thought.

2. Reimarus in (and out) of his Lutheran Context

(i) *The 'Poverty' of Judaism*

Although Reimarus's immediate religious context is that of Lutheran orthodoxy, which cannot be equated directly with the theology of Martin Luther, any student of New Testament scholarship reading Reimarus's treatment of the Pharisees, illustrated above, is unlikely to need too much promoting to hear echoes of Luther's critique of first-century Judaism, and the 'better righteousness' he associated with the Christian revelation. In such texts as *Vorrede zu der Epistel von St. Paulus an die Römer* (1522),⁶⁰ and *Kommentar zum Galaterbrief* (1535),⁶¹ Luther interprets Paul as calling for the overthrow of Jewish works-righteousness and its replacement with a higher form of righteousness, namely faith in Christ. On Reimarus's account, however, it is Jesus who actually delivers the theological critique of Christianity's parent faith, and it is Jesus who valorises faith over works of the law. Reimarus certainly shared with Luther the now discredited view of Pharisaic Judaism as a movement driven to distraction by an obsessive commitment to ostentatious legal display, over against purity of heart, sincerity of faith and moral conduct. Indeed, Reimarus's treatment of the Pharisees in the seventh *Fragment* begins in combative fashion, sustains a high octane antipathy in subsequent passages, before climaxing in a crescendo of accusation:

He [Jesus] squeezes open the festering sores of the Pharisees: they made their phylacteries and fringes splendidly wide and large, uttered long prayers, carefully avoided touching unclean things, vigorously washed face and hands, even paid tithes on mint and dill, and whitewashed the graces of the prophets. Since, however, they were full of spiritual pride, they were ambitious for titles and ranks, foreclosed widow's mortgages, swore falsely and heedlessly, were given to theft and gluttony, and had no scruples against killing the prophets and denying with vain pretence the love owed their parents.⁶²

Beetz and Giuseppe Cacciatore (eds.), *Die Hermeneutik im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, Cologne, 2000, pp. 99-111; and throughout Groetsh, *Polyhistory to Subversion*.

⁶⁰ See Martin Luther, *Preface to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Andrew Thornton (trans.), Andrew Thornton (trans.), *Saint Anselm College Humanities Program* (on-line), 1983, accessed 28 Jul. 2012: http://www.ccel.org/l/luther/romans/pref_romans.html

⁶¹ See Luther, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, Theodore Graebner (trans.), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1949.

⁶² See Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), pp. 68 – 69.

It would be unfair to draw too close a parallel between Reimarus and Luther's writing on Judaism, since the former shows a greater appreciation of the diversity of Judaism in the first century, and shows rather greater tolerance for the legal status of Jews in Christian nations (Reimarus's thoughts on toleration will be considered in Chapter Nine). In 1543 Luther published the notoriously anti-Jewish documents *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* and *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi*,⁶³ which, at best, have hampered ecumenical efforts for nearly half a millennium,⁶⁴ and at worst have been implicated in genocide.⁶⁵ It has been pointed out to me by Luther specialists that the aforementioned texts have a complicated publishing history, falling into relative obscurity after Luther's death and only reemerging in any significant numbers in the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ But even if Reimarus did not possess those particular works, Luther's conception of first-century Judaism is perfectly clear in some of his most influential and widely read works,⁶⁷ even if the treatment is less rhetorically venomous. As one would expect of someone in his professional and religious setting, Reimarus possessed a substantial cachet of Luther's works,⁶⁸ and he was still personally buying Luther's writings for his own collection well into his fourth decade (1731).⁶⁹ Such trenchant passages on the Pharisees as that quoted above are undoubtedly reminiscent of Luther's negative appreciation of first-century Judaism, and given the influence of Luther's rhetoric on the style and content of German preaching and academic theology, it seems reasonable to suppose that Reimarus was effected by Luther's conception of the Jews, if only through the potent cultural residue which marked the thinking of most biblical scholars in that context.

⁶³ See Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, in Franklin Sherman (ed.), *Luther's Works* (vol. 47 of 55): *The Christian in Society IV*, pp. 123 – 306; the damning title of this work does not even begin to capture the scope of Luther's condemnation. The only English translation I have been able to find of *On the Unknowable Name and the Generations of Christ* is included in the Appendixes (A) to Gerhard Falk, *The Jew in Christian Theology: Martin Luther's Anti-Jewish Vom Schem Hamphoras*, Jefferson, N.C. / London: McFarland, 1992.

⁶⁴ 46. See Krister Stendahl, 'Judaism and Christianity: A Plea for a New Relationship', *Cross Currents*, 17, 1967, pp. 445 - 458; and John T Pawlikowski, 'Martin Luther and Judaism: Paths Towards Theological Reconciliation', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 43, no. 4, Dec 1975, pp. 681 – 693.

⁶⁵ A cultural line of descent from Martin Luther to the Third Reich's reign of terror over the Jews, culminating in the Holocaust, is a common place in the literature: see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided*, New York: Penguin Books, 2004, pp. 666 – 667; and Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (new edn), London: HarperCollins, 1989, pp. 19 – 20.

⁶⁶ I owe this insight to Dr Charlotte Methuen, University of Glasgow.

⁶⁷ See, just for instance, for aforementioned *Vorrede* to Romans and his Commentary on Galatians.

⁶⁸ See Schetelig (ed.), *Auktionskatalog* (vol.1), pp. 2, 4, 25 – 26, 50, 59 – 60, 83; and vol. 2, pp. 157, 158. These works include a nine volume edition of Luther's German writings (see vol. 1, pp. 127).

⁶⁹ In April 1731 Reimarus notes the purchase of two volumes of Luther's writings, for which he paid 2 Marks. I am grateful to Professor Paul Spalding, of Illinois College, for this data (personal correspondence, 19 May 2012). Professor Spalding, along with his wife and colleague Almut Spalding, are editing fifty years of the Reimarus family's accounts, kept by H. S. Reimarus himself, and later by his daughter, Elise: *The Household Accounts of the Reimarus Family of Hamburg, 1728-1780* (2 vols.), Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.

Krister Stendahl (1921 – 2008), the renowned ecumenical theologian, said of the Lutheran conception: ‘This whole system of thinking, with its image of the Pharisees and of the political messianism of the Jews, treats Jewish piety as the black background which makes Christian piety the more shining.’⁷⁰ This tendency only partially carries over to Reimarus, where Jesus himself is located within the same political messianism that Luther judged so harshly, and where it is not Christian piety as such which shines more brightly when contrasted with a grim vision of Judaism; rather, it is Jesus’ personal piety that shines brightly when contrasted with an unedifying picture of the Pharisee, and a piety which shines brightly *in spite* of his political messianism. More broadly on this question of how these writers related to the Jewish faith, Reimarus’s intellectual formation had dimensions which were wholly lacking in the experience of Luther in sixteenth-century Wittenberg. Reimarus’s attitudes to Jews and Judaism were partly shaped by his personal interactions with the Jewish community in Hamburg, the largest of its kind in a German city-state,⁷¹ as well as a deep reading of rabbinic literature, which could conceivably have furnished some of his doubts about the theological claims of Christianity.⁷²

(ii) *Faith and Love in the Economy of Salvation*

There are more constructive theological parallels between these two German scholars and polemicists. Luther and Reimarus agree, for instance, about the centrality of faith and love in the religious life: for Luther, this is faith in Christ crucified, died and risen; for Reimarus, this is faith in God as providential creator. The ‘reduction’ of faith in the thinking of Reimarus to the ability to affirm distinct theological propositions—rather than an experiential phenomenon intimately connected to the believers relationship of dependence on Christ—could indeed be explained as a consequence of the deism he encountered on his travels and in his reading, but it could also be a legacy of the rationalising tendency within Lutheranism in the eighteenth century.⁷³ The passage from rationalistic Lutheran orthodoxy to purely natural religion need not be due to the external

⁷⁰ Stendahl, ‘Judaism and Christianity’, p. 450.

⁷¹ Reimarus apparently makes some quite pointed references to Jews he had dealings with when recording his business affairs in the household accounts. Their publication by Paul and Almut Spalding are sure to enrich our understanding of a man that the latter has already associated with ‘anti-Semitic polemic against biblical and post biblical Jews’ (*Elise Reimarus*, p. 260). On the other hand, there is evidence of cordial and charitable dealings with members of the Jewish community of Hamburg (p. 261 – 262), while financial records suggest that Reimarus may have acted as an expert witness of behalf of Rabbi Jacob de Abraham Basan in 1760 (again, I thank Paul Spalding for this data).

⁷² See Klein, *Das theologische Werk*, p. 12.

⁷³ There were some fears among eighteenth-century German thinkers, especially among Pietistic writers, about the potential for impiety in this rationalistic harmony between faith and reason (see Israel, *Democratic*, pp. 172 – 187).

influence of ‘free thinkers’. Reimarus does seem to have been impressed by the writings of some such figures, but it is at least conceivable to imagine deism emerging in a Protestant thinker of the eighteenth century who simply finds that the number of theological propositions they are able to affirm diminishes the longer they peruse their historically orientated biblical enquiries. Whatever the source of Reimarus’s deistic rationalism, the different concepts of faith in Luther and Reimarus, impacts on their different concepts of love.

For Luther, the Christian ‘lives in Christ through faith, in the neighbour through love’,⁷⁴ and he follows Paul in seeing faith in Christ, and receptivity to his Spirit, as the occasion for that grace which makes it possible to act in accordance with the love command in spite of our sinful nature:⁷⁵ ‘Just have faith and every work will flow from you naturally.’⁷⁶ Because faith is an intellectual commitment for Reimarus rather than an experiential relationship with Christ, the connection between faith and works of love is not absolute. On the other hand, when Reimarus considers Matthew 7:15–23, and Jesus’ warning about false prophets, he makes it clear that he thinks that the key test of whether someone who is truly a man or woman of God is their good works. As with Luther, then, Reimarus considers good works, works of love, to be necessary if not sufficient *signs* that a person has faith. As we will see in Chapter Nine, Reimarus considers the absence of faith in God to be morally detrimental to individuals and societies; nevertheless, faith and love are not co-dependent in Reimarus: the atheist is in intellectual error and is always liable to fall into depravity,⁷⁷ but, in principle, he or she may live righteously through the exercise of natural (God given) reason and the good fortune to be born into a moral culture with sound habits: virtue, *in spite* of atheism.⁷⁸ High moral righteousness without faith in Christ crucified, died at risen, would be rather less likely for Luther, and from the point of view of salvation, it would be unthinkable.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ From Luther’s 1520 *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*: *The Freedom of a Christian*, Mark Tranvik (ed. & trans.), Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008, p. 88.

⁷⁵ I am thinking here especially of Galatians 5, where the same ‘spirit’ who guides the person to faith in Christ also guides the person to love, goodness, self-control and other virtues (5:22–23).

⁷⁶ Luther, quoted by Bernd Wannewetsch, ‘Luther’s Moral Theology’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Luther*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 120 – 135: 128.

⁷⁷ These are two of the themes running throughout Reimarus’s treatise on *Natural Religion*.

⁷⁸ This was how Reimarus accounted for the ‘irreproachable’ life of Spinoza, who Reimarus took to be an ‘atheist’ (ibid, p.446).

⁷⁹ I say an irreproachable moral life would be *improbable* rather than *impossible* because, for Luther, the material kingdom of law, and of civil society, should function to ensure peaceful and just relations between persons in their external behaviours, regardless of their relationship to the gospel. Much of Luther’s thought on this is contained in *Von Weltlicher Obrigkeit* (1523): *On Secular Authority*, in Harro Höpfl (ed. & trans.), *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 1 – 43.

(iii) Law in the Economy of Salvation

Innumerable quills, pens and keyboards have been put to work on the question of righteousness or justification in Luther's theology, such is the significance accorded to this aspect of the great reformer's thinking. Reflecting on his theological journey, Luther honed in on a phrase from Romans 1:17, which laid bare the logic of salvation and soothed his religious anguish: 'Ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται' (the just man lives by faith).⁸⁰ These words of Paul, themselves a reference to Jewish scripture,⁸¹ transformed the latter's vision of God from one who judges persons according to their merit—whether by way of moral or penitential action—to a God who enacted a passive justice which would make sinners righteous in the eyes of God in so far as those sinners possessed faith in Christ. Any effort to win God's favour through works of the law—even the laws of sacred scripture—is futile. To explain how Luther and Reimarus differ on the question of law, we can draw from contemporary scholarship on first-century Judaism.

Whatever flaws may remain in this scholarship, it is generally agreed that historians have made significant advances in taking ancient Judaism on its own terms, rather than treating it as the religious background to Christian supersession. In one highly regarded example of such scholarship, we find the following two-fold typology of legal duties in first-century Palestinian Judaism:⁸² 1) duties owed to the God of Israel, such as worship of him and him alone;⁸³ and 2) duties owed to persons in light of humanity's relationship with this God, such as the negative duties not to kill or steal, and the positive duty to honour one's parents.⁸⁴ But Judaism was never so parochial as to imagine that the God of Israel's commands were irrelevant to outsiders; on the contrary, their God was the God of all creation, and his commands had more general application: Jews considered blasphemy and murder to be sins, offensive to God, regardless of the ethnic or religious group who

⁸⁰ See the *Vorrede* to Luther's Latin writing (1545): 'Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings', in *Luther's Works* (vol. 34), Helmut J. T. Lehmann and Lewis S Spitz (eds.), Spitz (trans.), 1960, pp. 327–338.

⁸¹ Another point that distinguishes Reimarus from Luther is the former's more negative estimation of the theological value of the Old Testament: Luther's admiration of the Hebrew Bible is plain throughout his writings, whereas Reimarus finds the Old Testament a repository of vice and superstition, with just the occasional nugget of theological gold worthy of God (such as the love command in Leviticus 19: 19) which Reimarus sees as central in the teaching of Jesus (see *Fragments* [7], pp. 71 – 72). Reimarus could nevertheless claim that Luther's theological attachment to the Old Testament is inextricably associated with his misguided (from Reimarus's point of view) hermeneutic whereby the Hebrew scriptures are appreciated purely for their presumed prophetic value as God's planned revelation in Christ.

⁸² See Sanders, *Judaism: Practise and Belief, 63BCE - 66CE*, London: SCM Press, 1992, pp. 192 – 195. Sanders makes a further distinction between 'involuntary' and 'intentional' violations of the law (p. 192).

⁸³ Sanders follows the argument of Philo who proposed two tables of five commandments (see *ibid*, pp. 193 – 194); the commandants relating to God are understood in terms of *εὐσέβεια* (piety).

⁸⁴ See *ibid*, pp. 193 - 194: Philo's second table of commandments concern *δικαιοσύνη* (justice).

committed such acts. On the other hand, the unique relationship between God and the Jewish people meant that there may be differences in the obligations owed to God by different groups. Recognition of such difference opened the way for a third category of law to be added: 3) duties owed to God, or human persons, which are binding on Jews alone, such as circumcision or certain purity laws.⁸⁵ The legitimacy of this last category, which allows for a distinction between universally binding duties and duties particular to Jews was controversial: the nature and extent of the duties that humanity owes to God is one of the key themes in the Pauline letters;⁸⁶ indeed, one could make a case that Paul implicitly adopts, if not invents, this third category of law in order to serve the interests of his mission to the gentiles, rejecting those ‘aspects of the law...which separated Jew from Gentile in the People of God’.⁸⁷ But however one might want to conceptualise or subdivide the law, Luther rejected its saving potential *en bloc*: intrinsically flawed humanity, however morally laudable the conduct of certain individuals may be, requires the grace of God if it is ever to share in his infinite perfection, and that gift is bestowed only on those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

According to Israel, ‘the fiercely anti-Jewish Reimarus’ differs from earlier radical critics of the Bible,⁸⁸ including Spinoza, in not ‘seeking to rescue shreds of moral worth from Scripture.’⁸⁹ We have already seen that in the case of Jesus, that is not true. What about the rest of the Bible? For all Reimarus’s denunciation of Jewish messianism and his trenchant skepticism about the godliness of Moses and many other prophets, parts of the Jewish law *do* offer salvation: at least some of those legal duties to God which might be considered binding on all people, not least glorification of the one true God as creator and sustainer of the universe; and those legal duties governing interpersonal relationships which fall within the remit of the love command. Reimarus cites Jesus in this context, since he ‘declared all outward ceremonies to be little compared with the great commandments of love of God and one’s neighbour, without which all other commandments are useless’.⁹⁰ Reimarus did not think that Jesus intended to abolish any part of what might be called (however imperfectly) specifically Jewish laws, but, in so far as Jesus emphasised those aspects of the law described above, then he can be seen to be

⁸⁵ These are the most obvious ones, but Sanders reminds us that the Sabbath was also a Jewish requirement that Paul did not see as binding on converts (see *Paul: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 103).

⁸⁶ Especially, but not exclusively, in Romans and Galatians.

⁸⁷ Sanders, *Paul*, p. 106.

⁸⁸ Israel, *Democratic*, p. 203.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 203.

⁹⁰ Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), p. 62.

a laudable religious figure. The fact that Jesus continued to practise theologically superfluous, culturally conditioned legal practises is of little relevance now, so long as this does not blind the reader of his words to the fundamentals of true religion: love of God and neighbour. This was the alleged offence of the Pharisees, who prescribed 'no other duties than those involving external ceremonies of the law. Indeed, they so refined and increased the latter by their additions that genuine godliness and virtue were almost obscured'.⁹¹ As we saw in previous chapters, Reimarus did not attribute any innovative ideas to Jesus; rather, Jesus was the greatest teacher of those salvific 'shreds of moral worth' which he recognised in the Old Testament.

If Reimarus's propositional concept of *Glauben* (faith) is consistent with the rationalist tradition of eighteenth-century Lutheran orthodoxy, his concern with *praktische* religion, and an active *Glauben* characterised by works of *lieben* (love) is more reflective of the Pietism which was the other dominant religious influence in the German context in which Reimarus was educated.⁹² As we saw in the previous chapter, however, a view of Jesus as a teacher of certain facets of the Jewish law which deal with a person's moral conduct and spiritual orientation was developed independently by Thomas Chubb in a different religious context, suggesting (at least) a convergence in the interpretative emphases by certain European writers, and one which has proved remarkable popular with writers ever since.⁹³ But it would be a mistake to exaggerated the continuity between the readings of Reimarus and Chubb and those of later writers who have chosen to emphasise what we would now regard as the ethical dimension in the Gospels stories about Jesus, over against, say, the messianic or apocalyptic dimensions. For many figures of the Enlightenment, ethics was not regarded as an independent discipline of human

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 62.

⁹² Reimarus's academic life coincided with the very public battle for the Lutheran soul of the German speaking people, between orthodox Protestants with their Wolffian and Leibnizian sensibility, and the Pietist tendency represented by such philosophers as Franz Budde Joachim Lange. Both traditions can actually be traced back to the progressive rationalism of Christian Thomasius (1655–1728): see Brigitte Sassen, '18th Century German Philosophy Prior to Kant', in *SEP*, Fall 2011, accessed 17 May 2012: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/18thGerman-preKant/>

⁹³ While Allen overstates her case when she argues that in historical Jesus studies from Reimarus to the Jesus Seminar, 'Jesus is almost always a version of Chubb's: a non-supernatural ethical teacher', she latches onto an undeniable trend. It is true that there are the minimalist historical reconstructions of the Jesus Seminar and some of its most prominent individual members (Crossan and Funk stand out), but this retelling of Christian origins, as the betrayal of the moral legacy of Jesus of Nazareth, has much wider cultural purchase. I have already mentioned the *Life of Brian*; more recently one could cite Philip Pullman's *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2010), where the author employs a plot device which would have been at home in the imaginative lives of Jesus of the nineteenth-century: Jesus is the worldly wise teacher of moral truths, and Christ is his sickly scheming twin brother who collaborates with a malevolent 'stranger' (possibly Paul) to produce a distorted account of his brother's life.

thought and practise,⁹⁴ ethics was intimately connected to theological considerations. Indeed, for many writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ethics was increasingly the queen of theological disciplines, even if theology was no longer the queen of the sciences.⁹⁵ In the next chapter, we will explore how this came about and what impact it had on biblical hermeneutics. But before we embark on that longer history, two crucial features of this Enlightenment commitment to moral theology are manifest in the work of Reimarus which I would like to highlight, so that we can fully devote ourselves to the historical backdrop to these preoccupations.

3. Reimarus and Moral Theology

(i) *The Sources of Virtue*

Reimarus was raised in a Christian setting where moral and religious righteousness were ostensibly woven together, but, like many before and since, he was troubled by conflicts arising between his own moral intuitions and features of his received religious tradition, where the Bible was central. In a passage reminiscent of the moral critiques of Bayle, Reimarus writes,

Need I say much about the persons who are commended in the Biblical stories as so just and holy? I was of course accustomed at school to read—or to listen to—all their deeds one after the other, and my mind was so clouded by the prejudice of respect for them...But the more I was prompted to reflect, the more the actions of individual persons, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David seemed to diverge from the rules of virtue, of natural and international law; and I would without question have declared their actions to be shameful transactions, deceitful, cunning, malicious and

⁹⁴ In one of the most important works of moral philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century, MacIntyre describes the rise of an ill-fated modern phenomena he calls 'the Enlightenment project', which begins in the eighteenth century as an attempt to find a new intellectual foundation for morality, based on reason alone, independent of theological and cultural tradition (see *After Virtue*, 2nd edn., London: Duckworth, 1985, pp. especially chaps. 4 – 6). MacIntyre captures a real and important trend in eighteenth century thought, the most compelling examples of which are the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and the de-ontological ethics of Immanuel Kant: the intellectual legacies of these two theorists are, indeed, enormous. But '*the Enlightenment project*' (my emphasis) might be better termed '*an Enlightenment project*', since nearly all historians of the period today recognise considerable diversity, and this was certainly not a 'project' that all philosophers of the Enlightenment would recognise as a desirable goal.

⁹⁵ Theology's status as a science, in the sense of discipline which studies something (God) which can be thought of as a legitimate object of knowledge met its most formidable foe in Kant, but, as we will see below, many modern philosophers prior to Kant were much more confident of our ability to know that God exists, and to know his attributes (including goodness). Although Kant jettisons rational arguments for the existence of God, he maintained that a good God is a legitimate object of *faith* and Jesus the ideal moral exemplar for those committed to the moral enterprise: an enterprise so demanding, and so full of disappointment, that reason alone may not be sufficient for success; this argument is developed in *Critique of Practical Reason*; and *Religion Within the Boundaries*.

cruel, if the persons had not been declared in the Bible to be just and pious men, men after the heart and will of God...⁹⁶

Reimarus clearly wrestled with the culturally received assumption that these biblical heroes were morally admirable persons, but, after due reflection, he came to realise that the rationale for placing these persons on a moral pedestal was that they feature prominently in the reputed story of God and his relationship to humanity, rather than because of their intrinsic, rationally discernable qualities. This moral vindication by biblical association could not be sustained in his mature thought, at least not if God and religious commitment were to retain their intellectual and moral respectability. Like many figures of his time, Reimarus came to reject the reputed ethical righteousness of biblical figures and stories when they offended his own moral sense. This is an implicit, pre-Kantian, rejection of the heteronomy which was to become perhaps the greatest intellectual and moral vice which those committed to *Aufklärung* were striving to overcome. As an approach to the historical texts of the Bible, however, it did not win many supporters. In correspondence between Lessing and the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, the latter was critical of the officially anonymous author for making anachronistic moral judgements of biblical figures.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, for Reimarus it seems that the sense of moral alienation he felt with respect to biblical figures may have been a creative one, inspiring his own quest for a thoroughly historical understanding: once he recognised that the 'speeches and actions' of some biblical figures was irreconcilable with his own idea of 'just and pious men, men after the heart and will of God,' then such persons were no longer immune from the historical-critical understanding increasing applied by scholars to all texts and persons of the past. They should not be viewed as part of a divine disclosure which automatically raises them above the moral status of others; rather, they should be seen as persons shaped by the historical conditions of their time and place, embodying the values indicative of those conditions—values which may or may not be worthy of God.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Reimarus did not restrict his historical-critical project—complete with disproving moral commentary—to figures of the Old

⁹⁶ Reimarus, quoted in Riches, 'Lessing's Change of Mind', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, XXIX(1), 1978, pp. 121-136: 132; from Reimarus's *Vorbericht* (preview) to the *Apologie*, in which he reflects on the intellectual journey which led him away from the orthodox faith (see vol. 1, pp. 41 – 64: 50 – 51).

⁹⁷ For a discussion of the Lessing – Mendelssohn exchange, see Riches, 'Lessing's Change ', p. 132.

Testament.⁹⁸ This stance on the ethical content of the Bible set the stage for Reimarus's—or, more accurately, Lessing's—confrontation with mainstream Protestant Christianity. For most Protestants of Reimarus' time—and many in own time, for that matter—the only proper idea of God is a biblical one, and, in that tradition, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and the disciples *are* agents of divine disclosure. For many of those same Christians, the Bible *is* the principal source of moral knowledge and guide to a virtuous life, so the idea that it could be judged by moral rules and found wanting is problematic. It would have been extremely problematic for Luther (for reasons we will explore in the following chapter), and this is one of the many dramatic differences between the reformer and Reimarus. On the other hand, the Protestant tradition was familiar with theologians and exegetes prioritising particular texts which provide a guiding interpretive lens for the rest of the Bible: Luther prioritised Paul's teaching on justification by faith and used it as the theological lens through which to view the whole canon, which led to some notoriously unflattering judgements of other biblical texts, not least the Letter of James, that 'epistle of straw.'⁹⁹ As we have seen, Reimarus held the ethical content of Jesus' mission in very high regard, and his moral theology functions in a similar way for Reimarus as Paul's Christology did for Luther. Both Luther and Reimarus identified certain biblical texts as particularly significant from the point of view of theological hermeneutics—for Luther they included Roman, Galatians and Habakkuk 2.4; for Reimarus, they included various parts of the Gospels, especially the Sermon on the Mount, and Leviticus 19:18—and both saw those texts as posing a radical theological challenge to some powerful religious interests. Moreover, just as Luther understood his 'reformation discovery' about the justice of God along the lines of a *rediscovery*—with Paul's doctrine about Christ illuminating a truth only dimly realised in the Old Testament—Reimarus was also insistent that his theological subject, Jesus, did not teach any new doctrines:

These are not great mysteries or tenets of the faith that he explains, proves, and preaches; they are nothing other than moral teachings and duties intended to improve man inwardly and with all his heart, whereby Jesus takes for granted a general knowledge of man's soul, of God and his perfections...To the same extent that he wished to see the law fulfilled and not done away with in respect to his own person, he

⁹⁸ On the contrary, in his treatment of the disciples response to the death and alleged Resurrection of Jesus, Reimarus went beyond the frank admission that some aspects of the Bible are morally problematic: his conspiracy laden reconstruction leads him to attribute dark and wholly self-interested intentions to New Testament figures.

⁹⁹ Luther, *Vorrede* to the New Testament (1522): 'Preface', in John Dillenberger (ed.), *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, New York: Anchor, 1991, pp. 14 – 19: 19.

shows others how the whole law and the prophets hang on these two commandments [Matt. 23: 27-40; Mark 12: 29-31; Luke 10:17]: that one love God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself, and that consequently the repentance and improvement of man is contained in this essence of the whole Old Testament.¹⁰⁰

So on this reading by Reimarus, Jesus illuminated and crystallised that doctrinal 'essence' of the Hebrew Bible. We have already seen that Reimarus considered the Old Testament to be a morally compromised document, but he clearly recognised an ethical core that might reasonably be thought of as according with the divine will. The key point to note here, however, is that what Reimarus takes features of the Bible to *accord* with the will of God, to be *worthy of* the will of God, but does *not* argue that it *is* the revealed will of God in the form of a special communication between God and humanity. How does one acquire this knowledge of God's will if not through revelation? There is a clue in the passage quoted above: Jesus' moral teachings, intended as they are to 'improve man', require little more than 'general knowledge of man's soul, of God and his perfections.' Note that Reimarus does not see Jesus as trying to persuade his audience simply by proof-texting. In Reimarus's account, Jesus is thought of as propounding, in some sense, a natural theological discourse, directing his followers to the will of God in such a way that the precepts he advocates would be intelligible to anyone with an adequate idea of the deity,¹⁰¹ regardless of their acquaintance with special revelations. This conforms to and develops the picture of Jesus as the teacher of *vernünftige* religion set out in *Duldung der Deisten*. By the time he was writing the *Apologie*, Reimarus had come to believe that natural religion was the only rational source of theological truth, and, in so far as Jesus was to remain a significant point of reference in modern religion, he must be located within the context of that natural theological discourse. It was in that very context that Chubb had already placed Jesus when he argued that persons are brought into Christ's kingdom by 'argument and persuasion', argument which impacts on the 'consciences' of men who then 'voluntarily' give their obedience to him.¹⁰² The priority that Chubb and Reimarus gave to natural theological discourse is entirely consistent with that rationalistic instance that all warranted belief and policies for action, including those pertaining to

¹⁰⁰ Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), pp. 69 - 70.

¹⁰¹ Such theological confidence was common currency in the eighteenth century, not least among those influenced by the philosophy of Locke, Leibniz and Wolff (Chapter Two). For his own defence of God against the materialists, see Reimarus, *Natural Religion*, especially Dissertations I, II and VII on God; and IX on the soul. Reimarus's method in philosophical theology is probably best characterised as one of abduction: inference to the best explanation.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 13.

God and salvation, must be discernible to all persons, at all times, and in all places.¹⁰³ But how, using natural reason alone, do we know what constitutes God's will in the moral domain? Reimarus's answer to this question can be teased out of the *Apologie*, but he gave his fullest account in the earlier *Die vornehmsten Wahrheiten der natürlichen Religion*.¹⁰⁴

Reimarus's vision of the good emerges in the course of detailed reflection on human and animal natures, compared and contrasted, from which a divinely ordained pattern of flourishing is proposed. Different patterns are identified as appropriate to the different capacities of each species: '[F]or the great Creator has made both men and brutes capable of arriving at a certain degree of perfection, delight and happiness.'¹⁰⁵ A reader today may be struck by the confidence in teleological forms of explanation which underscored Reimarus's reflections on, and inferences, from the natural world: such confidence would, of course, be shattered just over a century later by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection.¹⁰⁶ But Reimarus's assumptions were not untypical of his time, and the purpose driven constitution of the physical world is fundamental to his view of nature:

It is certainly manifest to any man that does not affect an obstinate subtlety, that an eye was made for seeing, the ear for hearing, the mouth for eating, etc, and that, in general, every particular disposition in the world, from the greatest to the smallest, exhibits an evident wisdom and design; so that he must be quite ignorant of nature, who goes about to persuade himself and others, that such a correspondence to the welfare of animate Beings is derived from chance and necessity.¹⁰⁷

This teleological conception of the natural world, however outmoded it may appear now,¹⁰⁸ was important for Reimarus's conception of a rational, moral order, ingrained into the very fabric of humanity:

¹⁰³ This is the view set out in the *Unmöglichkeit einer Offenbarung*.

¹⁰⁴ See Reimarus, *Natural Religion*, especially Dissertations IV - VII.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 326.

¹⁰⁶ See Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, Jim Endersby (ed.), Cambridge / New Yorks: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Darwin's seminal text was first published in 1859; Reimarus's study of *natürlichen Religion*, in 1754.

¹⁰⁷ Reimarus, *Natural Religion*, pp. 157 – 158. Of course, we now know that the characteristics of animate beings are due to the interplay of both chance (mutation) and necessity (the laws of nature).

¹⁰⁸ This is not to say that evolutionary theory has rendered natural law conceptions of ethics obsolete, but it has certainly necessitated revisions to the tradition: see Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law*, Grand Rapids, Mich: Erdmans, 2005.

[I]n order to act like men, we must not mould our understanding and will only according to the perfection of others, but chiefly after the Divine pattern, and the laws of design which God has exhibited in the nature of things; by which means we attain a real perfection, and have a well grounded reason to rejoice in, and be delighted with our own perfections.¹⁰⁹

Reimarus makes no reference to the most important teleological thinker in the Christian tradition, Thomas Aquinas, but he does refer to the latter's guiding philosophical light from antiquity. When confronting the claims of atomistic materialism, ancient and modern, which is his main target in *Wahrheiten der natürlichen Religion*, Reimarus informs his reader that, 'Aristotle, long since, considered the world as a great city founded and governed by God; and it is sufficiently evident that the luminous and opaque globes which compose the universe were so formed and disposed, as to the proper habitation of animate Beings.'¹¹⁰ Over a century since the attack on final causes in natural philosophy by thinkers such as René Descartes and Benedict Spinoza, providential teleology still infused the worldview of Enlightenment thinkers, whether Christian or not, given new impetus by the physico-theology associated with Isaacs Newton and his acolytes.¹¹¹

Reimarus's concept of natural law is theological, informed by a teleological perspective. As with some other natural law theorists, there is no absolute distinction in Reimarus's account between prudential (or self interested) conduct and moral conduct, and no absolute distinction between the cultivation of intellectual and moral virtues of the kind associated with some modern moral philosophies:¹¹² they are all bound up in an integrated system of flourishing whereby each human being realises the potential of their own nature, guided by reason, as originally envisaged by the creator.¹¹³ Jesus, a great moralist on Reimarus's reckoning, had an intuitive grasp of this created nature, and, although Reimarus listed 'self-denial' as one of the values Jesus advocated in this life, if his reading of Jesus is correct, then the moral mission of this first-century Galilean rabbi had an especially prudential *telos* in the form of our eternal happiness.

¹⁰⁹ Reimarus, *Natural Religion*, p. 345.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 172. The specific text he actually refers to is *De Mundo*, however, which most scholars doubt was actually written by Aristotle himself. Nevertheless, Reimarus possessed Aristotle's *Opera Omnia* (see Schetelig [ed.], *Auktionskatalog*, vol. 1). p. 149)

¹¹¹ This is emphasised in Israel, *Democratic*, pp. 200 – 206.

¹¹² See Reimarus, *Natural Religion*, Dissertation VII.

¹¹³ There is no proto-Kantian attempt to carve out a completely autonomous realm of moral judgement here: the religious life, the sensuous life, the prudential and the virtuous are interwoven features of the good life (see *ibid*, Dissertation VII).

(ii) The Rewards of Virtue

The principle that 'virtue is its own reward' has a long and distinguished history in moral philosophy,¹¹⁴ and it is one very much at home in modern schools of thought that define themselves against perennially popular religious conceptions. On this modern view, the notion of reward or punishment by a judgemental God in the afterlife is seen as at best crudely prudential;¹¹⁵ at worst, part of an oppressive ideology engaged in the wilful exploitation of humanity's most childlike impulses, such as the desire to be protected by an authoritarian father figure, or a fear of the unknown.¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, a commitment to personal salvation, secured through a life of virtue, was *de rigueur* amongst many major figures of the Enlightenment, including those openly hostile to the claims of revealed religion generally and Christianity in particular.¹¹⁷ Reimarus was one such figure.

We have already seen that Jesus taught moral doctrines which Reimarus thought consistent with 'the Divine pattern' of creation, but, for Reimarus, that was not his only significant contribution in the history of religion. In the seventh *Fragment* Reimarus quotes with approval the judgement of St Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430) that, '*jam Christi*

¹¹⁴ The idea goes back at least as far as classical Greece: it was implicit in the thought of Plato and Aristotle, where moral goodness is bound up with that complex picture of happiness or wellbeing they called *εὐδαιμονία*. The idea seems more challenging in the modern period, when moral philosophers have tended to consider morality in terms of the rightness or wrongness of actions, regardless of the place of such actions in 'the good life' overall, and where acts of greatest virtue are often associated with acts which are altruistic; as such, the rewards of virtue tend to be reduced to a quiet and dignified sense of satisfaction with our own altruism. In his *Groundwork*, Kant, the modern master of moral theory, offers this rather austere account of the rewards of virtue, which he sets against the ethics of 'the *eudaemonist*', arguing that, 'When a thoughtful human being has overcome incentives to vice and is aware of having done his often bitter duty, he finds himself in a state which could well be called happiness, a state of contentment and peace of soul in which virtue is its own reward... But since he can expect this reward of virtue only from consciousness of having done his duty, it is clear that the latter must come first' (p. 142).

¹¹⁵ This is a charge sometimes levelled at the religious thought of Blaise Pascal, prompted by a rather one dimensional reading of his famous 'wager'; Voltaire was particularly scathing about it in *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (2nd ed.) anonymous (trans.), London: C Davies, 1741, letter xxv. For a sympathetic discussion of the subtleties of the Pasclian approach to religion by a leading contemporary philosopher, see Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, especially chaps. 1 – 2.

¹¹⁶ This line of argument will be familiar to many who have never read the works of Sigmund Freud, but the father of psychoanalysis is perhaps the most influential and articulate advocate of this deflationary account of religion in works such as *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* (1927) and *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930): see *The Future of An Illusion*, W. D. Robson-Scot (trans.), London: Hogarth Press, 1928; and *Civilisation and its Discontents*, David McLintock (trans.), Leo Bersani (intro.), London: Penguin, 2002.

¹¹⁷ Some expressed this as belief, others as hope: for the former, see Rousseau's *Social Contract*, bk. 4, chap. 8; for the latter; see Thomas Paine's (1794) *Age of Reason: Being An Investigation of the True and Fabulous Theology*, Boston: Josiah P Mendum, 1852, pt 1, p. 6. It should be noted, however, that this belief did not necessarily embrace the tradition that saw hell as a possible destination for transgresses; indeed, an asymmetrical commitment to divine judgement, which eschewed eternal damnation (at least for supposed failings in the sphere of belief), was the order of the day for many thinkers during the Enlightenment. For a discussion of the related topic of the 'devil's demise' in seventeenth and eighteenth-century European thought, see Israel, *Radical*, chap. 21. Reimarus' own skeptical thoughts on these matters are contained in the *Apologie* (vol. 1), pp. 49 – 50.

beneficio etiam idiotis notam creditamque animae immortalitatem vitamque post mortem futuram [It is Christ's merit that he also taught the ignorant about the immortality of the soul and life after death].¹¹⁸ Reimarus considered this intervention by Jesus to be of considerable importance. In *Dass die Bucher des A T nicht geschrieben werden, eine Religion zu offenbaren* (the fifth *Fragment*) Reimarus had argued that one of the great sins of omission in the Old Testament was the failure to give a clear lead on an issue he took to be central to any religion worthy of respect,¹¹⁹ and, in the opening passage of *Vom dem Zwecke*, he takes up the theme again:

It can be seen from the foregoing book...that the doctrine of the salvation and immortality of the soul, which must be the essential element of a religion, especially a revealed religion, had not yet been expounded by writers of the Old Testament and thus had been unknown to the Jews during the days of their own prophets. Rather, later Jews had learned and accepted this important tenant through contacts made with rational heathens and their philosophers.¹²⁰

Note how Reimarus's concession to revealed religion works at a naturalistic level: knowledge of the immortality of the soul was not supernaturally revealed to 'later Jews' by God; rather, it was acquired by Jews during their encounters with heathens and especially philosophers who, it is implied, grasped this essential religious truth through reason alone. This is another example of how the claims made by followers of revealed religions—who think of themselves as heirs to special revelation—can correspond with those truths of natural religion revealed by reason. For Reimarus, Jesus was a teacher of such truths, both in the domain of morals and the related domains of the soul and the afterlife. But Jesus was by no means the first of these 'later Jews' to apprehend this truth. Ironically, given the opprobrium he reserves for them elsewhere, the Pharisees emerge as important earlier witnesses, although their reasoning was distorted by their attempt to present this idea as if it were consistent with their Jewish tradition: 'The Pharisees maintained and advanced the doctrine principally in opposition to the Sadducees, and since they were unable to prove it in the true, literal sense by Moses and the prophets

¹¹⁸ Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), p. 63.

¹¹⁹ See Reimarus, *Bucher des A T nicht*, where the point is especially emphasised towards the end, pp. 275 – 277.

¹²⁰ Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), p. 61. Reference to the 'foregoing book' suggests that Lessing changed the order of the 'books' in Reimarus' manuscript when issuing the *Fragments*, publishing the book in the *Apologie* dealing with the Resurrection before the book on the teachings of Jesus and the disciples (what became the famous seventh *Fragment*). In the original, the latter book seems to have followed straight on from the treatise on the supposed limitations of the Old Testament.

they employed an artificial, allegorical and cabalistic explanation.¹²¹This doctrine was then advanced via the teaching of Jesus who, although a critic of the Pharisees,

admitted the correctness of their view concerning immortality and salvation, and not only defended this opinion against the Sadducees, but impressed it diligently upon the people. He introduced Abraham and Lazarus into his parables, representing them as living in abundant joy in the realm of glory [Abraham: Matt. 8: 11; Luke 13: 28; Lazarus: Luke 16: 23, 25]; he urges the people not to fear those who can merely destroy the body and not the soul. Rather, they should fear God, who can plunge both body and soul into hell.¹²²

Is this Reimarus the historian and exegete at work here, or Reimarus the theological moralist? As is so often the case in eighteenth-century biblical criticism, there are a number of interests working simultaneously. On the one hand, Reimarus is interested in the development of the history of religious thought, and he clearly sees Jesus' teaching about the afterlife, as taken up by early Christianity, as a significant development, since it proved an (unlikely) ally in the conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: 'Thus it seems chiefly to the Christian doctrine that we must ascribe the fact that the Sadducees and their followers from that time on almost completely lost ground amongst the Jews.'¹²³ On the other hand, he also identifies something he sees as a significant 'advantage of Jesus' teaching'.¹²⁴

When Reimarus writes about this 'advantage', he could be thinking in historical terms: proposing, say, a psychological appeal that his teaching might have had, and thereby facilitating conversion. But Reimarus means rather more than this:

His [Jesus'] teaching has a considerable advantage not only over that of the Pharisees, but also over that of the Old Testament, where such *essential principles of religion* were not even considered and where there is mention only of earthly promises and rewards, all hope for man ending abruptly with his death. This Paul *correctly says of him* ' that he did away with death and in its place brought to life light and immortality through the gospel [2 Tim. 1:10] (my emphasis).¹²⁵

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 61.

¹²² Ibid, pp. 62 - 63.

¹²³ Ibid, p. 63.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 63.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 63.

In the preceding passage Reimarus betrays his theological perspective:¹²⁶ belief in the afterlife is an essential principle of what Reimarus took to be *true* religion, and so Jesus' teaching had the advantage of being theologically sound in addition to being historically influential. Reimarus, like Chubb before him, was sure that Jesus 'referred man to the true great goal of religion, namely, eternal salvation.'¹²⁷ Reimarus considered such salvation credible because, as he argued in *Wahrheiten der natürlichen Religion*, reason was able to demonstrate that 'the human soul...is a simple unperishable substance',¹²⁸ which may be 'exalted from an imperfect organical life to a more perfect, endless, and spiritual mode of existence.'¹²⁹ In the same publication Reimarus imagines a final judgemental in the afterlife as the only fitting conclusion to God's providential reign over humanity, which is only imperfectly realised on earth. When reflecting on the trials and tribulations often experienced by the innocent and the just, and the apparent privileges and pleasures enjoyed by the wicked, Reimarus reasons that it would be

taxing the justice of God not to believe that the good and the virtuous, who, in the present connexion of things have, for their faith in God and obedience to his commands, suffered with a great fight of afflictions in this life, shall be the more gloriously rewarded in a better state; and that, on the other hand, the profligate and oppressors, who have prospered in their wickedness, and lived here in riot and affluence, shall be punished hereafter according to their demerits...¹³⁰

With such a strong sense that there must be some metaphysical extension to God's providential rule over nature, whereby reversals of corrupt and unjust states of affairs are realised in a life beyond the physical realm, it is easy to see why Reimarus was so enthusiastic about the 'beautiful Sermon on the Mount',¹³¹ which suggests a radical reordering of the harsh conditions experienced by those who have faith and live in accordance with God's will, but a reordering which seems implausible as a worldly event.

¹²⁶ Not that Reimarus ever really tried to conceal it: the assumption that a scholar writing critical history ought at least to give the appearance of working without a guiding theological perspective is one of the many values which separates Reimarus from present day New Testament scholars and historians of early Christianity.

¹²⁷ These are Reimarus's words (see Chapter Six), but Chubb would have agreed entirely. As I have argued, where they differed is that while Reimarus saw Jesus' ethical mission as theologically important, it was historically less significant with respect to Jesus' own priorities, which revolved around political eschatology.

¹²⁸ Reimarus, *Natural Religion*, p. 424

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 424. From the point of view of an eighteenth-century intellectual, the philosophical credentials of this spiritual view of the mind were very good, supported as it was by the arguments of philosophers from Plato to Descartes.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 438.

¹³¹ See Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), p. 67.

When Reimarus says of Jesus' teaching that 'salvation depends simply upon one's doing the will of his heavenly father,'¹³² he does not investigate what Jesus understood salvation to mean, but seems to assume, following Augustine, Luther and countless others, that this refers, at least in the first instance, to some state of bliss to be enjoyed by the immortal soul. Such a reading of Jesus' view of the afterlife is problematic today: whereas recent scholarship has tended to find against Reimarus on his materialistic interpretation of Jesus' conception of himself as a political Messiah ruling as an earthly king,¹³³ the same generation of scholarship has tended to find against his spiritual interpretation of Jesus' view of life after death, which is often rendered, at least in part, in material terms: the resurrection of the dead.¹³⁴

The truth or otherwise of Reimarus's claims about first-century Jewish views of the afterlife is not my concern here. My concern is the intellectual context for the key components of his moral theology, especially as it manifests itself in his writings on Jesus: 1) that moral virtue, which he identifies with a good God and with the teachings of Jesus, is rationally discernable, and only occasionally manifest in the history of revealed religion and its sacred texts; 2), that human beings have the capacity for virtue, and possibly salvation, regardless of their 'sinful' nature or their specific theological beliefs; and 3) that the justice of God will prevail in the afterlife, when any deficit experienced by the virtuous will be compensated by restorative divine love. These heterodox positions were not unusual in European intellectual culture in the 1770s; indeed, they would almost certainly be classified by Israel as belonging to that moderate, mainstream Enlightenment, which he judges to have been the dominant intellectual force in the eighteenth century until that very decade.¹³⁵ They pervade the nineteenth-century liberal Quest chronicled by Schweitzer, and are at least partly taken up in the latter's own ethical religion. But how did these positions become so prevalent in European intellectual culture? It is to this

¹³² Ibid, p. 70.

¹³³ Political readings still have considerable currency in historical Jesus studies, but they tend to conceptualise Jesus as attempting to enact some kind of bottom-up social revolution, either within the tradition of the Israelite prophets or within a tradition of itinerant Jewish teachers with close parallels to the Cynic philosophers who operated throughout the Greco-Roman world: for the former view see Richard Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1973; for the latter, see Crossan, *Historical Jesus*.

¹³⁴ However macabre it may appear to some in the modern world, in studies of the after-life as imagined by early Christians and their Jewish contemporaries, the resurrection of the body has been revived as a prevalent and significant commitment: see Paula Fredriksen, 'Vile Bodies: Paul and Augustine on the Resurrection of the Flesh', in *Biblical Interpretation in Historical Perspective: Studies in Honour of Karlfried Froehlich*, M Burrows and P. Rorem (eds.), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, p.73-85; and Wright, *Resurrection*, especially chaps. 4 – 9.

¹³⁵ See Israel, *Democratic*, p. 10.

Chapter Seven

question that I now turn. To answer it, I will be taking a long view of intellectual history in the West, and my approach will be more philosophical than in other chapters. Although I will continue to note the connections between authors up to and including Reimarus, the emphasis will be as much on intellectual convergence as on intellectual influence.

CHAPTER EIGHT

God, Goodness and the Rise of Modern Pelagianism

1. The Goodness of God Contested

(i) Background to the Problem: Athens and Jerusalem

In Chapter Two I mentioned the famous *Euthyphro* dilemma which, on some interpretations, has bedevilled theological ethics for over two millennia. The dilemma raises questions about authority in a variety of disciplines, from aesthetics to mathematics, but from the point of view of moral philosophy and the philosophy of religion, the heart of this dilemma is the foundation of ethical values and their relationship to God. The problem can be presented in the following form, covering human deeds and dispositions: Are the actions and characters of persons good because they are pleasing to God, or are the actions and characters of persons pleasing to God because they are good? If we take the first option, we suppose that moral values can be created at the pleasure of an authoritative being, but this would seem to imply that if God had happened to have a different set of preferences, then they too would have to be considered good. As we will see, many religious thinkers have been willing to accept the apparent consequences of this position; for others, however, this whole way of conceiving the relationship between God and the good is counterintuitive, giving morality an arbitrary and relativistic appearance which theological ethics is often thought to provide a bulwark against.¹ If we take the second option, however, our invocation of God does not actually take us to the fundamental basis of the good: it does not reveal the truth makers of ethical judgements, which must lie in whatever is characteristic of those things which please God, which may be quite independent of him.

The aim of the *Euthyphro*, in keeping with other Platonic dialogues, is to explore a philosophical problem and unsettle the assumptions of readers, rather than to offer a concrete solution. Nevertheless, taking into account the dialogue itself and relevant passages in *The Republic* (c. 380 BCE),² it is clear that Plato rejected the first possibility, where the spectre of capriciousness threatened the stability of common moral intuitions. This capriciousness was a mainstay of classical Greek drama with its warring, scheming

¹ The idea that we need to posit God as the source of morality—a being who underscores the universal truth of certain widely held moral judgements—is an old one, and, despite coming under attack in the modern period, it retains an allure for some moral philosophers and theologians (see Philip Devine, *Relativism, Nihilism and God*, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

² See Plato, *The Republic*, Desmond Lee (trans.), 2nd edn, London: Penguin Books, 1987, bk 3, 378a – 383c.

gods, and was anathema to Plato's ethical monotheism.³ When Christians began to reflect on the relationship between God and morality, the context for their enquiries was similar to that which provided the occasion for Plato's philosophising: the existence of popular, dramatic narratives which, at times, present the divine in a morally questionable light. But for Christians, the option of retreating into abstract metaphysics was more problematic. Although the gods of classical Greek drama reflected popular ideas, the plays themselves were obviously composed by playwrights for entertainment, and, for the sophisticated monotheist, they could be debunked without significant loss. For most Christians in the emerging Church, however, the Bible was not primarily a story of lesser gods, real or imagined, behind which was the one immutable and unchangeable God of speculative theology. Rather, the Bible was supposed to be the historical record of the one true God's relationship with humanity from the moment he created the world, to his covenants with chosen people, to the prophets who spoke God's truth to power, and, the crowning glory, his Incarnation and continuous presence through the work of the Holy Spirit. This God has many of the characteristics we associate with personhood: he identifies himself with the subjective 'I',⁴ distinguishing between self and other; he has intentions and goals,⁵ and the will to act on them.⁶ The biblical account of God's revelation includes a raft of expectations of people and their conduct in all spheres of life, including the moral.⁷ Because of the often personal nature of God's appearance in the Bible, these expectations can be seen as issuing from a free will, manifest in particular commands, hence one of the most popular philosophical approaches to ethics to emerge in the Christian tradition became known as 'theological voluntarism' or 'divine command ethics'.⁸

³ On the subject of this conflict between Plato's philosophy and artistic conceptions of the gods, see D. M. MacKinnon, 'The Euthyphro Dilemma', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 46, 1972, pp. 211 – 221.

⁴ There are many instances of this, perhaps the most striking being the response God gives to Moses when the latter asks his name: 'I am that I am' (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה) from Exodus 3:14. When, in the Christian tradition, God becomes incarnate in Christ in the prologue to John's Gospel, his personification is complete.

⁵ For instance, God clearly had the goal of delivering his people from the hands of the Egyptians in Exodus 3:7–9.

⁶ God's will to fulfil his goal of liberating the Israelites from the Egyptians can scarcely be doubted when he sends ten plagues to force the hand of the Pharaoh in Exodus 7:14–12:36.

⁷ If we just take the Ten Commandments, there are obligations concerning loyalty to God, the structure of the working week, and some moral fundamentals (see Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21).

⁸ See Philip L Quinn, 'Theological Ethics', in L. Becker and C. Becker (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Ethics* (2nd edn), New York: Routledge: 2001, pp. 1702 – 1706. In this particular piece Quinn seems to equate 'theological voluntarism' with 'divine command ethics', but philosophers who hold that moral value ultimately depends on conforming to the commands of God may or may not hold that it is the will of God which creates morality. Those who do hold the latter such position on moral theology are perhaps best described as 'voluntarists', and that will be my preferred term in this chapter.

The philosopher Philip Quinn (1940 – 2004),⁹ explains the theory in the following way: ‘On a divine command conception, actions are morally wrong just in case and only because God forbids them; actions are morally right just in case and only because God does not forbid them; and actions are morally obligatory just in case and only because God commands them.’¹⁰ This approach to theological ethics takes seriously those portions of the Bible where God makes more or less direct demands and issues more or less direct prohibitions. For orthodox Christians, there was continuity between the Old and New Testaments, whereby God reveals, directly in the form of Christ,¹¹ certain duties which are binding on all persons. Some historians of moral thought have seen this as having the virtue of securing a fixed point of truth and authority. In his classic *Outlines of the History of Ethics* (1886), Henry Sidgwick argues that Christian expansion into the pagan world brought with it a conception of the moral life which filled a lacuna in Greco-Roman thought:

The first point to be noticed as novel is the conception of morality as the positive law of a theocratic community, possessing a written code imposed by divine revelation, and sanctioned by express divine promises and threatenings. It is true that we find in ancient thought, from Socrates downwards, the notion of a law of God, eternal and immutable... But the sanctions of this law were vaguely and, for the most part, feebly imagined...¹²

Although Sidgwick shows rather less appreciation for the diversity of primitive Christianity than one finds in contemporary scholarship,¹³ he identifies a strand of Christian thought which offered something approaching a general ethical constitution requiring interpretation in relation to specific cases. While this legalistic conception of ethics may have appealed to some in the Greco-Roman world, for others it posed insurmountable problems. Even a cursory reading of the Bible reveals the difficulty of maintaining that God reveals a consistent and internally coherent code of ethics;¹⁴ then

⁹ Quinn helped to revive interest in divine command ethics within Anglophone philosophy in works such as *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

¹⁰ Quinn, ‘Theological Ethics’, p. 1702.

¹¹ It is customary in modern critical scholarship to draw parallels between the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount (see Ehrman, *New Testament*, p.106).

¹² Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics: For English Readers*, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988, pp. 110 – 111.

¹³ One of the other varieties of early Christianity Sidgwick acknowledges is Gnosticism, which responded in an ‘exaggerated’ way to Jesus’ critique of Jewish legalism, leading to a ‘dangerous depreciation of rules of eternal duty’ (Ibid, p. 114).

¹⁴ God prohibits murder—most famously in Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17—and yet he commands Joshua to wipe out the inhabitants of conquered towns in Joshua 8: 21. One might respond that the moral

there is the problem that God sometimes commands things which are, at best, morally questionable. For some Christians, these features of God's revelation to the world ran up against the two Platonic criticisms outlined above: 1) that God cannot be associated with morally unedifying behaviour since he would then fall short of the perfections which are his by definition;¹⁵ and 2) that God cannot be seen to command contradictory things, since God is not subject to change, otherwise he would be identifiable with the contingent world of being—again, this would be inconsistent with his very nature as God.¹⁶ Of course, it would be wrong to attribute a Platonic understanding of God and his nature to all early Christians. The God of the Bible has decidedly more personal qualities than the highly abstract God of Plato's philosophy, and it is possible that some early Christians adopted an entirely prudential approach to ethics, whereby their needs would be secured, in this life or the next, by obedience to God's commands.¹⁷ But such crudely self-interested thinking would run up against other feature of the primitive Christian tradition, not least the insistence, taken over from Judaism, of an essential alignment between our actions and the dispositions of the heart and mind which motivate them.¹⁸ So for many Christians, prudential obedience to God was simply not sufficient. But how was authentic commitment possible, given the inconsistencies in the biblical account of divine law, and the unruly biblical depiction of God himself?¹⁹

(ii) Marcion: A Radical Christian Response

Marcion of Sinope (c. 85 - 160 CE) is notorious for, among other things, jettisoning the Old Testament as an authoritative religious text for Christians. The driving force behind Marcion's act of theological vandalism—which is how it was perceived by the emerging

rules governing ordered communities do not stand during war, when enemies are not deserving of the usual protections, but this is still problematic given other Hebrew texts. Moreover, in the New Testament, God Incarnate (from the point of view of orthodox Christianity) instructs his followers to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27); indeed, such a teaching, taken alongside the injunction to 'turn the other cheek' when struck by an aggressor (Matthew 5:39), has led some to conclude that God incarnate is a pacifist.

¹⁵ See Plato, *Republic*, bk iii, 378 (a) to 383(c).

¹⁶ See *ibid*, 378(a) to 383(c).

¹⁷ That this was one of the intelligible motivations for following God's in the Bible is freely acknowledged in standard works in the field: see Sidgwick, *Outlines*, p. 110; and MacIntyre, *Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, London: Routledge, 1967, p. 112.

¹⁸ Sidgwick, *Outlines*, p. 113,

¹⁹ Consider the encounter between God and Abraham before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, when Abraham—who, later on in the narrative, would blithely agree to slaughter his only child—dares to ask, 'Will the judge of the whole earth [God] not administer justice?' (Genesis 18:25–26) when he fears that guilty and innocent alike could be swept up in God's wrath. This seems to be a concession to the idea that, were God to kill the innocent in the course of punishing the sinners of Sodom (the subject of this conversation), then it would be not be rendered just by virtue of God willing it to be so.

orthodox Church—seems to have been an extreme interpretation of Paul’s critical engagement with his own Jewish tradition,²⁰ manifest in a ‘castrated’ edition of the Pauline corpus.²¹ Marcion’s reasoning impinged on moral theology in so far as he thought that the values revealed in Jewish and Christian scripture were irreconcilable. In his *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (1886 – 1889), Adolph von Harnack wrote,

Completely carried away with the novelty, uniqueness and grandeur of the Pauline Gospel of the grace of God in Christ, Marcion...supposed that it was necessary to make the sharp antitheses of Paul, law and gospel, wrath and grace, works and faith, flesh and spirit, sin and righteousness, death and life, that is the Pauline criticism of the Old Testament religion, the foundation of his religious views, and to refer them to two principles, the righteous and wrathful god of the Old Testament, who is at the same time identical with the creator of the world, and the God of the Gospel, quite unknown before Christ, who is only love and mercy.²²

In that famous summation and critique of threats to Christianity commonly known as *Adversus haereses*,²³ St Irenaeus (c. 140 - 202 CE) identified an individual named Cerdo as the precursor to Marcion’s apartheid of the Testaments, distinguishing between the δίκαιος (just) deity of the Old Testament and the αγαθός (good) deity revealed in Christ. In this theological system, while δίκαιος was undoubtedly a virtue, when juxtaposed with αγαθός, the implication was that the values of the Old Testament God were narrower than the God revealed in Christ: the former was concerned with the procedural administration of due reward and punishment, whereas the latter would include a sense of δίκαιος while extending beyond this to a more fulsome benevolence, opening the way to acts of grace and forgiveness.²⁴ Whether or not Marcion was under the influence of Cerdo, our best sources agree on how he responded to perceived differences in Jewish and Christian scriptures: Marcion made one of most radical theological moves in the history of Christian thought, concluding that in their encounters with the Jewish and Christian scriptures, Christians were not encountering different manifestations of the one

²⁰ Marcion’s original writings have not survived, but they can be reconstructed from the five books written by Tertullian (c. 160 – 220 CE) to counter the first major Christian heretic: see *Adversus Marcionem* (2 vols.), Ernest Evans (ed. & trans.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.

²¹ Irenaeus, quoted by Evans, Introduction to Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, p. x.

²² Harnack, *History of Dogma* (vol. 1 of 3), Neil Buchanan (trans.), Christian Classics Ethereal Library, undated, p. 269, accessed 04 June 2010:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/harnack/dogma1.ii.iii.v.html?highlight=marcion#highlight>

²³ The original Greek title is λεγχος και ανατροπη της ψευδονομου γνωσεως (On the Detection and Refutation of the So-Called Gnosis).

²⁴ See Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* (vol. 1), bk i, sect. 6, p. 15: ‘Marcion sets up unequal gods, the one a judge, fierce and warlike, the other mild and peaceable, solely kind and supremely good.’

true God—they were encountering two quite separate deities, and their allegiance should be to the God revealed in Christ.²⁵ Marcion's theology relied on such a tendentious reading of Paul—not to mention a flagrant disregard for all but one of the four (eventually canonical) Gospels²⁶—that the radical separation he tried to introduce between Christianity and the Hebrew Bible may appear an absurdity: of interest, perhaps, as an extreme curiosity in the history of Christian thought.²⁷ And yet Marcion's ideas commanded considerable popular support, posing a serious threat to the emerging orthodox consensus and retaining a following for several centuries;²⁸ moreover, one of the motivations for Marcion's heresy, a fear of moral-theological incoherence between Jewish and Christian scriptures, between old and new covenants,²⁹ has haunted Christian thinkers ever since. Echoes of the heretical Marcion could still be heard in the Enlightenment, and he has attracted unlikely admirers among public intellectuals who self-consciously identify with Enlightenment values: the famous polemicist Christopher Hitchens judged Marcion 'the cleverest Christian there ever was' on account of his desire to 'dump the Old Testament and start afresh.'³⁰ As we saw in the previous chapter, there were elements of this sentiment in G. E. Lessing's pedagogical project, which sought to transcend the authority of the Bible generally and the Old Testament specifically; as we will see, he was by no means a lone voice in the eighteenth century.

(iii) Thomist Responses: Rationalism, Divine Simplicity and Natural Law

From the outset, Christianity drew on more than one moral discourse: there was the positive divine law laid down in scripture, but there was also a natural law tradition, growing out of the Hellenistic context of early Christianity (one that H. S. Reimarus, the

²⁵ See *ibid*, bk 1, sect. 19.

²⁶ Marcion relied solely on the Gospel of Luke, shorn of the birth narrative—shorn, in fact of the first four chapters—and with significant omissions from the Resurrection appearances. For an analysis of all the cuts, additions and changes made by Marcion—or adopted by him—see Harnack's 1921 *Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott*: or *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*, John E Steely and Lyle D Bierma (trans.), Durham, North Carolina: The Labyrinth Press, 1999, chap. iv, especially pp. 36 – 46.

²⁷ Marcion's move is extreme because it represents an outright denial of a relationship between the God of the Old Testament and the God revealed in Christ. Traditionally, Christianity has insisted on the relationship between old and new covenants, but it has rarely agreed on the precise nature of that relationship. An interesting research topic for counterfactual history might be the question of Jewish and Christian relations in the event of Marcionism becoming the orthodox position. Some writers have suggested such an antagonistic break is found in Enlightenment deism, whereby 'true religion' (still associated in some sense with Jesus) is severed from the Hebrew Bible (see Spalding, *Elise Reimarus*, pp. 259 – 260).

²⁸ See Harnack, *Marcion*, especially chap. viii.

²⁹ See *ibid*, p. 21.

³⁰ Hitchens, interviewed by Ann Widdecombe, *The Bible: A History—Moses and the Law*, Channel 4, 05 Feb. 2010.

classicist, was well versed in).³¹ The interplay between Christianity and Greco-Roman thought worked both ways: just as Christianity furnished the eternal moral law—imagined in the abstract by Plato—with some substantive principles from scripture, so Christianity drew on a natural law tradition in Hellenistic thought, expanding the sources of moral knowledge available to persons apart from revelation: Paul speaks of ‘τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις’ (the Law inscribed on their [human] hearts’ (Romans 2:15). God is no less the author of this law, ‘inscribed’ on human hearts, than he is the author of those laid down scripture, and so a similar question arises as before, but with the focus on the book of nature rather than scripture: Is the law good because God wills it, or does God will the law because it is good?

One family of responses to this question can be traced back to the greatest exponent of natural law theory within the Christian tradition, St Thomas Aquinas (c. 1275 – 1274). Although Aquinas does not address the *Euthyphro* dilemma directly, it is possible to construct a reply from his writings which comes down on the horn of the dilemma favoured by Plato: God wills things because they are good. The philosopher Simon Blackburn offers the following pithy summary, which can serve as our point of departure: ‘The elegant solution of Aquinas is that the standard [of moral goodness] is formed in God’s nature, and is therefore distinct from his will, but not distinct from him.’³² We can expand on this by saying that because God is wholly rational and wholly wise (another assumption of classical monotheism), and untroubled by those inclinations which are liable to hinder our own pursuit of the good, his will invariably reflects his nature, which is wholly good; as such, God cannot redefine moral goodness by an act of will, since that will is bound by his nature *qua* God: on this reading, God is no more free to command something today, declaring it right and just, when yesterday it was prohibited as vice and folly, than a triangle is free to possess four sides. It is against the nature of things.

Underlying this view of God’s relationship to morality is the doctrine of divine simplicity: the view that the attributes of God are identical to his substance, that his

³¹ The tradition can be traced back at least as far as Aristotle, whose thinking was developed and popularised by the Stoics, and especially Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 – 54 BCE) who gave one of the classic statements in *De Re Publica*, where he made *lex naturalis* (natural law) the ultimate court of appeal, transcending the conventional laws of particular societies: ‘True law is right reason, comfortable to nature, whose commands urge us to duty, and whose prohibitions restrain us from evil’ (*The Republic and the Laws*, C. D. Young (trans.), Lawrence, KS: Digrads.com, 2009, bk 3, p. 51). Reimarus not only possessed the complete works of Cicero (see Schetelig [ed.] *Auktionskatalog* [vol. 2], pp. 30, 34 – 25, 37 – 38, 202, 208, 211, 213 – 214, 225), he cited the Roman specifically within the context of his discussion of Jesus’ teaching in the *Apologie* (vol. 2), p. 61.

³² Blackburn, *ODP*, p. 127

properties (including his goodness) are identical to his fundamental being.³³ But, returning to Blackburn's formulation, what would it mean to say that the 'standard' of goodness is 'formed in God's nature'? If it means that God is good by definition, then it looks like we have solved the dilemma by means of a tautology, without throwing any light on what makes God the standard of goodness. If we are to agree that the ultimate standard of goodness is intrinsic to God's nature, then the meaning of 'good' must be understood in terms other than by reference to God's nature (if we are to avoid circularity). Aquinas provides the resources for just such a move.

In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas follows Aristotle in taking 'the essence of goodness' to be 'that it is in some way desirable'.³⁴ This broad concept of the good and its connection to desire contrasts sharply with those preferred by influential philosophers of the modern period, who have assumed that moral goodness is either a special instance of a desire or inclination, such as an increase in pleasure;³⁵ or that moral goodness only truly manifests itself in the absence of such inclinations.³⁶ From the ancient and medieval perspectives under consideration here, the familiar theological proposition 'God is good' is not analytic, nor does it just mean that God possesses the full range of moral virtues,³⁷ complete with infinite wisdom.³⁸ It means that God is actually a desired end for persons. Why should God be desired? Because he constitutes the alpha and omega of our being. Whereas Aristotle proposed εὐδαιμονία (happiness, in the sense of a satisfying and worthwhile life)³⁹ as the τέλος (goal) of human endeavour, achievable within the context of the πόλις (political community),⁴⁰ Aquinas's concept of human flourishing extends

³³ Augustine gave an earlier formulation in bk xi, chap. 10 of *De Civitate Dei* (c. 413 – c. 426): *City of God* (3 vols.), Demetrius B Zema and Gerald G Walsh (trans.), Etienne Gilson (intro.), Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1950. Divine simplicity is not the sole preserve of Christian theology; nevertheless, within the Christian tradition, Aquinas's treatment in in the *ST* (vol. i, pt i q. 3) has probably been the most influential, and the one which has received the most far reaching criticism: see Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 1980.

³⁴ Aquinas, *ST* (vol. i), pt i, q. 5.

³⁵ In the utilitarianism of William Godwin and Jeremy Bentham, happiness is also the goal of the good life, but it can be calculated in a way that neither Aristotle nor Aquinas would have thought possible or desirable, not least because Bentham reduces happiness to the maximisation of pleasure and the reduction of pain: see Bentham's (1789) *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (ed.), F. Rosen (intro.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

³⁶ Kant is the most influential philosopher of the modern period to define moral obligation over against desire, especially in *Groundwork*.

³⁷ Although God's virtues are discussed at some length by Aquinas: on God's love, see *ST*, vol. i, pt. i, q. 20; on his justice and mercy, q. 21.

³⁸ For God's knowledge see *ibid*, q. 14; for his truth, q. 16.

³⁹ See Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (c. 330 BCE), Harris Rackham (trans.), London: Heinemann, 1926, especially bk i.

⁴⁰ See *ibid*, bk x.

beyond the temporal realm, informed by a creation myth that Aristotle did not share,⁴¹ and a philosophical theology which moved beyond the Aristotelian first cause.⁴² Aquinas's vision of human happiness—or, more accurately, of beatitude—⁴³is inseparable from his doctrine of creation and providence.⁴⁴

In the famous formula of Augustine: 'Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee.'⁴⁵ Aquinas offers an intellectualized version of a similar sentiment, with the focus on why such a state of repose is a reasonable expectation, given faith in God:

For as the ultimate beatitude of man consists in the use of his highest function, which is the operation of his intellect; if we suppose that the created intellect could never see God, it would either never attain to beatitude, or its beatitude would consist in something else beside God; which is contrary to faith.⁴⁶

For Aquinas, the intellect is able to identify those tendencies in our nature, inclinations towards desired ends, which enable us to begin reasoning about how to act in particular, concrete cases.⁴⁷ This natural law is supplemented though never overridden by the divine law revealed in the Bible.⁴⁸ What relationship do these two laws have to God, and is his will the sole determinant of their authority?

The philosopher Hugo Meynell has fashioned an argument from the thought of Aquinas,⁴⁹ which argues that the commandments of God, such as those revealed in the Bible, are indeed good independently of the will that commands them. On this reading, God has created the framework, the material and spiritual world, in which human beings

⁴¹ See Aquinas, *ST* (vol. i), pt i, qs. 44 – 46.

⁴² See *ibid* qs. 2 – 43.

⁴³ See *ibid*, qs. 12, 26.

⁴⁴ On creation see *ibid*, qs. 44 - 49; on providence see q. 22. Rightly resisting any attempt to separate Aquinas's ethics from his theology, Kerr insists on the centrality of Aquinas's understanding of our origins for his vision of our ultimate *telos* (see *After Aquinas*, p. 131).

⁴⁵ Augustine, *The Confessions* [*Confessiones*, c. 397], Edward Bouverie Pusey (trans.), London: Softback Preview, 1996, bk i, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *ST* (vol. i), pt i q. 12, art. 1, p. 48.

⁴⁷ The 'natural law' does not provide a set of rules—to be 'read off' the surface of our material being—ready made to govern the minutia of life: 'For Thomas it is part of our being created to the image and likeness of God that we have these natural dispositions which provide the principles upon which our moral reasoning can begin to work' (Kerr, *After Aquinas*, p. 101).

⁴⁸ Aquinas actually distinguished four types of law in the *ST* (vol. i), pt ii, q. 91): 'eternal law', which is God himself; 'natural law', which reflects eternal law without being identical to it; 'divine law', which is the revealed law of the Bible; and 'human' law, enacted by any persons with the authority to formulate rules for members of a political community.

⁴⁹ He is candid about his debts to Aquinas: see Hugo Meynell, 'The Euthyphro Dilemma', *Aristotelian Society*, vol. 46, 1972, pp. 223 – 234: 234.

can peruse their goals, and, moreover, the nature of that framework helps to define the kinds of actions and character traits which will be constitutive of that end:

In so far as the whole cosmic context within which human happiness and fulfilment are to be found is dependent for its nature and existence on the will of God the creator, what is good is ultimately dependent only on that will. But so far as by "the will of God" is meant what is revealed or alleged to be revealed in a special source of revelation, one may say that the will of God is according to what is good and right independently of it. The apparent [Euthyphro] dilemma, with all its unpalatable consequences for the theist, is due to failure to make a distinction between these two aspects of the alleged will of God...⁵⁰

So what might this mean for the specifics of moral judgement, conceived in terms of natural or divine law? For Aquinas, the preservation of our being 'belongs to the natural law',⁵¹ and 'every law is ordained to the common good.'⁵² So God's commandment, 'Thou shall not kill' (Exodus 20:13) is not good because God commands it, but because life is a precondition for the attainment of those common goods which human beings are inclined towards: to live in communities as the social beings we are,⁵³ to form sexual unions,⁵⁴ to produce and educate children,⁵⁵ and to know spiritual truths, ultimately truths about God.⁵⁶ The common good, which is part of the essence of all law, is not directly dependent on God's will; it is shaped by the kind of beings we are, seeking happiness and fulfilment in the kind of world we find ourselves. But the kind of beings we are and the world we find ourselves *is* dependent on God's will, which is directed by his own nature and, as such, is 'entirely unchangeable.'⁵⁷

This philosophical view of the relationship between moral values and the will of God has proven to be one of the most fruitful responses to the question of God's relationship to morality.⁵⁸ But what about the morally problematic representations of God in the Bible? It could be argued that having provided a highly integrated philosophical system to explain the relationship between moral values and the will of God—with theological checks and balances which only recognises laws which are 'directed towards the common

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 228.

⁵¹ Aquinas, *ST* (vol. i), pt ii, q. 94, art. 2, p. 1009.

⁵² Ibid, q. 90, art. 2, p. 994.

⁵³ See Aquinas, *ST*, pt ii, q. 94.

⁵⁴ See *ibid*, q. 94.

⁵⁵ See *ibid*, q. 94.

⁵⁶ See *ibid*, q. 94.

⁵⁷ Ibid (vol. i), pt i, q. 18, art. 7, p. 109.

⁵⁸ See Blackburn, *ODP*, pp. 127 – 128; MacIntyre, *History of Ethics*, pp. 117 – 119.

good’—Aquinas spectacularly fails to carry his system through, caving in as soon as he confronts some difficult test cases: the binding of Isaac,⁵⁹ the stealing of property from the Egyptians,⁶⁰ and Hosea’s marriage to an adulterous woman are all considered⁶¹—all commanded by God, and, according to Aquinas, all legitimate:

Consequently when the children of Israel, by God's command, took away the spoils of the Egyptians, this was not theft; since it was due to them by the sentence of God. Likewise when Abraham consented to slay his son, he did not consent to murder, because his son was due to be slain by the command of God, Who is Lord of life and death: for He it is Who inflicts the punishment of death on all men, both godly and ungodly...Again Osee, by taking unto himself a wife of fornications, or an adulterous woman, was not guilty either of adultery or of fornication: because he took unto himself one who was his by command of God, Who is the Author of the institution of marriage.⁶²

In this passage Aquinas seems to recourse to a voluntarist ethic,⁶³ whereby obedience to the will of God triumphs over moral norms, but this may be an anachronistic reading, and we should not underestimate the compulsive power of the biblical narrative at work here. Aquinas was not engaged in a philosophical theology distinct from a biblical history: the Bible did not just contain stories about God which we may judge more or less edifying against philosophical criteria. Aquinas was writing long before the onset of that ‘great reversal’ in Western perspectives on the Bible, and for most medieval Christian thinkers, the Bible was regarded as a more or less historical record of God’s dealings with humanity; as such, Aquinas had little choice but to take these examples as exceptional states whereby God—ultimate source of all life, property, and marriage—has imposed his sovereign judgement in discrete cases. God’s sovereignty, as reported in the Bible, was a historical reality for Aquinas, and sovereign powers, from biblical times to the present day do as a matter of course engage in such practises as judicial killing and the imposed redistribution of property, and, in some cases, without any violation of pre-existing law. What Aquinas attempts to do, however unpersuasively from our perspective, is to *rationalise* God’s behaviour and man’s obedience against the background of God’s actual role as cosmic, sovereign governor. Now, of course, ideas about what constitutes

⁵⁹ See Genesis 22:1-18

⁶⁰ Aquinas is presumably referring to Exodus 11:1-2.

⁶¹ On God’s instruction to take the belongings of Egyptians, Aquinas seems to be referring to Exodus 11:1-2.

⁶² Aquinas, *ST* (vol. ii), pt ii, q. 100, art. 9, p. 1046.

⁶³ This is precisely how he is characterised by Quinn, ‘Theological Ethics’, p. 1703.

righteous sovereignty change from age to age, and by the time of the Enlightenment, ideas about what constitutes biblical history were also being drastically revised. What is significant about the Thomist legacy is the sense that God's sovereignty and man's obedience to God must be rationalised at all, and that this impulse extends to God revealed in Christ.

It was that arch critic of heteronomy Immanuel Kant who said of Jesus: 'Even the Holy One of the Gospel must first be compared with our idea of moral perfection before he is cognized as such'.⁶⁴ To some Christians of earlier ages, perhaps some even today, such a sentiment could be viewed as emblematic of the intellectual pride and self-aggrandisement which is characteristic of a wrong turn in modern thought. And yet, in the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas mounts an enquiry into 'Christ's Manner of Life'.⁶⁵ In this and subsequent questions, we find a host of details about the life of Jesus put to the question. This investigation concerns his general preference for sociability over solitariness;⁶⁶ his occasional rather than consistent commitment to fasting and abstinence, the latter having been regularly broken through his enjoyment of food and drink;⁶⁷ his poverty;⁶⁸ 'whether it was becoming for Christ to experience temptation';⁶⁹ whether he should have been obedient to the Jewish law (Aquinas, unlike some later commentators, judges that he was);⁷⁰ and whether it was fitting to perform miracles which impinge on plant and animal life (the kind of miracles that Thomas Woolston was appalled by and sought desperately to allegorise).⁷¹

St Thomas, unlike his turbulent namesake Rev. Woolston, thought that all these details in the story of Christ were befitting God. After the huge shift in historical consciousness during early modernity, however, the doctrine of divine simplicity favoured by Aquinas—with its insistence that God's goodness and his substance are identical—was released from the necessity of seeing the Bible as a historical document which had to be made to cohere with the deliverances of reason. Instead, moral-theological rationalism could be deployed as part of a more discriminating hermeneutic, yielding conclusions which were radically disruptive to biblically based Christianity. But this did not happen before a

⁶⁴ Kant, *Groundwork*, sect. 2, p. 21.

⁶⁵ Aquinas, *ST* (vol. iv), pt iii, q. 40.

⁶⁶ See *ibid*, art. 1.

⁶⁷ See *ibid*, art. 2.

⁶⁸ See *ibid* art. 3.

⁶⁹ See *ibid*, q. 41, art. 1.

⁷⁰ See *ibid*, q. 40, art. 4.

⁷¹ See *ibid*, q. 44, art. 4. Compare with Woolston's first *Discourse on the Miracles of our Saviour*, London, 1727, p. 54,

powerful counter to Thomistic thought asserted itself, first in a later phase of scholasticism, and then, crucially, during the Reformation.

(iv) Scholastic Voluntarism

Some of the later scholastics moved away from the idea that the laws of God proceed from the divine will in complete conformity to God's essential nature, and emphasised instead the sovereignty of the divine will, proceeding as it does from the omnipotent overlord of the cosmos. The most famous philosopher-theologians associated with this tendency are John Duns Scotus (c.1265 – 1308)⁷² and William of Ockham (c. 1287 – 1350).⁷³ Janine Idziak has cast doubt on the standard explanations of *why* they adopted a divine command ethic:⁷⁴ for Idziak, the often cited explanation that it was the value they placed on God's freedom or power is at best conjectural, in the absence of explicit evidence in the relevant texts.⁷⁵ Whatever the basis for their reasoning, they can be seen as preparing the ground for subsequent divine command theorists where the sovereignty of an omnipotent deity did underpin their moral theology. The French writer and Chancellor of the University of Paris Jean de Charlier de Gerson (1363 – 1429) gives a remarkably clear statement of the voluntarist position in his *Liber de vita spiritali animae*: 'God does not therefore will and approve our actions because they are good, but they are therefore good because He approves them.'⁷⁶ And in his *Consolatione Theologiae*, the rationale for Gerson's preference is explicit:

[T]he teaching of theology from revealed Scripture must be embraced, that the divine will acts towards exterior things freely, in a contradictory way, and choosing whichever

⁷² The key texts include Scotus's commentaries on the *Libri Quatuor Sententiarum* by Peter Lombard (c.1100 – 1160). Lombard brought together what he judged the best of Christian doctrine, arranged thematically, consisting of theological and philosophical reflections on scripture. Other than the Bible, it was perhaps the single most important theological text of reference during the medieval period. Scotus produced the first commentary while he was in Oxford, the second in Paris; for selected readings see *The Oxford Commentary on the Four Books of the Sentences*, in Janine Marie Idziak (ed. & trans.), *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, New York / Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979, pp. 51 – 52; and *The Paris Commentary on the Four Books of the Sentence*, pp. 53 – 54.

⁷³ It was also Lombard's *Sententiarum* which provided the occasion for William Ockham's famous (or infamous) reflections on the divine will: see *On the Four Books of the Sentences* (extracts), *Divine Command Morality*, pp. 53 – 54.

⁷⁴ See Idziak, 'Divine Command Morality: A Guide to the Literature', in *Divine Command Morality*, pp. 1 – 38: 10 – 13.

⁷⁵ Although the direct textual evidence may be limited, I think that the traditional explanations of an emphasis on divine power and freedom of will still constitute a robust account. I would also stress the nominalism of both writers: if universals are rejected, including a universal moral good, then individual acts of divine will in dictating the moral good may seem more plausible.

⁷⁶ Jean Gerson, Reading I Corollary X from *On the Spiritual Life of the Soul*, in *Divine Command Morality*, pp. 66 – 67: 66.

one of two alternatives it pleases, just as the historical and prophetic course of Scripture plainly show...[T]he divine will is the first law of nature.⁷⁷

Gerson's conception of God's relationship to morality is clearly informed by reflection on scripture, and, with his emphasis on the 'divine will' as 'the first law of nature', Gerson is a notable precursor to perhaps the two most influential writers on the divine will in the Christian tradition.

(iv) Voluntarism in Reformation Thought

A biblically informed voluntarism carried over from the high Middle Ages into the Reformation, while the question of will, specifically free will, proved a sufficiently weighty issue to provoke a very public conflict between Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus. In *De Libero Arbitrio Diatribe sive Collatio* (1524), Erasmus criticised what he saw as the fatalistic tendencies in Luther's vision of our depraved humanity and corrupt will, the only hope for which lay in the grace of God through faith in Christ.⁷⁸ Erasmus thought this theological anthropology erred by underestimating human power and potential, and that it was an error which was liable to corrupt persons still further if it was ever to be believed, so bleak were the prospects for moral improvement.⁷⁹ By way of a reply, Luther penned *De Servo Arbitrio* (1525).⁸⁰ In the course of reflecting on the weakness of the human will, he has occasion to write about the will of God, and he confronts the charge made from Plato onwards that we cannot countenance morally questionable representations of the divine. The specific context for Luther's comments was the rationale for God allowing Adam to sin in the Garden of Eden, thereby permitting a fallen humanity and the stain of sin. Why would a good God act in such a way? Instead of offering a theological rationalisation, Luther responds in a manner reminiscent of Gerson:

God is He for Whose will no cause or ground may be laid down as its rule and standard; for nothing is on a level with it or above it, but it is itself the rule for all things. If any rule or standard, or cause or ground, existed for it, it could no longer be the will of God. What God wills is not right because he Ought, or was bound, so to will; on the contrary, what takes place must be right, because He so wills it. Causes and grounds

⁷⁷ Gerson, pt. ii (extracts) from *The Consolation of Theology*, in *Divine Command Morality*, p. 68.

⁷⁸ See Desiderius Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, in W Gordon Rupp and A. N. Marlow (eds. & trans.), *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969, pp. 35 – 97.

⁷⁹ See Erasmus, *Freedom*, especially pp. 41 – 42, pp. 91 – 96.

⁸⁰ See Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will*, in Philip S Watson and B Brewery (eds. & trans.) *Luther and Erasmus*, pp. 101 – 334.

are laid down for the will of the creature, but not for the will of the Creator—unless you set another Creator over him!⁸¹

Although Luther does not use the language of morality here, his thoughts on the relationship between morality and God is implicit, with God's will 'itself the rule for *all* things' (my italics). One reformer who did use the language of morality when discussing the divine will was Jean Calvin (1509 – 1564),⁸² and the French theologian was fearless in confronting the most severe criticisms of voluntarism. In the following passage from his *Institutio Christianae religionis*, Calvin is responding to criticism of the controversial doctrine with which he is inextricably connected, double pre-destination:⁸³

Foolish men raise many ground of quarrel with God...First, they ask why God is offended with his creatures, who have not provoked him by any previous offence; for to devote to destruction whomsoever he pleases, more resembles the caprice of the tyrant than the legal sentence of a judge; and, therefore, there is reason to expostulate with God, if at his mere pleasure men are, without any desert of their own, predestined to eternal death...The will of God is the supreme rule of righteousness, so that everything which he wills must be held to be righteous by the mere fact of his willing it.⁸⁴

When Christians feel moved to question the relationship between God and virtue, Calvin is scornful of such 'human temerity' and advises them to 'be quiet' in the face of the incomprehensible grandeur of God's will.⁸⁵ If a person enquires why God pleases as he does, they 'ask for something greater and more sublime than the will of God, and nothing such can be found.'⁸⁶ This is precisely what Aquinas denied: the greater and more sublime thing is the essence from which the divine will precedes, namely, the nature of God himself. Variants of this view about the relationship between God and morality captured

⁸¹ Luther, Chapter V (extracts) from *The Bondage of the Will*, J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnson (trans.), in *Divine Command Morality*, pp. 93 – 95.

⁸² See his 'Exposition of the Moral Law': Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Ford Lewis Battles (trans.), rev. edn, London: Collins, 1986, bk 1, chap. viii.

⁸³ Predestination features in different forms in the theologies of both Augustine and Aquinas. Calvin, who took it in a radical direction, was under no illusion about the difficulty of this doctrine for many fellow Christians: 'The human mind, when it hears this doctrine, cannot restrain its petulance, but boils and rages as if aroused by the sound of a trumpet. Many professing a desire to defend the Deity from an invidious charge admit the doctrine of election, but deny that anyone is reprobated': bk iii, chap. xiii (extracts) from *Institutes*, Henry Beveridge (trans.), in *Divine Command Morality*, pp. 98 – 103: 99.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 101.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 101.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 101.

the imaginations of many writers in the early modern period, informing their moral philosophy, their biblical criticism, and their conceptions of Jesus.

2. The Goodness of God in the Enlightenment

(i) *Enlightenment Attacks on Moral Voluntarism*

As we saw in Chapter Four, the sixteenth-century wars of religion have been cited as one factor in changing critical approaches to the Bible generally and Jesus specifically. The danger of rival dogmas—sometimes built on incommensurable theological criteria and making exclusive claims—had been revealed in decades of bloody conflict. If the study of the Bible was ever going to get beyond the perpetuation of entrenched confessional positions, then it must be approached using methods which are independent of contested theological propositions. This desire for independence was already evident in natural philosophy,⁸⁷ and in political philosophy;⁸⁸ reflecting on these radical changes across the disciplines, Sidgwick writes,

It was to be foreseen that a similar assertion of independence would make itself heard in ethics, also; and, indeed amid the clash of dogmatic convictions, the variations and aberrations of private judgement, that the multiplying divisions of Christendom exhibited after the Reformation, reflective persons would naturally be led to seek for an ethical method that—relying solely on the common reason and common moral experience of all mankind—might claim universal acceptance of all sects.⁸⁹

This ‘assertion of independence’ in the moral domain is central to what Alasdair MacIntyre would later call ‘the Enlightenment project’:⁹⁰ an attempt to find criteria for moral judgements, independent of religious or cultural tradition, capable of winning the assent of all rational persons.⁹¹ Sidgwick and MacIntyre identify a genuine trend in moral thought, but it would be a mistake to confuse the desire for independence from confessional positions with independence from theological considerations: it is true that the Enlightenment witnessed the rise of ethical traditions which aspired to rationality and

⁸⁷ Important turning points here would include the Ecclesiastical response to Copernicus, Galileo and their heliocentric picture of the heavens.

⁸⁸ With his *Leviathan* and other writings, Hobbes produced one of the earliest and most comprehensive attempts to solve the problem of competing political theologies, with his naturalistic account of human thought, action, and the justification for civil authority.

⁸⁹ Sidgwick, *History of Ethics*, p.157

⁹⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, chaps. 4 – 6.

⁹¹ MacIntyre argued that the moral philosophies of the utilitarians and Kant were the best candidates, but, in the end, both are judged failures (see *ibid*, chaps. 5 – 6).

universality, but many did so using the intellectual resources available from within their theological inheritance. One Christian perspective on morality which came under sustained attack throughout the Enlightenment, however, was the theological voluntarism we have just discussed, certainly in the extreme form entertained by Ockham and some of the Protestant reformers. Kant's rationalism has already been noted, and notable early critics amongst English speaking thinkers included George Rust,⁹² the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper),⁹³ Thomas Chubb,⁹⁴ Francis Hutcheson,⁹⁵ Richard Price,⁹⁶ and Jeremy Bentham.⁹⁷ In fact, the critique of theological voluntarism / divine command started before the Enlightenment proper, and was by no means an Anglophone preoccupation: it is explicit in the work of the Spanish Jesuit philosopher Francisco Suarez (1548 – 1617);⁹⁸ it is implicit in the latter's able successor as Europe's foremost philosopher in moral and legal matters, Hugo Grotius;⁹⁹ and it was a significant preoccupation of one of the seminal figures in modern rationalism, G. W. Leibniz.¹⁰⁰ These writers engaged critically with voluntarism at the philosophical and theological levels; others would later attack it through their analysis of biblical texts.

If we take seventeenth-century England as our initial focus, we find a revival of interconnected philosophical controversies which have roots in antiquity, and which include the moral-theological problems considered above. Notable protagonists in these seventeenth-century debates were, on the one hand, materialist and determinist advocates of mechanical natural philosophy,¹⁰¹ and, on the other hand, a group of

⁹² See George Rust, *A Discourse on Truth*, in Joseph Glanville et al, *Two Choice and Useful Treatises*, London: James Collins and Sam Lowndes, 1682, pp. 165 – 195.

⁹³ See Anthony Ashley Cooper, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (vol. 2 of 3), London: John Derby, 1711, pp. 45 – 52.

⁹⁴ See Chubb, 'An Enquiry Concerning the Justice of God', in *A Collection of Tracts on Various Subjects* (vol. 1 of 2), 2nd edn, London: T Cox, 1754, pp. 221 – 241.

⁹⁵ See Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue: In Two Treatises*, London: William and John Smith, 1725, pp. 249 – 254.

⁹⁶ See Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Difficulties in Morals*, A. Millar, 1758, chaps. i – v.

⁹⁷ See Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, London: T. Payne and Son, 1789, pp. xviii – xix.

⁹⁸ See Francisco Suarez, *Tractatus de legibus ac Deo legislatore: A Treatise on Laws and God the Lawgiver*, in Gwladys L Williams, Ammi Brown and John Waldren (eds. & trans.), *Selections from Three Works of Francisco Suarez* (vol. 2 of 2), James Brown Scott (intro.), Oxford: Clarendon Press; London: Humphrey Milford, 1925, bk 2, chap. 6.

⁹⁹ See Grotius, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis Libri Tres*, (vol. 2 of 2), Francis W Kelsey and Arthur E. R. Boak et al (trans.), Scott (intro.), Oxford: Clarendon Press; London: Humphrey Milford, 1925, pp. 13 – 14.

¹⁰⁰ Leibniz emphatically rejects voluntarism in his *Discours de métaphysique* (1686): see *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Jonathan Bennett (ed. & trans.), *Some Texts from Early Modern Philosophy* (on-line), Jul. 2007, accessed 21 Jul. 2012: <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdf/leibdisc.pdf>

¹⁰¹ Not all advocates of the mechanical philosophy were materialists or determinists: Descartes was a leading figure in mechanical philosophy but, like the Cambridge school, he affirmed the freedom of the will and is more closely associated with substance dualism than any modern philosopher: on free will see *Meditations*, 4; on dualism, see 2 and 6. Hobbes and Spinoza were frequently associated with materialism and determinism in the seventeenth-century, but, writing in an English context, it should come as no surprise that

Christian scholars associated in one way or another with the University of Cambridge: the Cambridge Platonists.¹⁰²

One of the most eloquent philosophical critiques of moral voluntarism written in the seventeenth-century (published in the eighteenth) was a *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* by Ralph Cudworth (1617 – 1689), a fellow of Christ's College Cambridge, and, with the possible exception of Henry More (1614 – 1687), the leading light of the Cambridge school.¹⁰³ In his *Treatise*, Cudworth describes a tradition of thought in classical Greece which held that nothing is 'just or unjust, but what is made by law and men',¹⁰⁴ a tradition resurfacing in his own time: 'Of this sort is that late writer of Ethics and Politics [Thomas Hobbes]',¹⁰⁵ who argued that 'there are no authentic doctrines concerning just and unjust, good and evil, except the laws which are established in every city.'¹⁰⁶ Cudworth sees parallels between this vision of the basis for moral and civil law, defined by the principal power of a jurisdiction, and the voluntarism of the medieval scholastics.¹⁰⁷ Cudworth resists this position, arguing that the moral imperative to follow commands presupposes that the authority of a commander is only legitimate in so far as he has moral capital.¹⁰⁸ That good and evil exist in the world, independently of the divine will, is consistent with the Thomist position sketched previously: God has created the world, and thereby created the context within which human beings find the good, a good which then has independent reality. With respect to our knowledge of the good, however, Cudworth is a Platonist rather than an Aristotelian / Thomist: for the Platonist,

Hobbes was singled out for special attention.

¹⁰² Benjamin Whichcote is often cited as the father of this Cambridge intellectual tradition, having taught many of the leading figures at Emmanuel College. The memory of this seventeenth-century teacher and scholar is preserved in a stain glass widow in the chapel of his old college: see 'Benjamin Whichcote (1609 – 1683)', Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge (on-line), accessed 08 March 2011: <http://www.emma.cam.ac.uk/collegelife/chapel/windows/display.cfm?id=6> The group were by no means homogenous, with some more indebted than others to Aristotle and scholasticism; nevertheless, they were all Christians, committed in one way or another to the Platonic virtues of the sovereignty of the good and the value of reason in religion as in all things: see Taliaferro and Teply, editorial 'Introduction to Cambridge Platonism', in *Cambridge Platonist Spirituality*, pp. 5 – 53.

¹⁰³ Cudworth was one of the first writers to produce a philosophical treatise in the English language, and was the most academically accomplished of the Cambridge Platonists, serving as Regius Professor of Hebrew (see Taliaferro and Teply, 'Cambridge Platonism', 19 – 20). His most important work was *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678), a massive criticism of Hobbes's materialism. Reimarus, we may recall, was also committed to combatting materialist philosophy, and Cudworth's massive treatise was among Reimarus' collection of works by English writers (see Schetelig [ed.], *Auktionskatalog* [vol. 1], p. 162).

¹⁰⁴ See Cudworth, *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (extracts), in *Divine Command Morality*, pp. 155 – 171: 156.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁰⁶ Hobbes, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁷ See *ibid.*, 158 – 159: Petrus Alliacus and Andreas de Novo Castro are cited as following Ockham down the 'wrong' path of denying that things may be good by nature.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 161 – 162.

the good is ‘that which would satisfy us and would continue to satisfy us once we had made the ascent of abstraction from particulars to the Form[s]’,¹⁰⁹ whereas for the Aristotelian-Thomist, ‘to call a state of affairs good is not necessarily to say that it exists or to relate it to any object that exists, whether transcendental or not; it is to place it as a proper object of desire.’¹¹⁰ In the latter tradition, what we properly desire, inclinations which contribute to our happiness, are revealed to us by natural law.

(ii) Natural Law: British Perspectives

Natural law does not feature in Cudworth’s Platonic moral theorising, but a Thomistic presence had already been felt in the first work ever to be published by a Cambridge Platonist, Nathaniel Culverwell’s immodestly titled *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature* (1652). Culverwell had no qualms about placing certain limitations on God’s liberty,¹¹¹ while insisting that knowledge of what is good and evil, that which is detrimental or beneficial to our welfare, is something God ‘publisht to man by the voyce of Reason, by the Mediation of this Natural Law.’¹¹² Like Aquinas before him, Culverwell sees human nature as an outpouring of God’s creative activity, and he connects our happiness and satisfaction with God’s:

Whence it is that every violation of this Law, is not only an injury to mans being, but *ultra nativam rei malitiam* [beyond the intrinsic evil of the thing], (as the Schools speak), ‘tis also a vertual and interpretative contempt of that supreme Law-giver, who out of so much wisdome, love, and goodnesse did thus binde man to his own happiness.¹¹³

Here the Aristotelian emphasis on εὐδαιμονία is absorbed by Christian theology. Culverwell may have been distinctive among the Cambridge Platonists for his emphasis on the natural law as the source of moral knowledge, but the European Enlightenment teems with interest in natural law. In the English context, Culverwell was a younger contemporary of the historian, legal scholar and MP John Selden (1584 – 1654), who was

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 52.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 61.

¹¹¹ See Nathaniel Culverwell, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature* (extracts), in *Divine Command Morality*, pp. 172 – 177: 175 – 176.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 176.

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 176. On Culverwell’s dependence on Aquinas and Suarez, see Taliaferro and Teply, ‘Cambridge Platonism’, p. 25.

steeped in the thought of Aristotle and Aquinas.¹¹⁴ Culverwell also stood between two major figures of moral and political thought, both of whom relied on the natural law tradition: Richard Hooker (1554 – 1600),¹¹⁵ and the fountainhead of English philosophy as the seventeenth century gave way to the eighteenth, John Locke (1632 – 1704). Although Locke would emphasise the empirical basis of knowledge over against the Platonic emphasis on more abstract truths of reason, the Oxford man followed Culverwell in his commitment to natural law.¹¹⁶ Some of the English speaking writers who followed him into biblical studies would make even more radical use the tradition as a moral-theological hermeneutic.

(iii) Natural Law: Continental Perspectives

Natural law flourished in the Enlightenment as an approach to ethics that was capable of meeting the intellectual demand for a moral philosophy independent of warring Christian factions. Just as the civil war was the traumatic backdrop for so much religio-political discourse in the early English Enlightenment, the thirty years war (1618-1648) provided the context for much of the religio-political thought in mainland (especially central) Europe during the same period. But the revival of natural law predates both these cataclysmic events. Just as Hooker stood as the most masterful practitioner of natural law in the English speaking world at the start of the seventeenth-century; Suárez was in many respects the catalyst for innovations in moral and legal philosophy in mainland Europe during the same period. And unlike the Anglican Hooker,¹¹⁷ he was not in the least bit bashful about his continuity with Thomistic scholasticism, which formed the philosophical backdrop to his theorising in such seminal works as *Tractatus de legibus ac deo legislatore* (1612). This system of moral, political and legal philosophy developed in the early Enlightenment by such figures as Hugo Grotius,¹¹⁸ and later by the German philosopher

¹¹⁴ The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, keep manuscripts of lectures delivered by Selden on Aristotle and Aquinas, both apparently in Rome and dated to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century respectively, accessed 21 Jul. 2012:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/seldenCLD/seldenCLD.html>

¹¹⁵ See Richard Hooker, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polite: Eight Books* (1594 – 1597), London: Matthew Lownes, 1611.

¹¹⁶ Locke was based at Christ Church College, Oxford, in various academic capacities from 1632 – 1667: see J. R. Milton, ‘Locke, John’, in *DNB* (on-line), May 2008, accessed 26 Nov 2010:

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16885?docPos=1>

¹¹⁷ In understated fashion, Hooker says of the scholastic natural law tradition: ‘these School-implements are acknowledged by grave and wise men not unprofitable to have been invented’: quoted in A. P. d’Entrèves, *Natural Law: An Introduction to Legal Philosophy* (2nd edn.), London: Hutchinson & Co, 1970, p. 49. In fact, d’Entrèves argues that ‘Hooker was probably one of the ablest, and certainly one of the most unbiased defenders of Thomist legal philosophy’ (p. 47).

¹¹⁸ In *Belli ac Pacis*, Aquinas still outstrips Suárez as a reference for Grotius by a ratio of 9:1

Samuel von Pufendorf (1692 – 1794), is often regarded as providing the foundations for a purely secular discourse on such matters.¹¹⁹ It is true to say that a whole range of traditional theological concerns—Christological, soteriological, sacramental and ecclesiastical—play very little role in the natural law writings of these philosophers. There were good reasons, intellectual and socio-political, to bracket such matters in the search for common ground, but it is a mistake to imagine that the assumed common ground was not theologically infused. It is hard to ignore the influence of an explicit commitment to a benevolent creator God on the content of the natural law philosophies of Grotius and Pufendorf, which depend on a concept of the human person as a rational and sociable animal, with discernable duties to God and man alike.¹²⁰ A more appropriate characterisation of the thought of Grotius and Pufendorf—and, for that matter, the natural law referred to in the *American Declaration of Independence*, which is sometimes cited as the culmination of their project¹²¹—would be non-confessional: inter-Christian theological disputation is avoided, but the ‘rational’ truths of natural law are ‘self-evident’ in the relevant documents only in so far as their authors are reasoning against a background of theological assumptions.¹²² But however great the continuity between the scholastic natural law tradition and these early modern interpretations, on the question of God’s relationship to morality, Grotius rejects the Protestant theologies of Luther and Calvin, siding unequivocally with the rationalism of Aquinas: ‘Measureless as is the power of God, nevertheless it can be said just that there are certain things over which that power does not extend...Just as even God, then, cannot cause that two times two should not make four, so He cannot cause that that which is intrinsically evil be not evil.’¹²³ For Grotius, God cannot contradict the law of the nature, but, in this metaphysic, no less than in the one adopted by Aquinas, the natural moral order is God’s creation, and so the moral order is never wholly distinct from him.¹²⁴

(see pp. 927 – 928). Grotius’s great work of moral and legal philosophy was on hand for Reimarus (see Schetelig [ed.], *Auktionskatalog* [vol. 1], p. 210).

¹¹⁹ d’Entrèves, *Natural Law*, pp. 53 – 55.

¹²⁰ See Grotius, *Belli ac Pacis*, (vol. 2); explicitly p. 45; Pufendorf’s *De officio hominis et civis* (1682): *Of the Duty of Man According to Natural Law*, James Tully (ed.), Michael Silverthorne (trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, bk 1, chaps. 1 – 9.

¹²¹ See d’Entrèves, *Natural Law*, chap. 4; he also connects the *Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen* with this tradition (pp. 51, 63).

¹²² d’Entrèves says that the ‘Supreme Being’ God who features in the *Déclaration* is ‘not more akin to the God omnipotent of the Creed than Deism is to Christianity’ (Ibid, p. 55). Even if we grant this, it is incorrect to say such thinking ‘has nothing to do with theology’: theology is not exhausted by the contents of the Christian creeds.

¹²³ See Grotius, *Belli ac Pacis*, p. 40.

¹²⁴ In moral philosophy Grotius is Thomistic not only in his commitment to natural law and moral rationalism, but also in the exception he makes for God’s apparent violations of the natural

(iv) Natural Law and Radical Biblical Criticism

Locke's enthusiasm for the natural law was echoed in the work of later and more theologically radical Anglophone writers with whom Reimarus is so often associated, including Thomas Chubb, Thomas Morgan and Matthew Tindal. These figures are of particular interest because, like Reimarus, their moral theology finds very clear expression in their biblical scholarship and their interpretations of Jesus. Having already discussed Chubb and Tindal in relation to the historical Jesus, I will take Morgan as my focus here,¹²⁵ as an example of a writer carrying theological rationalism and natural law through to what for him was its logical conclusion.

Of Welsh origin, Morgan made the journey from 'Protestant Dissenter' to 'Christian Deist' during a career which saw him leave the ministry of the Church where his views were judged beyond the pale,¹²⁶ and emerge as a prominent writer on a wide range of subjects, from medicine to biblical criticism.¹²⁷ Like many philosopher-theologians of his age, Morgan was deeply concerned with ethics, and it is appropriate that the three volume work for which he is most famous should be called *The Moral Philosopher*. In the first volume, Morgan considers the biblical narrative which might very well be seen as *the* test case for those who wish to defend voluntarism: the near sacrifice, or the binding, of Isaac.¹²⁸ Morgan has no interest in seeking a rationale for Abraham's apparent willingness to obey such a command, and, while he regards Abraham's acquiescence to be intelligible on historical grounds, there could be no moral-theological justification:

The Case of *Abraham* is very well known...This is a plain Proof of the common Notion, or general receiv'd Opinion of that Time that human sacrifices might be enjoined and accepted of God... and that the Blood of Man for the Expiation of Sin and procuring the divine favour was much more efficacious than the blood of beasts... It may be probable enough, that either *Abraham* had such a Belief or Conceit...but that God, in this, or any

law, where murder and theft and not actually murder and theft 'if the deed is done by authority of the Supreme Law of Life and Property' (Ibid, p. 40).

¹²⁵ For Tindal on natural law, see *Christianity*, pp. 88, 115.

¹²⁶ Morgan could not accept that it was necessary for ministers of dissenting Churches to subscribe to specific articles of faith: see Harrison, 'Morgan, Thomas', *DNB* (on-line), 2004, accessed 26 Nov 2010: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19239?docPos=6>

¹²⁷ Although Morgan was noted as a writer on medicine, rather than a practitioner, he claimed the status of medical doctor from 1726 onwards (see *ibid*).

¹²⁸ It is also discussed by Chubb, 'A Supplement to the Previous Question, with Regard to Religion', in *Collection of Tracts* (vol. 1), pp. 357 – 380, especially: 366 – 372. On Chubb's account, God never intended Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and, had Abraham gone ahead with the deed, his act 'would have been abdominal both in the eyes of *God* and *man*' (p. 371). Chubb returned to the matter again in 'The Case of Abraham with regard to his Offering Up of his Son Isaac in Sacrifice, Re-examined', in *ibid* (vol. 2), pp. 1 – 52.

other Case, should dissolve the Law of Nature, and make it a Man's Duty, as a Thing morally reasonable and fit, to act contrary to all the natural Principles and Passions of the human Constitution, is absolutely incredible and cannot possible be proved.¹²⁹

Morgan does not deny the historicity of the Patriarchs, but he does attempt to contextualise their beliefs about God to explain away their vision of the divine. The reports of miracles associated with the Patriarchs, and divine favouritism towards the Hebrews also go unchallenged. What is challenged, however, is the response of the Hebrews to such miracles. Coming from a position of powerlessness, Morgan argues, the Hebrews responded in the first instance with gratitude and loyalty,¹³⁰ only to fall into idolatry whenever this power appears to desert them:¹³¹

In all this it is plain that they [the Hebrews] worshipped nothing but power. But Power thus continually employed for Devastation, War, and Destruction, carried no great Appearance of divine Power, which is always kind and beneficent...The true End of all Power, whether ordinary or extraordinary, is to do good; and where power is thus employed it proves the Righteousness of the Person, and the Goodness of his Temper and Intention, as a Friend to Mankind; and this Jesus Christ, the great and holy Prophet of our Possession, gave in a higher and more remarkable Degree than any other Person had ever done.¹³²

Morgan's refusal to argue for substantial continuity between the Old Testament and the New, between the religion of the 'power worshipping' Hebrews and the 'Goodness' manifest in Christ, helps to explain why he is treated by some historians as a modern Marcionite.¹³³ Reimarus does not quite follow the Welsh writer either in the extent of his depreciation of the God of the Hebrews or in his elevation of Jesus, but the parallels between the two should be clear enough: both judged that many figures of the Old Testament were unworthy of God, whether due to personal vice and ignorance or the worship of naked power in support of their interests; and that, by contrast, Jesus was committed to 'true inner and upright love of God, of one's neighbour and all that is

¹²⁹ Morgan, *Moral Philosopher* (vol. 1), pp. 133 – 134.

¹³⁰ See Morgan, 'Letter to Eusebius', in *ibid* (vol. 2), pp. 1 – 80: 10.

¹³¹ See *ibid*, p. 10.

¹³² Morgan, 'Letter to Eusebius', pp. 10 – 11.

¹³³ This was the view of no less a chronicler of Christian history than Harnack (see *Marcion*, p. 252). Morgan continues to be cited as a 'Marcion in his time' by contemporary authors: see van den Berg, 'English Deism and Germany: The Thomas Morgan Controversy', *Journal of Ecclesiastic History*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2008, pp. 48 – 61: 48.

good’;¹³⁴ for ‘to love God above all, and our Neighbour as ourselves, was the Sum and Substance, the End and Design of the whole Law’.¹³⁵ Both writers refer to the natural law and reason in their critiques of the Old Testament and their high estimation of Jesus and his teachings; in the following section, we will see how this Enlightenment concern for reason and natural law is matched by a concern with personal salvation and the means of obtaining it.

4. The Rise of Modern Pelagianism

(i) *Erasmus contra Luther; Augustine contra Pelagius; and Back Again*

The great Christian Humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466 – 1536) occupies an ambiguous position in the history of Christian thought: on the one hand, he is often treated by scholars as an indispensable figure for the intellectual history of the Reformation; on the other hand, he presented himself as a defender of Catholic orthodoxy, and was as good as his word in so far as he attacked the theology of the foremost reformer, Luther.¹³⁶ Pierre Bayle admired the scholarship and moral orientation of Erasmus, and regretted that he never joined the Reformation proper.¹³⁷ What seems certain is that, in so far as Erasmus did want to reform the Church, it was through drawing on the resources of morality and piety contained in the Gospels.¹³⁸ Erasmus had a healthy respect for Aquinas, ‘a man whose greatness has stood the test of time’,¹³⁹ but the ‘Angelic Doctor’ was a notable exception to an otherwise jaundiced view of the scholastics, especially the Scotists.¹⁴⁰ Erasmus looked primarily to the ancient fathers who differed enormously on matters of theological doctrine, but ‘agreed on the inculcation of the Christian life.’¹⁴¹

In his *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* (1501), Erasmus proposes the *philosophia Christi* as the guiding light of the Christian way of life.¹⁴² Notwithstanding his admiration for Aquinas, he queries whether it is plausible to expect persons to ‘bear about him’ the

¹³⁴ Reimarus, *Fragments* (7), p. 68.

¹³⁵ Morgan, *Moral Philosopher* (vol. 1.), p. 36.

¹³⁶ This was never enough to ensure his orthodox credentials in the eyes of some critics, who distrusted anyone who accorded so much value to the pagan classics: see Rupp, ‘Introduction: The Erasmian Enigma’, in *Luther and Erasmus* pp. 1–10.

¹³⁷ See Barbara Sher Tinsley, *Pierre Bayle’s Reformation: Conscience and Criticism on the Eve of the Enlightenment*, Selinsgrove, PA and Cranbury, NJ: Susquehanna University Press, 2001, chap. 1

¹³⁸ Rupp, ‘Erasmian Enigma,’ pp. 4–5.

¹³⁹ Erasmus, quoted in Albert Rabil, *Erasmus and the New Testament: The Mind of a Christian Humanist*, San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1972, p. 107; from LeClerc (ed.) *Erasmi Opera Omnia*, (vol. 6 of 10), 1703–1706, p. 554.

¹⁴⁰ See Rabil, *ibid*, p. 108.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 108.

¹⁴² Erasmus, *The Manuel of the Christian Knight*, London: Methuen and Co., 1905, p. 10.

'works of St Thomas',¹⁴³ and yet they are obligated to lead a 'good life', and so must be provided with the suitable resources for that end.¹⁴⁴ This 'good life' should be 'plain and open for every man...not by inexplicable crooks of disputations' without resolution,¹⁴⁵ but 'by true and sincere faith and charity not feigned.'¹⁴⁶ It was for the 'unlearned and rude multitude which Christ died for';¹⁴⁷ and his instruction was as fit for these lowly types as it was for any princes, teaching a 'virtue which hath inflamed men into a love thereof'.¹⁴⁸

Erasmus's vision of Christian reform based on commitment to the *philosophia Christi*, conceived as a life of virtue, contrasted with that of Luther, who was at the coalface of doctrinal controversy during his trailblazing project of reform. The relative simplicity of Erasmus's programme, in so far as he had one, did not protect it from Luther's bludgeoning style of theological engagement, or his lofty scorn, although Erasmus struck the first blow in this famous conflict. The latter's emphasis on the freedom of the will, in response to the example of Christ, was sufficient to raise the spectre of Pelagianism, which Luther regarded 'as the one perennial heresy of Christian history, which had never been fully exterminated and which, under the patronage of the church of Rome, had now become dominant.'¹⁴⁹ In the mind of Luther and other reformers, this deviant theology was everywhere apparent in the sixteenth-century; indeed, the term 'Pelagianism' functioned in a way not too dissimilar to 'atheism' during seventeenth and eighteenth-century England and 'communism' during the McCarthy era in the US: polemically and often imprecisely.¹⁵⁰

It is worthwhile making a distinction at this point between the theology of Pelagius (c. 354 – c. 420) the Irish (possibly British) monk,¹⁵¹ discussed and disputed by scholars immersed in what remains of his writings,¹⁵² and those elements of his theology that inspired the doctrines which carry his name.¹⁵³ My concern is with the latter; as Jaroslav

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 5. Erasmus's reference to the 'secunde' may suggest a reference to part two of the *ST*, which contains Aquinas's treatment of moral matters.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁴⁹ Pelikan, *Reformation*, p. 139.

¹⁵⁰ For an excellent account of the liberal use of the term atheist in England during the Enlightenment, see Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion*, chap. 1; on the anti-Communist excesses of McCarthyism, see James Rorty, *McCarthy and the Communists*, Boston: The Beacon Press, 1954.

¹⁵¹ See Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, p. 313.

¹⁵² See Alexander Souter (ed.), *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul* (3 vols.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922 – 1931.

¹⁵³ Pelagianism was officially condemned as a heresy at the Council of Ephesus in 431 (see Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, p. 318).

Pelikan writes, 'it was Pelagianism as a doctrinal option that determined the anti-Pelagian polemics of Augustine and the dogmatic formulations of the Western Church. An injustice may have been done, here as in other dogmatic debates, but it was an injustice which made history.'¹⁵⁴

The Pelagian 'doctrinal option' centred on the relationship between divine grace and perfection. Looking back on the controversy today, it seems fair to say that all the major theological players in the fifth-century agreed that grace was required, and so what we are dealing with is rival conceptions of grace. That perfection was a Christian requirement was evidenced in the Gospel of Mathew (5:47- 48): 'You must be perfect, just as your heavenly father is perfect.' As Augustine noted, this was 'an injunction which [Christ] would not have issued if he had known that which he enjoined was beyond achievement.'¹⁵⁵ Such Christian texts as the Sermon on the Mount and the mass of legal material in the Old Testament suggested that 'a man was able to respond to the commandments of God and could be held personally responsible if he failed to do so'.¹⁵⁶ But according to the doctrine of original sin, so prominent in Augustine,¹⁵⁷ Adam defiled all of human nature when he exercised his autonomy to disobey God ; as such, our inherited nature is too weak to direct the will to the good, to obey God's commands. It is only through the pure gift of God, therefore, that we are perfectible. We receive this grace through the revealed word of God in the Bible which climaxes in the revelation of his Son, through the continuing work of the Holy Spirit, the sacraments of the Church and especially baptism. But for Pelagius, the grace of God permeated the world he created, including human nature: 'This grace was not identical with nature or the law of creation, but all of these were major constitutes of it...[So] any disparagement of nature was simultaneously a disparagement of grace.'¹⁵⁸ According to Augustine, our unaided nature was so corrupt that it was necessary to attribute to divine grace 'the knowledge of the good, the joy in doing the good, and the capacity to will the good, while for Pelagius "the ability [posse]" came from God, but both "willing [velle]" and "acting [esse]" depended on the free decision of man.'¹⁵⁹ The logical outworking of Pelagius's moral-theological

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 313.

¹⁵⁵ Augustine, quoted in *ibid*, p. 313, from *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione, et de Baptismo Parvulorum* (412 CE).

¹⁵⁶ Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, p. 314.

¹⁵⁷ For most of the key texts, see Philip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* (vol. 5 of 14): *Saint Augustine's Anti-Pelagian Works*, Peter Homes, Robert Ernst Wallace and Benjamin B Warfield (trans.), New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1887.

¹⁵⁸ Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, p. 315.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 315; including quotes from Augustine's *De Gratiâ Christi* (418 CE).

reflections on the biblical record led many of his followers,¹⁶⁰ if not himself, towards the formation of two interconnected theses: 1) a denial that the sin of Adam was visited on his progeny, and 2) an affirmation of the freedom of persons to orientate themselves towards the good, fulfil their obligations to God and secure their salvation. It was this kind of reasoning which led Augustine to claim that Pelagius's doctrine 'defended the nature of man against the grace of God'.¹⁶¹ In their defence Pelagians could complain that far from maintaining theological tradition on divine grace, Augustine had introduced

a new doctrine of fate, since man could do nothing but sin unless God infused a new inclination into him against his will...Not by Adam's fall, transmitted through the propagation of the race by marriage and sex, was sin to be explained. For sin is "carried on by imitation, committed by the will, denounced by the reason, manifested by the law, punished by justice"; and none of these would be true if the doctrine of original sin prevailed.¹⁶²

By the sixteenth century and Luther's 'Reformation discovery' of justification by faith—and the fervent conviction that salvation was granted to the undeserving soul by the grace of God alone—it was no longer necessary to deny the taint of original sin outright to be regarded as a Pelagian: any theology which seemed to emphasise the autonomy of the will and the salvific significance of good works was sufficient to be judged heretical. In *De Libero Arbitrio* Erasmus showed sympathy with just such a theology; as such, he stood accused of Pelagianism; Erasmus denied this, and with good reason.¹⁶³ But why is this controversy significant for our discussion? It is significant because what we have in Erasmus is a radical voice of Christian reform committed to the word of God manifest in scripture, especially the Gospels, who nevertheless affirmed the power and freedom of the human will to fulfil our obligations to God. So this Pelagian tendency was already present at the highest levels of Christian learning in the century prior to the onset of the Enlightenment. Most of the figures of the Enlightenment examined in this study were

¹⁶⁰ Perhaps the most systematic theological statement to emerge from the tradition of Pelagius was one attributed to Celestius by Augustine.

¹⁶¹ Augustine, quoted in Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, p. 314; from *Retractationes* (c.427 CE).

¹⁶² Pelikan, *ibid.*, p. 315; including quotes from Augustine's *Contra secundam Juliani responsionem opus Imperfectum* (429 CE).

¹⁶³ Erasmus claimed to stand with 'those who ascribe something to free will, but most to grace' (quoted in Pelikan, *Reformation*, p. 140). The occasion for much of the earlier controversy was the meaning of baptism: Pelagians were allegedly discussing the baptism of infants in terms of 'sanctification' rather than 'forgiveness of sins'; this alerted Augustine to a possible challenge to original sin (see Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, pp. 316 – 318). There is no evidence that Erasmus ever denied original sin or the efficiency of baptism for the forgiveness of sin.

self-conscious heirs to the Reformation, and especially that Erasmian vision of reform through a return to the moral ethos of primitive Christian piety,¹⁶⁴ a vision which would be radicalised by intellectuals seemingly committed to perpetual religious reform.¹⁶⁵

(ii) Salvific Virtue: Spinoza's Ethical Christ

To move from the Catholic Humanist Erasmus to perhaps the most famous renegade from Judaism in modern times may seem like quite a leap, in both historical setting and intellectual outlook. And yet these Dutch virtuosos, Erasmus and Spinoza, shared an overarching concern with the promotion of peace in times of religious strife, and, more significantly, they were driven by ethical imperatives in their conceptualisation of religious piety and the use of scripture, with Jesus serving as the exemplar of both. Let us not underplay the differences, however. On the question of God's relationship to ethics, Spinoza stands at something of a tangent to nearly all figures discussed in this chapter; indeed, this is true of Spinoza on many questions, which helps to explain the growth in literature on a distinctively Spinozist tradition of Enlightenment. And yet Spinoza is comprehensible as a distinctive voice within the kind of debates I have been already been discussing.

It might be assumed that the salvific significance of Jesus was a nonissue for Spinoza: he came from a Jewish religious and cultural background, and, having being issued with a חרם or *cherem* (total exclusion) from the Sephardic Jewish community in Amsterdam (27 July 1656), he is not known to have professed allegiance to any particular religion thereafter.¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, after Spinoza was excommunicated, he relocated to Rijnsburg, noted for the activity of the radical Christian 'Colleges' that emerged during what is sometimes referred to as the Dutch Republic's 'second reformation'.¹⁶⁷ This Collegiant movement developed in reaction to the crushing defeat of the Arminian branch of Calvinism by the established Reformed version at the Synod of Dort (1619).¹⁶⁸ The Collegiants maintained a fervent opposition to the Roman Catholic Church but

¹⁶⁴ The importance of Erasmus's programme for the shape of subsequent biblical hermeneutics is emphasised In Reventlow, *Authority of the Bible*, pp. 39 – 48.

¹⁶⁵ The eighteenth century was awash with such figures, from the eccentric Arian and Newtonian Whiston, to The enigmatic Spinozist and herald of the universal Christ, Lessing. Such characters, all with slightly different projects of religious reform, populate the pages of Sheehan's *Enlightenment Bible*.

¹⁶⁶ See Asa Kasher and Shlomo Biderman, 'Why Was Baruch de Spinoza Excommunicated?', in David S Katz and Jonathan I Israel (eds.), *Sceptics, Millenarians and Jews*, Leiden: E J Brill, 1990, pp. 99 – 141; and the Introduction to Mason, *God of Spinoza*. The debate still continues on the question of just what the 'abominable heresies' and 'monstrous deeds' were that resulted in one of the most harshly worded *cherems* from the period.

¹⁶⁷ See Graeme Hunter, *Radical Protestantism in Spinoza's Thought*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, p. 38 – 45.

¹⁶⁸ See *Ibid*, p. 39.

rejected the attempt to replace 'Babylon' with a new institution, a rival power, with new creeds and new rites.¹⁶⁹ Not unlike the Quakers, they emphasised the '*innerlijke licht*' (inner light)' and the informal,¹⁷⁰ individual, but mutually supportive pursuit of holiness and virtue. Erasmus's vision of Church reform was not nearly radical enough for these Dutch Christians, but the Christo-centric private piety remained. Spinoza's connection with such figures was not merely one of geography, but of friendship and intellectual correspondence.¹⁷¹ Whatever Spinoza's reasons, intellectual or social,¹⁷² the issue of salvation and Jesus' role in it did matter to him, and his remarks about Jesus, especially in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, demand our attention.

Spinoza's interpretation of Jesus was controversial in his own time, and it remains so: some commentators have found Spinoza's writings imbued with Christian supercessionism, whether sincere or tactical.¹⁷³ But Spinoza's reverence for the man he 'regularly calls Christ' is partly explained by a judgement,¹⁷⁴ not unlike the one made by Reimarus almost a century later, that Jesus made eternal truths in Jewish tradition available to all persons,¹⁷⁵ some of whom had corrupted this gift from antiquity onwards through unwarranted philosophical and political encroachment.¹⁷⁶ How does Spinoza understand Jesus in relation to the Jewish tradition? Working within the framework of substance monism,¹⁷⁷ Spinoza naturalises revelation, defining prophesy as an exercise in the imaginative faculty, but these revelations, which teach moral and political obedience, are no less divine for being natural because, in Spinoza's system, there is no distinction.

¹⁶⁹ See *Ibid*, pp. 41 – 45.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 42.

¹⁷¹ They include others who turned their backs on business for a 'higher' calling, such as Jarig Jelles, and the Writer Pieter Balling (a Mennonite, as well as a Collegiant (see *ibid*, pp. 37 – 46)

¹⁷² Following his excommunication, Spinoza gravitated towards Christians with a radical social reform agenda, and those working at the cutting edge of natural philosophy. His approach to Christianity generally, and Jesus specifically, could conceivably have been adopted with a view to fostering a collegiate spirit among his new friends and intellectual interlockers, but this would seem to be against the whole spirit of intellectual independence and freedom of expression which characterised his thought and life. I take it, contra Leo Strauss (see below), that Spinoza was sincere in his public and private writings about Christianity.

¹⁷³ Leo Strauss advanced the 'double meaning' thesis in relation to Spinoza's writings, at least those published in his lifetime: like other writers working in fear of persecution, so this argument goes, Spinoza's work has an 'exoteric' meaning, intelligible to unsophisticated readers, and an 'esoteric' meaning, which betrays the author's true intentions but is only intelligible to a sophisticated 'in crowd': see Strauss's *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft* (1930): or *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, E M Sinclair (ed. & trans.), New York: Schocken Books, 1965.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 171.

¹⁷⁵ For Spinoza, Paul is also a key figure in making this case to Jews and gentiles alike (see *TPT*, pp. 44 – 45); indeed, the New Testament as a whole is regarded by Spinoza as a collection of texts written with one end in view: the promotion of a universal religion (see p 153).

¹⁷⁶ See *ibid*, chaps. 7, 13.

¹⁷⁷ It is not clear if this radical metaphysical perspective developed in response to his independent reading of such figures as Descartes, or whether this had been acquired already under the tutelage of the radical former Jesuit, van den Enden. For the latter view, see Wim N A Klever, 'A New Source for Spinozism: Franciscus Van den Enden, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 29, 1991, pp. 613 – 631.

Jesus is understood by Spinoza to be an advance on, but not a break from, ancient prophetic religion.¹⁷⁸ What I mean by ‘an advance’ is that he helped to propagate a ‘universal faith’ from principles previously treated as belonging to a single religio-political community (ancient Israel), which have a fundamentally ethical orientation (the tenants of the ‘universal faith’ are discussed at length in Chapter Nine). More specifically, Jesus was judged by Spinoza to have paid more attention to the proximate causes of moral transgression than his predecessors: our errant desires. The latter point can be illustrated by considering Spinoza’s juxtaposition of Jesus and Moses.

Spinoza regarded Moses as a great leader who used imaginative imagery and forceful rhetoric to secure authority for a legal framework necessary to sustain a political and religious community,¹⁷⁹ but, once such a community and their leader ceased to exist, the moral content of the revelation is liable to be lost. Jesus, by contrast, preached the Jewish commands of love of God and neighbour outside the context of a formal religio-political role, and without the pragmatic need to maintain social cohesion:

Moses does not justify his precepts by reasoning, but attaches to his command a penalty...his command not to commit adultery has regard only to the good of the commonwealth and state. If he had intended this to be a moral precept that had regard not merely to the good of the commonwealth but to the peace of mind and the true blessedness of the individual, he would have condemned not merely the external act, but the very wish, as did Christ, who taught only universal moral precepts.¹⁸⁰

For a non-Christian philosopher to portray Jesus as a commendable moralist does not in itself seem surprising, but, in Spinoza's system, an intuitive grasp of universal moral precepts requires higher knowledge of *Deus sive natura*, a knowledge framed by Spinoza in the following way:

I do not believe that anyone has attained such a degree of perfection surpassing all others, except Christ. To him God's ordinances leading men to salvation were revealed not by words or by visions, but directly, so that God manifested himself

¹⁷⁸ Whether Spinoza understood Jesus to be a philosopher or prophet is a matter of dispute: for some remarks in support for the former, see Mason, *God of Spinoza*, p. 222; for a nuanced discussion which takes the opposite view, see Donagan, ‘Spinoza’s Theology’, in *Companion to Spinoza*, pp. 367 – 374. I am inclined towards the prophet conception, since Spinoza conceived of the philosopher as one who derives his ethical (and all other) judgements systematically from first principles; clearly, Jesus does not appear to reason in this way.

¹⁷⁹ See Spinoza, *TPT*, especially chap. 17.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 61.

to the Apostles through the mind of Christ as he once did to Moses...The Voice of Christ can thus be called the Voice of God in the same way that Moses heard. In that sense it can also be said that the Wisdom of God— that is, wisdom that is more than human—took on human nature in Christ, and that Christ was the way of salvation.¹⁸¹

But what can Spinoza mean by that ‘wisdom which is more than human’ which was made manifest in Christ? And what does it mean for Christ to be ‘the way of salvation’? Spinoza quotes with approval an argument he extrapolates from Paul’s Letter to the Romans: ‘Paul concludes that, since God is the God of all nations...and since all mankind were equally under the law and under sin, it was for all nations that God sent his Christ to free all men alike from the bondage of the law’.¹⁸² Spinoza can sound rather Lutheran when he is quoting such passages—with the juxtaposition of sin, bondage to the law and freedom through Christ—but, in Spinoza’s naturalised theology, our bondage is due to irrational passions *acting on us as*, rather than the consequences of sin. This can be illustrated in part four of the *Ethica*: ‘For the man who is subject to affects is under control, not of himself, but of fortune, in whose power he so greatly is that often, though he sees the better for himself, he is still forced to follow the worse.’¹⁸³ Although Spinoza’s explicit engagement with the Bible is minimal in the *Ethica*, having read him on Paul in the *Tractatus*, it is difficult to read this passage and not think of Romans 7 and Paul’s description of the human struggle with sin, especially verse 19: οὐ γὰρ ὁ θέλω ποιῶ ἀγαθόν, ἀλλὰ ὁ οὐ θέλω κακὸν τοῦτο πράσσω (For I do not do the good that I will, but the evil that I do not will.’¹⁸⁴ Spinoza appears to naturalise Pauline insights into human bondage, and his solution for overcoming bondage is likewise naturalistic, coming with scant reference to divine revelation.¹⁸⁵ In the *Tractatus* and in his personal correspondence, however, we get a fuller insight into how Spinoza naturalises theology and how he imagines, from his philosophical perspective, that Christ might liberate us.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p. 14.

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 45.

¹⁸³ Spinoza, *Ethics*, Preface to pt iv, p. 113.

¹⁸⁴ Indeed, one could compare Romans 7:18-20: whereas Paul thought that human judgements about the good are impeded by sin, Spinoza regarded this impediment as the result of the affects / emotions. In both cases there is a sense of human beings being *acted on*, rather than being free to follow the good.

¹⁸⁵ Although even in the *Ethics* Spinoza talks about ‘the spirit of Christ, that is... the idea of God, of which alone it depends that man should be free, and desire for other men the good he desired for himself’ (schol. to prop. 67, p. 152).

Such liberation certainly does not come through his atoning death and our faith in his Resurrection.¹⁸⁶

It is through practical religion, rather than speculative theology, that we are saved, and Spinoza defers to Luther's biblical *bête noire* to make the point: '[F]aith does not bring salvation through itself, but only by reason of obedience; or, as James says (ch. 2 v. 17), faith in itself without works is dead.'¹⁸⁷ What are these works, and how do they liberate? In some respects, they remain works of the law, but we are back once again to those moral features of the law. According to Spinoza, the religion preached by the apostles 'consists essentially in moral teachings as does the whole of Christ's doctrine, [and] can be readily grasped by the natural light of reason.'¹⁸⁸ The moral features of the law are then rendered into universal moral truths as distinct from duties to the state: 'In this way he [Jesus] freed them from bondage to the law, while nevertheless giving further strength and stability to the law, inscribing it deep into their hearts.'¹⁸⁹

In the *Ethica* Spinoza makes it clear that liberation comes from greater understanding of those causes, especially the passions, which frustrate our power to flourish as self preserving creatures of reason; in becoming aware of these passions, and in understanding them, we become active in our own being and thereby achieve a certain freedom.¹⁹⁰ This is a highly intellectualised account of freedom, quite unlike common notions of freedom of the will which assume that persons have the power to make choices other than the one ones they do actually make: Spinoza was a hard determinist, holding that events in the world, including our actions, are not merely necessitated by their physical causes, but that those events follow their causes with the force of *logical* necessity.¹⁹¹ On the other hand, not unlike the Stoics,¹⁹² Spinoza thought that our realisation of the necessity of events is one important component in our liberation from our enslavement to external affects: 'In so far as the mind understands all things as necessary, it has a greater power over the affects, or is less acted on by them.'¹⁹³

¹⁸⁶ As Spinoza told Henry Oldenburg, he understood the Resurrection in an 'allegorical sense', although the disciples may have understood it as a real event: see letter 73 in Shirley (ed.), *Spinoza: The Letters*, S. Barbone, L. Rice and J. Adler (intro. & trans.), Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995, p. 333.

¹⁸⁷ Spinoza, *TPT*, p. 165.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, pts iv - v. Although pt v is called 'Of the Power of the Intellect, or On Human Freedom', much of what Spinoza considered to be required to achieve freedom is contained in pt iv, 'Of Human Bondage, or The Powers of the Effects'.

¹⁹¹ Key passages would include *Ethics*, pt i, prop. 29, dem.

¹⁹² Although Spinoza criticises the Stoics for overestimating the power of the rational mind over the passions (see *ibid.*, Preface to pt. v, pp. 160 - 161).

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, pt v, prop. 6, p. 165.

Spinoza tended towards a form of egoism in his ethical thinking; as such, sadness is to be avoided since it is damaging to our power and our joy.¹⁹⁴ Sadness is diminished by recognising that our losses and failures are natural necessities, rather than the deprivation of things which might well have worked out in our favour.¹⁹⁵ Leaving aside Spinoza's rather optimistic faith in the acceptance of determinism as a therapy for personal loss or failure, what is interesting is how this philosophical psychology finds expression in his interpretation of Jesus' teachings. In the case of adultery, for example, Jesus condemns those desires which lay behind such ignoble actions; as such, he is engaged, on an intuitive level, in the same project that Spinoza envisages for the rational man: bringing into awareness those passions which have the power to enslave us and motivate destructive actions. Some of Jesus' other pronouncements are potentially more problematic for Spinoza, however.

In the *Tractatus* Spinoza refers to one of Jesus' teachings from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 4): μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται (Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted). As we have seen, mourning for some loss or failure is something Spinoza felt could and should be treated by accepting that those events which caused our sadness occurred by necessity; as such, proclaiming the blessedness of those in a state of mourning would seem to be celebrating our surrender to the passions. It would be taking outrageous liberties with the text to suggest that Jesus was talking about the happiness which would be enjoyed by persons once they reconciled themselves to the necessity of events, but, following the tradition of interpreting scripture through scripture, Spinoza offers an alternative interpretation which avoids the impression that Jesus is talking about grief per se:

[W]e do not know from this text [Matthew 5: 4] what kinds of mourners are meant. But as Christ therefore teaches that we should take thought for nothing save only the kingdom of God and His righteousness, which he commands as his highest good (Matth. ch. 6 v. 33), it follows that by mourners he means only those who mourn for man's disregard for the kingdom of God and His righteousness; for only this can be the cause of mourning for those who love nothing but the kingdom of God...¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ See *ibid*, pt iii, props. 11 – 30.

¹⁹⁵ See *ibid*, pt v, prop. 6.

¹⁹⁶ Spinoza, *TPT*, p. 94.

Perhaps the μακάριοι in this passage does indeed include those ‘who mourn for man’s disregard for the Kingdom of God’,¹⁹⁷ but we cannot say with any confidence that those who πενθοῦντες are restricted to such a group.¹⁹⁸ More significantly, the question of what Jesus actually meant by the Kingdom of God is passed over without analysis: given that most modern scholars have regarded the Kingdom as central to Jesus’ public mission, this might be regarded as an exegetical oversight. Of the candidate theories we have already encountered—political, moral and apocalyptic—it is a purely ethical Kingdom which comes closest to Spinoza’s conception, and this is most consistent with the overall purposes of his philosophy: the ethical betterment of humanity. Still, he does not argue for this interpretation, and, in the absence of radical historical reconstruction, it is doubtful that the synoptic Gospels can support such a reading.¹⁹⁹ If Spinoza is one of the first moderns to argue that it was Jesus’ moral character and the ethical nature of his public mission which marked him out as having a uniquely close relationship with God, he is also one of the first modern writers for whom Jesus seems to have a unique relationship to his own philosophy.²⁰⁰ According to Graeme Hunter, however, the life of Jesus is just one crucial phase in the history of ‘progressive revelation’,²⁰¹ preceded by the prophets, followed by the apostles, and climaxing with Spinoza himself!²⁰²

The merits or problems with Spinoza’s philosophical appropriation of Jesus are not my concern here. What is of relevance is the extent to which Spinoza’s morass of theological outrages—from an orthodox Christian point of view—overlap with the broad aims of the modern Pelagian tendency I have described: as a Jew by upbringing, it is not a surprise that Spinoza he did not acknowledge original sin,²⁰³ and, although he recognised the

¹⁹⁷ As one exegete has written, ‘Blessed are the disciples who mourn because God gets so little chance in their lives because they are so far removed from the ideal of the gospel. Blessed are the disciples of Jesus who mourn because the world...shows so little of the realisation of God’s kingdom’ (Herman Hendrickx, *The Sermon on the Mount: Studies in the Synoptic Gospels*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984, p. 22).

¹⁹⁸ The most obvious association many will make is with grief for the dead, and in the Septuagint version of Genesis 23:2, πενθήσαι is used to signify precisely this. A more obvious intertextual relationship, however, would be with Isaiah 61:2, where, again in the Septuagint, the context for comforting those who mourn (πενθοῦντας) is, on the one hand, the suffering of the poor (61:1)—which corresponds with the first of the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount—and, on the other hand, persons said to be held captive (61:1). See the discussion in A. J. Grieve, ‘Matthew’, in *A Commentary on the Bible*, Arthur S Peake (ed.), with Grieve, London: Nelson, 1919, pp. 700 – 723.

¹⁹⁹ Some ethical readings of Jesus’ mission, such as the ethical eschatology of Crossan, command serious attention from scholars today, but they often rely on highly stratified treatments of the Gospels and a range of additional sources (especially the Gospel of Thomas) beyond anything Spinoza entertained.

²⁰⁰ Major philosophers of the later Enlightenment who fall into this category are Kant in *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen* and Rousseau in *Emile*, although it is to be found in a host of others: Erasmus, Toland, Chubb Morgan and Lessing, and many more.

²⁰¹ Hunter, *Radical Protestantism*, p. 56.

²⁰² See *ibid.*, pp. 56 – 66.

²⁰³ There is no mention of this Christian doctrine in either the *TPT* or the *Ethics*, although the sin of Adam is

extent to which we are bound by the passions (sinful inclinations to the Pelagian), we have it within our power, as potentially rational modes of the divine substance,²⁰⁴ to reach that ‘true salvation and blessedness’,²⁰⁵ which consists in ‘contentment of mind.’²⁰⁶ In short, Spinoza naturalises the Pelagian tendency of Erasmus and other reforming Christians: salvation is retained as a legitimate aim, though it is not understood in terms of God’s judgement of our souls in the afterlife, but in terms of improved psychological well being brought about through greater understanding of those affects which threaten to render us passive rather than active beings. There is, it must be said, Spinoza’s notoriously enigmatic claim that, ‘The human mind cannot absolutely be destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal.’²⁰⁷ This ‘eternal part of the mind’ is identified with the ‘intellect’,²⁰⁸ and, in so far as the intellect understands, it is said to belong to ‘God’s eternal and infinite intellect’.²⁰⁹ Moreover, there is reason to suppose that ethical understanding, best exemplified by Jesus, might be included—along with the truths of mathematics and natural philosophy—among those truths preserved in God’s ‘eternal and infinite intellect’.²¹⁰ Of course this is some way removed from the kind of eternal bliss or damnation of the traditional Christian picture, but Spinoza could agree with Erasmus that persons are capable of working towards the most exalted state possible through the exercise of their own intellect, using the natural resources provided by God, and sound moral pedagogy with Jesus as the central reference point.

(iii) *Ethical Providence and Christian Origins: From Spinoza to the Anglophone ‘Deists’*

Although the traditional Christian idea of a providential reign over a created cosmos, with Jesus as a redeeming figure, is ruled out by Spinoza’s metaphysic of divine immanence, Jesus did as a matter of fact (in Spinoza’s judgement) live a life which, once internalised and retold by his followers, helped to make universal ethical religion a more realisable goal than it had previously been: ‘To him God’s ordinances leading men to salvation were revealed not by words or visions but directly, so that God manifested himself to the

mentioned in the former (p. 54, 56 - 37); and in the latter in connection with the fall of humanity from freedom and reason (pt iv, schol. to prop. 68).

²⁰⁴ The fullest account of this in *Ethics*, pt ii.

²⁰⁵ Spinoza, *TPT*, p.101.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁰⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics*, prop. 22, p. 172.

²⁰⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, cor. to prop. 40, p. 179. On this account, personal aspects of human existence (memory, imagination etc.) do not survive the death of the body.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, cor. to prop. 40, p. 179.

²¹⁰ See Mason, *God of Spinoza*, p. 245.

Apostles through the mind of Christ'.²¹¹ The universal application of this revelation was appreciated by Paul in his Letter to the Romans, and in promising freedom from the 'bondage of the law... Paul's teaching coincides exactly with ours.'²¹² It is well known that Paul's teachings about the 'meaning of Christ' has 'coincided' with the ideas of many theologians and philosophers, from Martin Luther to Alain Badiou.²¹³ It is seldom pointed out that Spinoza must count among them. A common theme in many of these readings of Paul is the idea of a more or less radical break from religious particularity and a move towards universality; sometimes this is thought about within a providential theological framework (Luther), sometimes through a materialistic and socio-political framework (Badiou). Spinoza understood providence within an immanent theological framework, redefined in terms of our intellectual and moral responses to natural / divine causes. For Spinoza, in so far as the apostles responded to their encounters with Christ by instilling in others the need to regulate the affects (sinful inclinations), and, in so far as they did so without regard for the nation or race of the potential convert, then the early Christians can be said to have been imbued with the wisdom of God.

We have already noted the connection between the thought of John Toland and Spinoza. In his early work Toland also emphasised the seemingly 'matter of fact' nature of religious advancement brought about by the birth of Christianity. In earlier chapters I have acknowledged the continuing relevance of Peter Gay's 'appeal to antiquity' as an interpretative lens through which to view some major developments in the Enlightenment; indeed, I have sought to illustrate that relevance with the temporal scope of this chapter. But for many British and Irish writers, as for Spinoza before them, there was no unqualified love-in with pagan antiquity.

Toland compares the message of the apostles favourably with the teachings of ancient philosophers, some of whom 'could get the wildest Paradox to Pass for Demonstration.'²¹⁴ In defending reason over against 'philosophy', Toland interprets Colossians 2.8 thus:²¹⁵

²¹¹ Spinoza, *TPT*, p. 14.

²¹² *Ibid*, p. 45.

²¹³ Luther's 'Reformation discovery' was famously made in the course of his study of Paul. An important and relatively recent example of Pauline themes finding their way into the philosophy of a writer outside the Christian tradition—and therefore offering a better parallel for Spinoza—would be Badiou's *St Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Ray Brassier (trans.), Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2003.

²¹⁴ Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, p. 54.

²¹⁵ 'βλέπετε μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν' (Be sure that no one traps you, depriving you of your freedom, by some second hand, empty, rational philosophy based on the principles of this world, instead of on Christ).

By *Philosophy* is not here understood *sound* Reason...but the Systems of *Plato*, of *Aristotle*, of *Epicurus*, of the *Academicks*, &c. many of whose Principles are directly repugnant to common Sense and good Morals. Sophistry was never more in vogue than in the Days of *Paul*.²¹⁶

How did Christianity combat this 'sophistry'? Jesus, in 'fully and clearly' preaching the 'purest morals' came to fulfil the law spoken about in the Old Testament:

[H]e taught that reasonable Worship, and those Just conceptions of Heaven and Heavenly things, which were more obscurely signifi'd or design'd by the Legal Observations. So having stripp'd the Truth of all those external Types and Ceremonies which made it difficult before, he render'd it easy and obvious to the meanest capacities.²¹⁷

Like Spinoza and Erasmus, Toland was keen to emphasise the simplicity of Jesus' message, thereby keeping his teaching accessible to all persons, without the need for priestly mediation, while at the same time signalling Jesus' rare if not unique conception of those moral-theological truths which are deemed to be at the heart of true religion. In Toland's treatment of the early history of Christianity, there is, on the one hand, the familiar Reformation and Spinozist critique whereby 'right religion' falls away from divine truth and into priestly corruption. On the other hand, there is a replaying of the biblical pattern of Israelite disobedience and idolatry, whereby the wisdom of Christ was quickly subverted by the forces of superstition, material self interest and the temptations offered by the pagan world: Jesus' 'Disciples and followers kept to this Simplicity for some considerable time',²¹⁸ but the Christian proclamation was threatened from all sides:

The converted *Jews*, who continu'd mighty fond of their *Levitical* Rites and Feasts, would willingly retain them, and be Christians too...But this was nothing compar'd to the Injury done to Religion by the Gentiles...They were not a little scandaliz'd at the plain Dress of the *Gospel*, with the wonderful Facility of the Doctrines it contain'd, having been accustomed all their Lives to the pompous Worship and secret Mysteries of Deities without Number.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, p. 121.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 151.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 151.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 152.

So both Jews and pagans stand accused here, but it is the latter who bear the brunt of Toland's criticisms.²²⁰ For Toland, the apostles had understood the simple power of the mission of Christ, and communicated it to a Jewish and pagan world crying out for religious correction, and his description of the nature and the effect of the gospel is imbued with Spinozist idealisation and rationalisation:

[T]he scope of the Apostles was very different: Piety towards God, and the Peace of Mankind, was their Gain, and *Christ* and his *Gospel* their Glory; they came not magnifying nor exalting; nor imposing but declaring their Doctrine: they did not confound and mislead, but convince the Mind; they were employ'd to dispel Ignorance, to eradicate Superstition, to propagate Truth, and Reformation of Manners; to *preach Deliverance to Captives, (i.e.)* the Enjoyment of Christian Liberty to the Slaves of the Levitical, and Pagan Priesthoods; and to declare Salvation to repenting Sinners.²²¹

Just what Toland means by salvation is never made clear, although there is implicit support elsewhere in this particular text for the immortality of the soul.²²² What is clear is that Toland has no truck with those who want to argue that our rational human nature is so radically corrupted by sin that we lack the capacity to attain salvation—whether in this life or the next—by our own efforts: 'We lie under no necessary Fate of sinning. There is no Defect in our Understanding but those of our own Creation, that is to say, *vicious habits easily contracted, but difficultly reformed.*'²²³ Indeed, he goes much further than the determinist Spinoza, describing '*Freewill*' as 'the noblest and most useful of all our faculties',²²⁴ taking the line adopted by Erasmus in his clash with Luther, whereby our freedom is a reasonable presumption if there is to be any justice in our being judged for our success or failure to conform to the demands of the divine will.²²⁵ Whatever ambiguity might be said to remain in Toland's early vision of salvation and Christ's role in it, there is none of this in the writing of one of the later 'deists', Thomas Chubb.

²²⁰ An undercurrent in many treatments of alleged corruption to Christianity is what that corruption can tell us about the Catholic Church: for those who want to charge the Church of Rome with legalism and bombastic ceremonialism, then Judaism is the preferred point of comparison; if idolatry is the charge, then pagans are the target.

²²¹ Ibid, p. 54.

²²² See *ibid*, pp. 64 – 65.

²²³ Ibid, p. 58.

²²⁴ Ibid, p. 61.

²²⁵ See *ibid*, pp. 59 – 60.

Like Erasmus, Spinoza and Toland, Chubb denies that reason has been corrupted by sin to the extent that we lack the power to attain salvation,²²⁶ and this denial is accompanied in his thinking with a more traditional conception of divine providence,²²⁷ which would allow him to see Jesus not merely as a singularly important figure in religious history, but as an agent chosen by God in the course of his benevolent governing of the universe. In his *True Gospel*, Chubb agrees with the general thrust of Toland's thinking at the time he wrote *Christianity Not Mysterious*, in so far as the 'vices and wickedness' of those in the age of Jesus had made 'themselves *unworthy of God's favour*, and had exposed themselves to his just displeasure'.²²⁸ As for the role of Jesus in this chapter of the story of providence, on the basis of the Gospels, he concludes that

the *great end* and the *professed design* which Christ came into the world to prosecute was to procure their salvation; which in other words is the same as to say that the great end and design was to prepare men for, and to *insure* to them the *favour of God*; and their *happiness* in another world.²²⁹

This is clearly a vision of salvation which, in one sense, would be at home in some medieval and early Reformation Christian contexts, but the difference here is that it is through an appropriate *moral response to the message of Jesus*, not faith in his divine personhood or in his Resurrection, that secures our salvation. As we saw in the previous chapter, this insistence that it was the moral message of Jesus that saves was even maintained by Reimarus in his notorious *Fragments*.

4. Conclusion

From antiquity onwards the question of God's goodness has posed significant problems for both pagan and Christian thinkers: conceptual problems arising within moral philosophy; historical and ethical problems arising from the study of texts purporting to represent God. Intellectuals have responded to these challenges in various ways: in some cases they have tended towards a highly abstract and idealised theology (Plato); in other cases they have dropped the offending texts and embraced those which speak of a God

²²⁶ He devoted an earlier work to this very subject: Chubb, *Human Nature Vindicated*, London, 1726.

²²⁷ See, for instance, Chubb's 'Short Dissertation on Providence' appended to the *True Gospel*, where, although Chubb clearly places greatest emphasis on 'general' providence conceived as the natural resources provided by God in the act of creation (pp. 197 – 209), he has no quarrel with the 'particular' providence of God, whereby the deity may bring about states of affairs in the world which are necessary to answer to specific human needs not provided for by general providence (p. 210).

²²⁸ Chubb, *True Gospel*, p. 2.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

deemed worthy of our worship (Marcion). Both these approaches threaten the integrity of Christian monotheism as a revealed religion manifest in the Bible. One of the most influential Christian responses has been mined from the thought of Aquinas and the doctrine of divine simplicity.

In this account, the final end for all persons is happiness, and our happiness is ultimately to be found in the return to our creator, God. God is good in so far as he is the proper end towards which our desires tend; this ultimate good, and the many lesser goods we strive for, may be discovered by rational reflection on our God given natural inclinations, and the extent to which they promote the common good: the natural law at work in creation. The natural law, like all creation, is the ultimate outcome not of the divine will, but of God's reason or intellect, which is identical to the good, and which shapes the character of divine law. The philosophical perspective of Aquinas himself could only rationalise, not criticise, the ways of God and Christ within the biblical narrative: that narrative was historically and theologically indispensable. In medieval nominalism and early Reformation thought, rationalism itself was challenged by even grander, monarchical conceptions of God, whereby the deity is understood as a cosmic legislator with the liberty to redefine the good at any moment, potentially defying all human reason and desire: the logic of God need show no affinity with the logic of humanity to warrant humanity's submission. But rationalism survived this attack and remerged as a major moral theology in the work of Suarez, Grotius and Leibniz; the Cambridge Platonists; English legal and political theorists from Hooker to Locke; many of the British and Irish 'deists', and in Reimarus himself.

This rationalistic vision of divine goodness asserted itself alongside a particular strand of the Reformation. Against Luther, Erasmus affirmed the freedom to conform to God's commands. For Erasmus, what God wants of us is most fully revealed in the *philosophia Christi* and the best way of reforming the Church, and of gaining salvation, lay in our commitment to that philosophy. In the following century Spinoza affirmed a similar programme of reform, albeit one shorn of traditional Christian metaphysics and supernaturalism. Throughout the Enlightenment, from Spinoza to Reimarus, one frequently finds a commitment to combinations, if not all, of the following positions: 1) that God's will is bound by moral reason; 2) that the divine law, shaped by the divine intellect, is manifest in human nature conceived as natural law; 3) that human beings are capable of obedience to the dictates of divine law, either because original sin is rejected,

or because it does not have a decisive effect on our autonomy; 4) and that Christ was uniquely blessed with insights into the nature of divine law, and that his example shows the way to salvation.

The Pelagianism implied by (at least) the third of those positions was everywhere apparent in Karl Barth's analysis of religious thought in the high Enlightenment. He judged Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writings about religion in *Emile*, where an ethical Christ is central,²³⁰ to be 'the height and apotheosis of the Pelagian Humanism which was triumphant in the eighteenth century.'²³¹ Indeed, Barth claimed in *Die Protestantische Theologie in 19. Jahrhundert* (1946), that, 'It is from Rousseau onwards and originating from Rousseau that the thing called theological rationalism, in the full sense of the term, exists'.²³² What I have tried to show in this chapter is that such rationalism, and Jesus' place within it, was a very long time in the making, with orthodox as well as heterodox sources, and cannot simply be seen as the expression of a peculiar combination of intellectual skepticism and moral optimism characteristic of the eighteenth century.

The Enlightenment's ethical Christ was especially venerated within the context of private piety, with limited association with any particular Church. But securing the freedom to be open about such a religion was a battle which had yet to be won; in an attempt to win it, the Christ of private piety was brought into the public square for a political-theological crusade for religious toleration. It is to this cause of toleration, within the wider context of political theology, that we now turn.

²³⁰ The relevant text here is the confession of faith by the character of the Savoyard Vicar in bk. iv of *Emile*. A Pelagian tendency has also been identified with the thought of that other great eighteenth century moralist and contributor to the modern 'ethical Christ' paradigm, Kant (see McCarthy, *Philosophical Jesus*, p. 77).

²³¹ Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: It's Background and History* (new edn), Bowden & B. Cozens (trans.), Colin Gunton (intro.), Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002, p. 161.

²³² *Ibid*, p. 219.

PART IV: POLITICAL THEOLOGY

CHAPTER NINE

Jesus and Political Theology

1. Political Theology and Schweitzer's Quest

(i) *Putting Jesus in his Place*:¹

When modern intellectuals write about Jesus in political terms, they tend to be doing one of the following: 1) producing historical studies which insist on the importance of politics for understanding Jesus as a figure of his own time;² or 2) appealing to Jesus as a source of inspiration or authority for certain political ideas or arguments.³ Sometimes, of course, they do both.⁴ In Albert Schweitzer's *Reimarus zu Wrede*, the concrete political context for the historical Jesus is mostly subsumed into the apocalyptic enthusiasm of his religious milieu, and while Schweitzer did take Jesus as a source of inspiration for his own worldview, he did so in a self-consciously discriminating way: drawing on the moral energy while abandoning the apocalyptic mind-set.

Schweitzer objected to any attempt to make the historical Jesus conform to the dominant moral and theological values of the modern age (as he saw them). Schweitzer thought this modernising project was a demonstrable failure as a historical research project, but he also considered it bad for theology. While soaring in his praise for the achievements of German scholarship, he was wary of new theological elites becoming as stifling of the individual religious conscience as the ecclesiastical elites of old:

¹ I have borrowed this phrase from the title of Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, but it is used with a different emphasis here (see below).

² Although very different in method and emphasis, Crossan's *Historical Jesus*, Horsley's *Spiral of Violence*, and Wright's *Victory of God* would all count as major late twentieth-century studies which do this.

³ Examples of this are legion; some of them notorious: Jesus has been appropriated by card carrying Nazis (see Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*); and by political radicals of a very different stripe, in the jungles and urban centres of South America, encapsulated by the slogan attributed to the Colombian Catholic Priest and revolutionary Camilo Torres: 'si Jesús viviera, sería guerrillero' (If Jesus were alive, he would be a guerrilla): for a collection of his musings see Diego Baccarelli (ed.), *Camilo Torres: Vidas Rebeldes*, New York: Ocean Sur, 2009. More measured uses in contemporary contexts can be found in the writings of figures as varied as the conservative philosopher Scruton in his discussion of the separation of political and religious spheres of life, and the anarchist Chomsky in his criticisms of US 'hypocrisy' in matters of foreign policy: see Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalisation and the Terrorist Threat*, London / New York: Continuum, 2002, pp. 3 – 4; and 'Noam Chomsky on the Middle East and the US War on Terrorism' (interview by Evan Solomon), *Dissident Voice* (on-line) 28 July 2002, accessed 24 March 2011: http://dissidentvoice.org/Articles/Chomsky_DVHotType.htm

⁴ An important late twentieth-century example was John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, Mich., Wm. B Eerdmans, 1972; more recently there is Crossan's *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now*, New York: HarperOne, 2007; Terry Eagleton's Introduction to *Jesus Christ: The Gospels*, with Giles Fraser, London: Verso, 2008; and Moxnes's *Rise of Nationalism*, chap. vii.

We modern theologians are too proud of our historical method, too proud of our historical Jesus, too confident in our belief in the spiritual gains which our historical theology can bring to the world...There was a danger of our thrusting ourselves between men and the Gospels, and refusing to leave the individual man alone with the sayings of Jesus...Many of the greatest sayings are found lying in a corner like explosive shells...⁵

Whatever the value of historical knowledge, for Schweitzer 'it cannot call Spiritual life into existence',⁶ which for the modern Christian only comes through mystical encounter with the will of Jesus. So my reference to Schweitzer 'putting Jesus in his place' means two things: 1) it means the historian putting Jesus him back into the context of first-century Judaism; and 2) it means that anyone with a spiritual hunger, historian or layperson, must put Jesus back into the Gospels as they stand, and allow him to speak to the individual conscience with the immediate theological force which has impressed itself on the minds of men and women throughout the ages.

(ii) Liberalism and Political Theology

As we saw in Chapter Five, self-consciously 'liberal religion' often places an emphasis on ethics, and do doubt this moral dimension was manifest in the social conscience of self-avowed liberals among nineteenth-century German scholars. In one sense, this is the kind of political theology Schweitzer disliked: in his review of Daniel Schenkel's 1864 *Das Charakterbild Jesu* (The Portrait of Jesus), Schweitzer writes,

In his anxiety to eliminate any enthusiastic elements from the representation of Jesus, he ends by drawing a bourgeois Messiah...He feels bound to save the credit of Jesus by showing that the entry into Jerusalem was not intended as a provocation to the government...There is never far to look for the moral of the history, and the Jesus here portrayed can be imagined plunging into the midst of the debates in any ministerial conference. The moralising, it must be admitted, sometimes becomes the occasion of the feeblest ineptitudes. Jesus sent out His disciples two and two; this is for Schenkel a marvellous exhibition of wisdom. The Lord designed, thereby, to show that in His opinion "nothing is more inimical to the interests of the Kingdom of God than individualism, self-will, self-pleasing."⁷

⁵ Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 400.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 399.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 206 – 208.

This is a typically cutting riposte to scholars that Schweitzer suspected of trying to make Jesus a ‘fellow traveller’ through modernity. But we must recall the Janus face of Schweitzer’s engagement with liberalism: naturalistic, ethical eschatology—preferred by liberal Christian thinkers then as now—was at the heart of Schweitzer’s own religious commitment. Schweitzer took his ethical inspiration from Jesus, while insisting that *historians* resist the temptation to naturalise and modernise the intellectual categories of Jesus and his teaching in an attempt to free him from the ‘late Jewish metaphysics’,⁸ in which his ethical commitment took root, blossoming into the desire for a complete ‘moral consummation of all things.’⁹ For despite the intellectual necessity, as Schweitzer saw it, for the modern person to eschew apocalypticism, ‘moral consummation’ remained, for Schweitzer, the proper end of the religious quest, and the adoption of this ‘ethical eschatology’ requires nothing less than ‘fighting for the triumph of the moral spirit of God, a fight which would fill the individual, nations and denominations with the inspiration to sustain them.’¹⁰ Schweitzer did not find this kind of world transforming theology anywhere in his own time: ‘[M]ankind is on the point of delivering the world up to the dominion of heedless spirits; of coming to terms with the present standstill and retrogression in our culture, and so abandoning the attempt to raise all that it means to be human to the heights of true humanity.’¹¹ The scope of this theology and some of its content—embracing the individual, denomination and nation; raising our human nature to its highest heights—has certain political overtones. But how would Jesus actually figure in the form of eschatology which Schweitzer thinks necessary to combat the spiritual lethargy in modernity?¹²

For Schweitzer, following Jesus requires that we allow ‘that elemental quality to speak to us which makes him real for us’.¹³ And this arch critic of historical projection had no hesitation in arguing that Jesus experienced ‘similar anxiety and similar grief’ about the predicament of his own age as that experienced by Schweitzer in his.¹⁴ In moving from historical enquiry to a theology of the present,

We give history its due and liberate ourselves from the thought-forms which were available to him. But we bow to the powerful will which lies behind them and try

⁸ Schweitzer, *Quest: FCE*, p. 481.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 482.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 484.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 484.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 483 – 484.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 485.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 484.

to serve it within the limits of our own period...In this way we become one with the eternal moral will which governs the world, and become sons of the kingdom of God.¹⁵

Such a prescription is consistent with the third typology of political theology outlined in the introduction to this thesis,¹⁶ whereby 'our whole thought about politics can be enframed by a view of God and his purposes, and their relation to human action in history, even though our normative thought does not derive directly from any theological premises, revealed or rationally arrived at.' On the other hand, while talk of transforming 'the world' and criticism of the religion of his own time of lacking the 'wider orientation' to show '*nations* and individuals the way forward' (my emphasis) may have collective political overtones, elsewhere, the message Schweitzer takes from Jesus' ministry is resolutely personal: 'His powerful *individual* ethic tells us that whoever wants to work towards the kingdom of God can do so only by concentrating continually on inward purity and by freeing himself from the world' (my emphasis).¹⁷ This seems to be a political theology focussed on individual transformation, with a view to translating this into public action rather than something fundamentally communal in character. This emphasis on the individual will is, of course, something he shared with ones of his muses, Friederich Nietzsche,¹⁸ and which arguably takes Schweitzer's political theology beyond Protestant individualism. Indeed, the features of the Jesus tradition which left Nietzsche cold were those offered up by the liberal lives tradition Schweitzer vigorously rejected: the Jesus who offers wisdom for the weak.¹⁹ In Schweitzer's account, Jesus was an 'imperious ruler':²⁰ and 'the one immeasurably great man who was strong enough to think of himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to his purposes.'²¹ This is hardly the Jesus of bourgeoisie liberal democracy, preaching sermons to the feeble on how to be good, all the while chipping away at the higher values of those who aspired to greatness.

The Enlightenment is a period noted for its high-flown rhetoric, yet nothing I have read

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 486.

¹⁶ Since I will be referring back to this typology, it is worth restating here: 1) 'Political theology exists where our normative political theory [or argument] depends directly on premises from Revelation'; 2) political theology exists where our normative political 'theory [or argument] depends on premises which are theological, even though not drawn (only) from Revelation'; and 3) political theology exists when 'our whole thought about politics can be enframed by a view of God and his purposes, and their relation to human action in history, even though our normative thought doesn't derive directly from any theological premises, revealed or rationally arrived at.'

¹⁷ Schweitzer *Quest: FCE*, p. 485.

¹⁸ See Schweitzer, *Life and Thought*, pp. 30, 64.

¹⁹ This is a theme in Nietzsche's *Antichrist*.

²⁰ See Schweitzer, *Quest*, p. 403.

²¹ Ibid, p. 403.

quite compares to the vaulting, if maddeningly opaque, claims that Schweitzer makes for Jesus' abiding significance. But it is during the Enlightenment where we first find the figure of Jesus routinely embroiled in political arguments and aspirations which fall outside exclusively doctrinal and denominational interests.²² And where Schweitzer is relatively vague in his recommendations and aspirations, many writers of the Enlightenment era were concrete and specific in their deployment of Jesus in the political domain.

2. Reimarus on Jesus and Toleration

(i) *The Politicisation of Jesus*

H. S. Reimarus approaches Jesus in both the senses outlined above: 1) as a political figure of his own time; and 2) as a figure he appeals to as a source of authority when addressing his own religio-political concerns. His contribution to the first tradition, of politically orientated historical readings, has long been recognised. The political climates of much of the twentieth century, characterised by Eric Hobsbawm as an 'age of extremes',²³ provided an especially hospitable environment to radical political readings of the historical Jesus, and historians of New Testament scholarship have acknowledged Reimarus as an innovative thinker in that interpretive tradition. In his essay 'The Revolution Theory from Reimarus to Brandon', Ernst Bammel repeats the conventional judgement that Reimarus carried out 'the first landmark research on the life of Jesus',²⁴ but his principle concern is Reimarus's achievement of bringing 'into focus...the idea of political messianism'.²⁵ This political-eschatological reading can be understood as a secularising narrative with respect to the historical figure of Jesus—ripping him out of the Christian theological context in which he had been embedded for centuries, and recasting Jesus' desires for himself and his people in political terms—and yet Reimarus's own overriding project in the *Fragments*, and the *Apologie* from which they were extracted, was very much theological. And regardless of Jesus' own political ambitions, he is invoked by Reimarus in the political discourse of his own day. In short, Reimarus employed Jesus for political ends as well as describing him in political terms.

²² Schweitzer's 'Jesus mysticism' was, in part, an attempt to transcend these parochial intra-Christian concerns (see *Quest: FCE*, p. 486).

²³ See Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914 – 1991*, London: Michael Joseph, 1994.

²⁴ Ernst Bammel, 'The Revolution Theory from Reimarus to Brandon', in Bammel and C. F. D. Moule (eds.), *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 11 – 68: 11.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p.11.

(ii) On Being a Christian and Tolerating Deists

Reimarus lived and died in an age of confessional strife, of banned books, and jailed authors. According to some historians, his home city of Hamburg played host to some of the most ‘bitter’ disputes over how to accommodate a plurality of Christian communities.²⁶ Reimarus was not a noted controversialist, but he was a more publically engaged figure than one would tend to guess from the picture generated in histories of biblical studies. He was a founding member of the renewed Patriotic Society of Hamburg (1765),²⁷ which was committed to promoting independent learning and the creation of a culture of knowledge-based civic virtue.²⁸ More personally, Reimarus corresponded with some of Europe’s most famous religious controversialists, such as Jean LeClerc (see Chapter Five), while studying and reviewing the work of the poster-boy of eighteenth-century German religious dissent and official enemy of multiple city states, J. L. Schmidt.²⁹ Reimarus was not prepared to put his head above the parapet in his lifetime, but, in his private writings, he vented his anger at the religious zealotry and heavy-handed state sanctions which attended professions of faith which did not conform to the dominant religion of a sovereign territory.

One of the overarching themes of the manuscript Reimarus left unpublished at the time of his death was an appeal for religious toleration to be extended so as to include followers of natural religion, in the same way that Judaism and minority Christian denominations were already tolerated in many European settings. Indeed, Reimarus reels off the religiously suspect types who he thought were already better accommodated—‘Ketzer, Fanatiker, Juden, Türken, Heiden’³⁰—as a way of highlighting the injustice of the besieged minority on behalf of whom he was (posthumously) acting. If there is a place for heretics, fanatics, Jews, Turks (Muslims), and heathen, why not the *vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*? Reimarus was a devotee of this rational religion, which bases belief in God on inferences drawn from the natural world, rather than revelations recorded in sacred

²⁶ Israel, *Democratic*, p. 136. In the mid-1680s, approximately nine hundred Huguenots arrived in Hamburg, which added to existing tensions between the majority Lutheran community and the local Jewish population.

²⁷ See Groetsch, *Polyhistory to Subversion*, p. 168. Reimarus was also associated with the first Patriotic Society, established in 1724, which brought together men from across the arts, science and industry, as part of encouraging mutually supportive citizenship. This was very much part of the profusion of new forms of sociability in eighteenth-century Europe.

²⁸ See Jennifer Jenkins, *Provincial Modernity: Local Culture & Liberal Politics in Fin-de-siècle Hamburg*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003, pp. 28 – 30.

²⁹ See Spalding, *Seize the Book*, p.187

³⁰ Reimarus, *Duldung der Deisten*, p. 117.

texts: a position reasonably described as deistic. So how does Jesus, the central figure in Christian *revelation*, come to the aid of Reimarus in his defence of natural religion?

We must recall that in *Duldung der Deisten* (the first *Fragment*), and in the famous *Von dem Zwecke*, Reimarus suggested that Jesus was the teacher of practical, moral religion, whose most important teachings were clouded by the messianism of his scheming followers, not to mention the political-eschatological hopes of Jesus himself. Despite this misguided sense of political destiny, Jesus resisted most of the religious errors of his day and preached a gospel which got to the very root of the Jewish law and true (natural) religion: love of God and neighbour; the priority of repentance; and belief in life everlasting. So on this reading of the mission of Jesus, there is very little difference between the gospel of the first-century Jew who inspired Christianity, and some of the common truths of that rational religion recommended by Reimarus. And it is the suggestion of commonality between these ancient and modern religious traditions which underscores Reimarus's plea for toleration.

In work published in his lifetime, Reimarus had combated ancient and modern forms of atheism, and considered its moral and political implications for society:

It has been a matter of dispute whether atheism might lead a man to vice, and to be in itself dangerous to human society: But whoever has pursued La Mettrie's writings will no longer doubt it...How miserable would the general prevalence of these doctrines render civil society, and indeed all mankind.³¹

To combat the nihilism threatened by ancient or modern forms of atheism, in *Duldung der Deisten* Reimarus suggests a minimalist theology with an ancient heritage. He argues that in so far as someone holds to those basic religious imperatives—love of God, love of humanity, concern with personal salvation—then their theology is consistent with the essential message of Jesus, and, as such, they can properly be regarded as religious fellow travellers with the dominant Christian community.³² So Reimarus is not just arguing for toleration on the familiar modern grounds that a person's conscience is beyond the rightful legislative reach of government, but that a religion is to be tolerated in so far as it shares a basic theological core.³³ What we have here is theology as a discourse of public reason. To borrow a phrase from John Rawls (1921 – 2002), used in a very different

³¹ Reimarus, *Natural Religion*, p. 446.

³² See Reimarus, *Duldung der Deisten*, pp. 116.

³³ See *ibid.*, pp. 116 – 118.

context, Reimarus's idea of toleration is justified on the basis of an 'overlapping consensus',³⁴ whereby a shared stock of socially binding commitments, theological in this case, may be held by persons within a society for a variety of reasons, perhaps supplemented by a range of other beliefs that others within that society would reject.³⁵ On this reading, what matters for the purposes of social cohesion is that there is agreement on core values which may be formulated differently by different people, and originating in different sources: in the case of religious values, some may think they derive from supernatural revelation, others that they are discoverable by the natural power of reason. What counts are the basic ideas about God and our duties to each other in light of our relationship to God, and Reimarus finds pre-Christian justification for this arrangement.

Reimarus appeals to studies of ancient Jewish law by the English jurist John Selden and the Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides,³⁶ insisting on the conformity of laws of the 'unbeschnittenen [uncircumcised] Noah',³⁷ with the principles of '*vernünftigen Religion und des Naturgesetzes*'.³⁸ These supposedly 'natural laws' are significant to Reimarus's argument because they are said to have been sufficient for the '*Proselytorum Dominicilii*' and their peaceful co-existence with the Jewish people:³⁹ the basic religious conformity which enabled non-Jewish residents to be accepted as pious members of the host community of Israelites. The parallels are clear enough: Reimarus and the *vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* are the *Proselytorum Dominicilii* of eighteenth-century Europe. And within the context of an analysis of the theological-political climate of first-century Palestine, and drawing on the witness of the New Testament, Reimarus actually makes normative judgements about the proper scope of society's tolerance of religious diversity, and that judgement rests on a presumed agreement on what constitutes the essential elements of true religion.

Reimarus is impressed by the respect the early Christians showed towards the 'Heiden' (heathen),⁴⁰ those 'Frommen' and 'Gottesfürchtigen' (pious and God-fearing)

³⁴ Rawls did not see theology as a discourse of public reason; nevertheless, he acknowledged that persons can share a set of commitments, necessary to sustain a liberal democracy, for very different reasons, reasons which would inevitably be grounded in each person's own 'compressive worldview': see *Political Liberalism*, New York / Chichester: Colombia University Press, 1993, pt 2, lecture 4.

³⁵ See Reimarus, *Duldung der Deisten*, pp. 118.

³⁶ See *ibid*, p.125.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 125.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 125.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 125.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 127.

folk, who they encountered on their early mission among the gentiles.⁴¹ Once again, the primitive Christian context is the point of departure for an attack on the religious ways of the present, and the message is clear: while the early Christians were able to recognise fellow *Gottesfürchtigen* when they saw them, when the modern Christian encounters their kind, the so called 'Freidenker' (free thinkers),⁴² they see only 'Ungläubigen' (unbelievers) and 'Religionsspötter' (mockers of religion).⁴³ The irony here, of course, is that the prejudice Reimarus complains about in the first *Fragment* is one he would only serve to confirm in the sixth and seventh, when some of the most cherished of Christian doctrines are subjected to a mixture of critical dissection and high ridicule. But this is only part of the story. Taken on his own terms, Reimarus was only unsparingly critical of those 'supplementary' doctrines which natural religion had, alas, been accruing ever since the days of Noah: an accruelement Christianity had been a major contributor to. But Jesus himself remained a touchstone for the moral and religious authority Reimarus required in making his case for *Duldung*.

(iii) *Jesus in Amsterdam*

Lessing's editorial work on the first *Fragment* shows his interest in the fate of Adam Neusner (1530 – 1576), a clergyman from Heidelberg, whose anti-Trinitarian views, and the intolerance which greeted them, set him on a spiritual and physical journey which fascinated and appalled many eighteenth-century culture-watchers: a journey to Islam and Constantinople.⁴⁴ For Reimarus, however, whose reference points were usually Jewish rather than Islamic, it was the person of Uriel da Acosta (originally Gabriel da Costa, c. 1585 - 1640) who interested him.⁴⁵ Da Acosta was from a Catholic Portuguese family with Jewish ancestry, with some form of Judaism possibly still practised on his mother's side. Da Acosta's study of scripture seems to have led him away from Catholicism to reconnect with the religion of his forefathers, and the adoption of an independent minded Jewish rationalism. On moving to Amsterdam with some of his family, who he had convinced to join him on his religious odyssey, he openly embraced his Jewish faith for the first time, only to find the form of Judaism practised there as

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 127.

⁴² Ibid, p. 128

⁴³ Ibid, p. 128.

⁴⁴ See *ibid*, pp. 115 – 116, 130 – 134.

⁴⁵ For an account of his tragic fate, see Popkin, 'Costa, Uriel Da', in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, (9 vol. of 16 in first edn), Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972, p. 987. Da Costa may also have interested Reimarus because there is some evidence that he fled to Hamburg after his first excommunication.

stifling as the Catholicism of his youth. Da Acosta's unrealistic expectations that the Jewish community in Amsterdam ought to be in agreement with his distinctive religious outlook were so comprehensively frustrated, that he penned strongly worded attacks on the strictures of Rabbinic Judaism and was excommunicated, twice.⁴⁶ As a religious nomad, he was unable to make a life for himself outside the Jewish community: he was 'verfolgt' (hounded), writes Reimarus, by all as a man of 'keine Religion' (no religion).⁴⁷ When he returned, beleaguered, to the synagogue, he recanted and was accepted, but the price was high: he was subjected to a 'schändliche' (shameful) ordeal by the congregation, physically 'gegeißelt' (lashed), and his 'nackend' (naked) body 'mit Füßen getreten' (trampled underfoot).⁴⁸

By providing a visceral snapshot of the sorry story of Acosta,⁴⁹ Reimarus captures the potentially violent frenzy of insular religious fanaticism. But his real target was not the Jewish community in Amsterdam, but the 'christliche Obrigkeit' (Christian authorities) who permitted such cruel intolerance.⁵⁰ So convinced were the leaders of revealed religions that 'vernünftige Religion' was the 'allgemeine Feindin' (common enemy),⁵¹ that a state's governing authorities would permit leaders of revealed religions to mete out their own punishments to dissenting members. Indeed, such was the fear of the *Freidenker* in European societies, that Reimarus speculated that if 'Christus' were to walk among the Jews of Amsterdam, 'preaching against their Pharisaic hypocrisy' (*wider ihre pharisäische Heuchelei predigte*),⁵² the ruling power would grant the same freedom to curb his defiance.⁵³ Thus Reimarus creates the image of a scourged Christ, attacked by his own people, with a complicit state power washing its hands of responsibility: from Roman Palestine to the Dutch Republic, the prophetic voice is silenced.

⁴⁶ The key writings are *Propostas contra a tradição* (1616) and *Exame das tradições farisaicas* (1623); for a recent English version of the latter, see H. P. Solomon and I. S. D. Sassoon (trans.), *Uriel Da Costa: Examination of Pharisaic Traditions*, Leiden: E J Brill, 1993. His first excommunication came as a result of the writings referred to above; the second came about when his increasing disregard for the Jewish law, and growing skepticism about all revealed religion, began to filter back to the leading figures in the community via people Da Costa had had personal dealings with in Amsterdam (see Popkin, 'Costa, Uriel Da', p. 987).

⁴⁷ See Reimarus, *Duldung der Deisten*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 123.

⁴⁹ This story did not have a happy ending. After his ordeal at the synagogue, Da Acosta turned a gun on himself, dying a slow, excruciating death. His last notable act of the intellect was his autobiography *Exemplar Humanae Vitae* (1640): in English, see *The Remarkable Life of Uriel Acosta*, London: John Whiston, 1740.

⁵⁰ Reimarus, *Duldung der Deisten*, p. 23.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 124.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 124.

⁵³ See *ibid*, pp. 123 - 124.

There is more to Reimarus's use of Jesus than rhetorical shock tactics, however. In *Von dem Zwecke* Reimarus notes two 'advantages' to Jesus' teachings over that found in the Old Testament. The first of these we have already explored: a commitment to redemption in an afterlife. The second, however, relates to attitudes to religious outsiders; for according to Reimarus:

Jesus also invites the heathen into the kingdom of God and, unlike Moses, does not command that they be despised and eradicated with fire and swords. "Go," he says, "and teach all heathen, preach the Gospel to all creatures [Matt. 28: 19, combined with Mark 16: 15]. Indeed, he does not entirely exclude from this hope even those heathen who remain firmly rooted in their imperfect understanding; he says that it shall go easier with Tyre and Sidon at the last judgement than with many of the Jews [Matt. 11: 22; Luke 10: 14].⁵⁴

This builds on the position in *Duldung der Deisten* where, having presented Jesus as the teacher of *vernünftige* and *praktische* religion, he feels the need to negotiate a problematic verse from the point of view of toleration. Reimarus is referring to 'den harten Ausspruch' (the harsh remark) by Jesus that those who do 'nicht glaubt' (not believe) will be 'verdammte' (condemned).⁵⁵ But Reimarus insists that it is impossible to draw any conclusion from this in favour of state sanctioned compulsion, and he argues that such a policy is contradicted by Jesus himself when he instructs his disciples to 'sollten das Unkraut wachsen lassen bis zur Ernte' (allow the weeds to grow until the harvest),⁵⁶ implying, at most, deferred condemnation when each man and woman faces their creator.

It is curious that having entered into the nitty-gritty of scriptural warrants and prohibitions for religious toleration, Reimarus declines to consider the most influential proof text in the New Testament *against* toleration; as we will see below, he is not alone among Enlightenment intellectuals in ducking this challenge. What he does do, however, is try to show that modern Christian states are pursuing policies of intolerance which find no precedent in primitive Christianity, or 'even' in the Mosaic dispensation (so often the poor, benighted relation in these discussions).⁵⁷ Reimarus is clear that the *Gottesfürchtigen* has always represented a tolerable position on the religious spectrum:

⁵⁴ Reimarus, *Fragments* (7). pp. 63-64.

⁵⁵ Reimarus, *Von Duldung Deisten*, p. 126.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 127. Reimarus seems to be referring to Matthew 13:30.

⁵⁷ See *ibid*, pp. 126 – 127.

their salvation in question, perhaps, but the right to freedom of religious thought and worship unchecked. This positing of an acceptable theological minimum for the enjoyment of religious and civil liberties gives these politically significant debates their theological component, and such 'base line' requirements were common fare during the Enlightenment, and it is to those earlier debates over toleration that we now turn. We begin, however, with some consideration of their philosophical and theological contexts.

3. Political Theologies in the Enlightenment

(i) From Metaphysics to Politics: Transcendence and Immanence

Some of the most innovative work on the Enlightenment in recent decades has emphasised the frequent co-existence of particular metaphysical worldviews and the socio-political tendencies of those who held them. Where metaphysical views had a significant theological dimension (and they usually did), and where the holders of such views engaged in political discourse, it is safe to say that we are dealing with political-theologies of one kind or another.

One way to appreciate how different theological metaphysics underpinned different political outlooks would be to consider how early modern writers imagined divine transcendence and immanence, and study the relationship between these theological positions and any co-existing political outlooks. For the most part, theologians and philosophers in the major monotheistic traditions have conceived of God as both transcendent and immanent with respect to creation, but the task of holding the two conceptions together in an intellectually satisfying way has proved no easy matter.⁵⁸ A preference for the transcendence of God in the Enlightenment is often identified with the kind of text book deism discussed already in this study, but this same period of history also witnessed a tendency in the opposite direction, whereby God's immanence was emphasised, becoming a prominent theme in philosophical enquiry, theological belief and religious worship.⁵⁹ The most extreme expression of this tendency is pantheism, although, rather like its apparent polar opposite, deism, it is difficult to find card carrying proponents.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ For two quite recent discussions of the problems, see Robert Oakes, 'Divine Omnipresence and Maximal Immanence', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 2, April 2006, pp. 171 – 179; and Richard Bernstein, 'The Uneasy Tensions of Immanence and Transcendence', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, vol. 21, 2008, pp. 11 – 16.

⁵⁹ See Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, chaps. 1 - 2.

⁶⁰ The writer who did most to promote pantheism as a positive stance is probably Toland, who is often credited with coining the term in *Socinianism Truly Stated*.

The intellectual stimulus for this turn towards divine immanence is identified with various sources. In Margret Jacob's account, two pre-Enlightenment traditions form the backdrop: a politically and theologically subversive form of magical Neo-Platonism,⁶¹ with close affinities to the Hermetic tradition,⁶² and the Christian Millenarianism associated with the English Revolution.⁶³ The immanent dimension of neo-Platonism lay in a metaphysic which assumed an underlying structure to nature, written in the language of mathematics and authored by God, which could be understood, harnessed and manipulated for human advantage. Both the natural philosopher and the magician could aspire to precisely this harnessing, albeit using very different methods. The immanent dimension of Christian Millenarianism lay in an eschatological expectation that that the justice of God will soon reign over the actual physical world,⁶⁴ bypassing the established religio-political order, realising the desire for justice directly. But on one important reading of major intellectual trends in the seventeenth century, this theological immanentism came to be shorn of both its magical and Christian Millenarian features, taking on a more naturalistic character.⁶⁵ So on this reading, theological immanentism in the form of 'pantheistic materialism' retains the anti-establishment,⁶⁶ anti-hierarchical tendencies of earlier forms of immanentism, but jettisons the supernatural explanation for humanity's predicament and the supernatural prescription for progress: 'Pantheism rendered the apocalyptic impulse into a secular utopianism.'⁶⁷

Of all the intellectual stimulants which might be cited in the rise of the kind of egalitarian 'pantheism' described by Jacob and others, Spinoza's response to Cartesian dualism stands out. A dualism of the kind usually thought to be maintained by

⁶¹ Elements of Platonic thought seemed to be confirmed by the discovery of mechanical principles which could be framed in the language of mathematics: these discoveries cohered with a Neo-Platonic commitment to a 'universal system of spiritual hierarchy' (Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 33).

⁶² The idea that there was an underlying reality to nature, beneath the reality of common sense experience, which could be understood and then manipulated for our own advantage, 'encouraged magical and animistic speculations, in conjunction with the extreme individualism characteristic of the magician' (Ibid, p. 33).

⁶³ Although Schweitzer thought some Enlightenment treatments of Jesus came close to the radical moral spirit of Jesus' apocalyptic eschatology because of their commitment to an immanent 'ethical consummation' of humanity. But it is outside the context of higher New Testament criticism, and in a slightly earlier context, that we find the most visceral examples of that type of mentality: among such radical Christian reformists as the Levellers and the Diggers, who were such an important part of the religious and political landscape of the English civil war and Revolution (see *ibid*, chap, 2). Such radical reformers had their continental counterparts in the Anabaptists and Mennonites, with whom Spinoza has often been connected (p. 47).

⁶⁴ See Force and Popkin (eds.), *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture Volume III*, A. A. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001.

⁶⁵ See Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 32. 'Pantheism' is Jacob's preferred term. Israel, who understands the radical Enlightenment as the generator of later secularism and atheism, prefers the terms 'materialism' and 'substance monism', which occur throughout his trilogy of works.

⁶⁶ Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 32.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.69.

Descartes,⁶⁸ which he considered to be at home in Christianity, has always invited reductionist critiques which either attempt to bring mind or spirit into a materialistic framework, or to reduce the material world to a feature of mental or spiritual activity: in short, substance dualism invites either materialism or idealism. That materialist-pantheist responses to Descartes are closely associated with the thought of Spinoza is beyond any reasonable doubt.⁶⁹ Ironically, it is almost as certain that Spinoza himself was neither a materialist nor a pantheist.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, his insistence on substance monism, at least when taken in isolation from his view of the attributes of the divine substance,⁷¹ has been seen as a move in the direction of materialism. On the other hand, this same metaphysical foundation can be read with the emphasis on the other side of the *Deus sive natura* formula, whereby 'matter in effect becomes spirit, and out of that paradox it is possible to postulate a new religious vision where nature is not simply animated, it is, in effect sacred.'⁷²

Whether one wants to understand this metaphysical monism as the incorporation of God into mundane material processes leading to atheism, or as a deified nature leading to mystical pantheism, there is a tradition of scholarship which holds that this metaphysical picture was central, if not essential, to the evolution of modern, democratic and egalitarian values.⁷³ The idea is that this metaphysic view, moral values and political authority are not imposed by any source external to nature; rather, values and authority emerge within nature, as intellectually free and rational creatures negotiate their interests. For Jonathan Israel, Spinoza is the towering figure in the creation of this metaphysic, and, if Israel is to be believed, the legacy of this man's thought is everywhere apparent in the modern world:

⁶⁸ Some Cartesian experts have challenged the conventional reading of Descartes on this point, arguing that his reflections on mental activity cannot be accommodated within a strictly dualist framework (see Cottingham, 'Cartesian Trialism', in *Cartesian Reflections*, pp. 173 – 187).

⁶⁹ See Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 246.

⁷⁰ One of the key battlegrounds with regard to materialism in the modern world has been the nature of the mind and its relationship with (or reducibility to) material processors. On this crucial issue Spinoza shows no interest in taking sides: on his understanding, the mental and physical realm can have no causal relationship at all, because physical and mental states have no conceptual overlap, no logical connection. This conceptual dualism is evident throughout bk ii of *Ethics*. More explicit still, on this question of materialism, is a footnote early in his chapter 'On Miracles' in the *TPT*, where Spinoza writes, 'by Nature, I do not mean simply matter and its modifications, but infinite other things besides' (p. 4).

⁷¹ See Spinoza, *Ethics*, bk i, especially props. 9 – 12, 16, 19 – 22; and bk ii, especially props. 1 – 2, 6 – 8.

⁷² Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 50.

⁷³ See *ibid.*, especially chaps. 2, 6 – 7.

Spinoza...with his one substance monism—that body and soul, matter and mind are not distinct substances but rather one single substance viewed under different aspects—extends this “revolutionary tendency” appreciably further metaphysically, politically, and as regards man’s highest good...On Spinoza’s principles, society would become more resistant to being manipulated by religious authority, autocracy, radical oligarchies and dictatorship, and more democratic, libertarian and egalitarian.⁷⁴

This ‘democratic metaphysic’ is often juxtaposed with a more authoritarian, hierarchical picture of reality—a picture of reality with some very, very influential advocates. One man at the centre of this alternative metaphysic, and a pillar of the so called ‘moderate Enlightenment’, is Isaac Newton. The elements of this metaphysic, with its theology of transcendence, were all in place by the 1690s and, so this argument goes, they underpinned the dominant vision of God, man and the social order held by most eighteenth-century *philosophes*. This vision is outlined by Jacob:

In general the adherents of the Newtonian Enlightenment can be identified as proponents of the new science and natural philosophy who insisted on a supernatural being separate from nature, and who also held to the concomitant social assumption that the deity imposes order in nature and society, his function resembling that of the strong, but not arbitrary monarch.⁷⁵

This commitment to benevolent authority among admirers of Newtonian natural philosophy, whereby a Christian monarch is held to reflect the cosmic creator, meant that Newtonians could join forces with metaphysical monists against the absolutism and religious intolerance associated with the French and Spanish religio-political establishments.⁷⁶ The Newtonians valued order, to be sure, but not at any price: not at the expense of living in fear, and not at the expense of intellectual or spiritual freedom. But this hierarchical metaphysic stopped short of supporting the republicanism associated with that alternative metaphysic, nor would the early (Christian) Newtonians

⁷⁴ See Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*, Princeton, NJ / Oxford: Princeton University Press: 2010, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 87. As Jacob also explains, the Masons ‘offered the God of Newtonian science, the Grand Architect, as a supernatural entity that could be worshipped by either Christians or deists’ (p. 87). This was in its original British form, however. Mainland European freemasonry would attract adherents of naturalistic, immanent religion and its (sometimes) concomitant republicanism; while the bonds of secrecy, integral to the institution, helped to facilitate the transmission of subversive religious and political ideas (see chap. 4).

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 88.

countenance the idea that ‘civil religion’ was ‘dependent solely upon man’s participation in the natural order’.⁷⁷

(ii) Taking Leave of a Metaphysical Dichotomy

As we have seen, substance monism is given pride of place in some important recent histories of the rise of the intellectual foundations of the modern world. But can Spinoza really be thought of as the main intellectual architect of the large scale historical changes outlined by Israel? Some historians have already expressed skepticism (even amusement) at Israel’s fixation with Spinoza and the explanatory power of ‘Spinozist’ philosophy as an instrument for historical change,⁷⁸ but I will not be reviewing their arguments here. Suffice to say, in a study designed to provide a corrective to a narrow account of how a research tradition in the humanities developed—the critical study of Jesus—I hesitate to attribute the origins of modern liberal democracy to the fruits of a single philosopher or philosophical system.

One of the key features associated with the radical, ‘Spinozist’ Enlightenment is a commitment to ‘comprehensive religious toleration’,⁷⁹ including all faiths and none. The assumption seems to be that the levelling effect of materialism meant that there was no transcendent justification for any kind of policy of religious coercion, and no inherent danger in atheism. But it was perfectly possible to come to such a conclusion without adopting one substance monism, or non-providential deism.⁸⁰ I will offer one example, from the work of a writer familiar from previous chapters, Thomas Chubb. In terms of theological commitment, Chubb was probably an Arian at the outset of his writing career,⁸¹ and may well have become a providential deist in his later years.⁸² He showed no sympathy with one-substance monism, and is closely associated with the Newtonian Enlightenment.⁸³ And yet, within the context of a defence of his controversial study of Jesus, Chubb addresses the question of atheism and the status of atheists, clarifying that

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 87 – 88.

⁷⁸ In his review of Israel’s then incomplete study, Samuel Moyn criticises Israel’s ‘monomaniacal Spinoza worship’ as ‘amusing and exasperating by turns’: Moyn, ‘Mind the Enlightenment’, *The Nation* (on-line), 31 May 2010, accessed 14 May 2011: <http://www.thenation.com/article/mind-enlightenment> A less polemical but more searching academic critique is Antoine Lilti’s ‘Comment écrit-on l’histoire intellectuelle des Lumières? Spinozisme, radicalisme et philosophie?’, *Annales HSS*, vol. 64, Jan. – Feb., 2009, pp. 171 – 206.

⁷⁹ See Israel, *Democratic*, p. 12.

⁸⁰ These are the theological / metaphysical worldviews that Israel associates with radical reform in the Enlightenment (see *Radical*, pp. 11 – 12).

⁸¹ See Chubb’s *Supremacy of the Father*; and *Supremacy of the Father Vindicated*.

⁸² See Chubb’s dissertations on providence attached to *Truth Gospel* and *True Gospel Vindicated*; and *Posthumous Works* (vol. 2)

⁸³ See Bushell, *Sage of Salisbury*, p. 18.

he is referring to ‘speculative atheists, or those who are so in principle...and not those who believe in a Deity, and yet live as if there were none.’⁸⁴ When considering their status within a political commonwealth, Chubb argues that it is important to remember that ‘the favour of God, and the happiness of another world, are things, which society can neither *give, nor secure, nor take away*’,⁸⁵ while ‘all the advantages and benefits, that flow from civil society association, are merely *temporal, and regard this world only*: So, if a man stakes *all* his interest in *this world*, for their sake, which the atheist does; then he stakes *all* that he *ought*.’⁸⁶ And ‘while he behaves properly in his *social capacity*, he must have a *just title*, to the society’s care and protection, and cannot possibly be the *proper object* of its resentment.’⁸⁷ Indeed, Chubb goes on to argue that while the atheist, who is perhaps ‘not one in a million’,⁸⁸ may well be inclined to wickedness, this is not due to any atheistic principles;⁸⁹ by contrast, the wickedness of the theist is frequently driven ‘by their *religious principles*, and their religious zeal.’⁹⁰ Among the great theorists of toleration explored below, not one of them expresses more unambiguous acceptance of speculative atheism as Thomas Chubb.⁹¹ One case proves little, of course. But it illustrates the caution I believe is warranted when positing ‘package logics’ of metaphysical and political worldviews. In exploring the writers below, I will concentrate on concrete and particular philosophical and theological arguments, and the place of Jesus within them, rather than identifying them with a great metaphysical divide among Enlightenment writers. The one common denominator is this: they all recognised the importance of the Christian ‘revelation’ for addressing the relationship between Church and state and freedom of religious thought and practise.

⁸⁴ Chubb, *True Gospel Vindicated*, p. 46.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 42.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 42.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 42.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 46.

⁸⁹ See *ibid*, p. 46.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 46.

⁹¹ Bayle came closest. In his *Pensées Diverses sur l’Occasion de la Comète* (1782), Bayle argues that atheism is no worse than idolatry: see *Miscellaneous reflections, Occasion’d by the Comet which Appear’d in December 1680* (vol. 1 of 2), London: J Morphew, 1708, sects. cxiii – cxxxii; that it does not necessarily corrupt manners (sect cxxxiii); and that there is no necessary connection between religious belief and virtue (sect. cxxxv). However radical Bayle may have been as a thinker on this point, it is difficult to argue for a dependency on Spinoza’s metaphysics given his critique wide-ranging critique: ‘Spinoza’, in *Critical Dictionary*, pp. 288 – 238.

4. Spinoza's Political Theology: Toleration and Authority in Religion

(i) *The Universal Faith*

It is conceivable that Reimarus's idea of an agreed theological minimum—an 'overlapping consensus' on religious matters—as the basis for a tolerant society was a variation on something that Spinoza proposed in the previous century. Although Spinoza himself was arguably working in a tradition of seventeenth-century European thought hinted at by Erasmus with his *Philosophia Christi*;⁹² a tradition radicalised by Lord Herbert of Cherbury in *De Veritate* (1624), with his five 'notitiae communes' (common notions) of religion,⁹³ intended to include non-Christian traditions within the acceptable boundaries of universal religion; and a tradition developed as an inclusive Protestant option in the form of 'fundamental articles', drawn from scripture, by Remonstrant figures such as Hugo Grotius, Philippe Limborch and John LeClerc.⁹⁴

Having achieved political emancipation from Spain, the future of the Dutch Republic was contested by supporters of the House of Orange, who tended to be more traditionally Calvinist than the largely Remonstrant republicans, the leading lights of whom belonged to the same merchant class as the Spinoza family.⁹⁵ It was within the context of this religio-political factionalism that Spinoza wrote the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, a book which caused considerable alarm throughout and beyond the cities of the Dutch Republic, even before the official ban of 1774.⁹⁶ Spinoza does not actually discuss toleration in quite the same focussed and disciplined way as some of the other authors considered in this chapter, such is the range of his philosophising and historical-critical scholarship. On the other hand, it has been suggested, and for good reasons, that 'the overarching purpose of the TTP is to argue for a specific kind of tolerance as a state policy'.⁹⁷

One of the key battle grounds for Spinoza was intellectual freedom and the relationship between philosophy and religious faith, and in chapter fourteen of the

⁹² See Erasmus's *Christian Knight*, chap. viii, on 'Certain general rules of true christendom'. Erasmus is rather more discursive than some of the later would be unifiers of Christendom.

⁹³ For his discussion of the 'notitiae communes' see Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, *De Veritate*, M. H. Carré (trans.) Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1937, pp. 291 – 307. In summary, they are 1) that God exists, 2) that he ought to be worshipped, 3) that the practise of virtue is central to worship, 4) that one must repent of one's sins to receive God's forgiveness, and 5) that God will pass judgement of one's moral fitness in the afterlife.

⁹⁴ See Klauber, 'Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism'.

⁹⁵ See Seymour Feldman, Introduction to Spinoza, *TPT*, pp. vii – xviii: xvi – xvii; and Israel, *Radical*, pp. 165 – 167.

⁹⁶ See Israel, *Radical*, chap. 16.

⁹⁷ Michael A Rosenthal, 'Tolerance as a Virtue in Spinoza's Ethics', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 39, no. 4, Oct 2001, pp. 535 – 557: 536.

Theologico-Politicus he sets out to distinguish the two; more precisely, Spinoza wants to distinguish between, on the one hand, philosophy carried out by intellectuals, and, on the other hand, practical religion which concerns everyone, and demands only obedience to God. But this is no mere process of intellectual / spiritual compartmentalisation: Spinoza is well aware that the devil is in the detail when it comes to showing due obedience to God. So Spinoza sets about the task of clarifying the fundamentals of religious faith with the optimistic aim of putting an end to their confusion with philosophical matters which do not matter a jot for salvation.

He begins his discussion by insisting that the practise of the biblical writers when dealing with matters of faith was to ‘adapt the words of scripture to their own beliefs.’⁹⁸ This is fine, as far as it goes: ‘[A]nyone may now adapt it [scripture] to his own beliefs if he feels that this will enable him to obey God with heartier will in those matters which pertain to justice and charity.’⁹⁹ What Spinoza objects to—manifest in the history of European sectarianism—is the steadfast refusal of religious communities to recognise that this adaptationist hermeneutic is something they all use; instead, they imagine that their own community possesses unadulterated divine doctrine: ‘All those who do not share their opinions, however righteous and truly virtuous the dissenters may be, they persecute as God’s enemies’.¹⁰⁰ Having sketched what he sees as the existing problem, Spinoza moves to overcome it, and, in doing so, follows in that European tradition sketched above of isolating a shared theological core which transcends local variation in belief and practise.

Although Spinoza makes it his express intention to distinguish ‘between faith and philosophy’,¹⁰¹ he might easily be read as distinguishing between practical religion and speculative theology.¹⁰² The latter is carried out at the level of metaphysics and natural philosophy, and is neither necessary nor sufficient for salvation, which is secured by the former, manifest in practical religion. Spinoza agrees with Christians and Jews that the ‘true norm for defining faith’ is derived from scripture,¹⁰³ but it is not to be found in any act of God recorded therein, but in the overarching purpose of scripture, which ‘is simply

⁹⁸ Spinoza, *TPT*, p. 163.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 163.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 163.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 164. Spinoza later spells this out: [P]hilosophy rests on the basis of universally valid axioms, and must be constructed by Nature alone, whereas faith is based on history and language, and must be derived only from Scripture and revelation’ (p. 169).

¹⁰² If Spinoza’s *Ethics* is an example of what he means by philosophy, and it surely is, then one might very well regard it as a sustained study of God (the first book claims to be nothing less). This, then, is the speculative, metaphysical theology which Spinoza considers to be the business of the philosopher.

¹⁰³ Spinoza, *TPT*, p. 164.

to teach obedience',¹⁰⁴—this, Spinoza assures us, is a 'statement which surely no one can deny.'¹⁰⁵ On the New Testament specifically Spinoza writes, 'The message of the Gospel is one of simple faith; that is, belief in God and reverence for God, or—which is the same thing—obedience to God.'¹⁰⁶ And how do we obey God? 'Scripture itself tells us quite clearly over and over again what every man should do in order to serve God, declaring that the entire law consists in this alone, to love one's neighbour.'¹⁰⁷ If this stripped down version of the law sounds familiar, then it may be because we encountered very similar sentiments expressed by Reimarus when we examined his moral-theology (Chapter Seven). Morality was at the heart of both men's understanding true piety, enabling them to distinguish it from more speculative matters, where the opinions of persons inevitably differ due to family upbringing, cultural context and, Spinoza's main focus, intellect and education.¹⁰⁸

To the mainstream Churches of seventeenth-century Europe, preoccupied as they often were with precise theological formulations, it must have been alarming for a philosopher to recommend detaching truth from piety, without any cost to salvation: '[F]aith requires not so much true dogmas as pious dogmas, that is, such as move the heart to obedience; and this is so even if many of those beliefs contain not a shadow of truth'.¹⁰⁹ But Spinoza is aware that his brand of theological pragmatism will not satisfy most religious traditions, and he is sensitive to a likely complaint that, 'Anyone will still be able to foist on religion whatever doctrine he pleases under the same pretext, that it is a means for inculcating obedience.'¹¹⁰ Taking this possibility seriously, Spinoza agrees that 'faith must be defined as the holding of certain beliefs about God such that, without these beliefs, there cannot be obedience to God'.¹¹¹ As we saw in the previous chapter, Spinoza called on the Letter of James to support his insistence that obedience to God in a life well lived is the key to salvation, but he also found support for this in John's Gospel and the Johanne Epistles.¹¹² Having established the priority of practical religion, at least to his own satisfaction, Spinoza outlines what he regards as the 'universal faith': beliefs which

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 164.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 164.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 164.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 164.

¹⁰⁸ See *ibid*, pp. 163 – 164.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 166.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 165.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 165.

¹¹² See *ibid*, pp. 165 – 166. The Gospel of John and the John's Epistles were key documents for the Dutch Collegiants with their emphasis on the *innerlijke licht* (see Hunter, *Radical Protestantism*, pp. 42 – 45).

facilitate obedience to God through a life of virtue. In his preamble to this creed Spinoza writes,

Now no body questions that there is to be found among men a wide variety of temperament...so that what moves one man to devotion will move another man to ridicule and contempt. Hence it follows that a catholic or universal faith *must not contain any dogmas that good men may regard as controversial*...A catholic faith should therefore contain only those dogmas which obedience absolutely demands, and *without which every such obedience is absolutely impossible*.¹¹³ (My emphasis)

So what are these non-controversial articles of faith? Spinoza identifies seven, which I present below in slightly abbreviated form:

- 1) 'God, that is, a Supreme Being, exists, supremely just and merciful, the exemplar of true life.'¹¹⁴
- 2) 'God is one alone: No one can doubt this belief is essential...for devotion, reverence and love spring only from the pre-eminence of one above all others.'¹¹⁵
- 3) 'God is omnipresent, and all things are open to him.'¹¹⁶
- 4) 'God has supreme right and dominion over all things.'¹¹⁷
- 5) 'Worship of God and obedience towards him consists solely in justice and charity, or love towards one's neighbour.'¹¹⁸
- 6) 'All who obey God by following this way of life, and only those, are saved; others, who live at pleasure's behest, are lost.'¹¹⁹
- 7) 'God forgives repentant sinners...He who firmly believes that God forgives men's sins from the mercy and grace whereby he directs all things, and whose heart is thereby the more inspired by love of God, that man verily knows Christ according to the spirit, and Christ is in him.'¹²⁰

¹¹³ Spinoza, *TPT*, Ibid, pp. 166 – 167.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 167.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 167.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 167.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 167.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 167.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 167.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 167.

Even allowing for the latitude Spinoza accords persons to speculate on these tenants, it is hard to imagine how they can have been seriously proposed as uncontroversial, and it is even harder to imagine how their author can be thought of as a prophet of secularism, or even serious religious diversity. Let us just take the most obviously problematic tenants: 1) excludes atheists and agnostics; 2) excludes polytheists; 5) would be rejected by Orthodox Jews and most Christian denominations; and 7) includes repeat references to the central figure of a particular revealed religion, and, as such, seems contrary to the spirit of universality so often associated with the Enlightenment. It is possible, of course, that these principles are nothing more than a sop to the masses, for whom Spinoza showed little fellow feeling,¹²¹ but with whom he wished as far as possible to live in peace. Indeed, there are commentators, albeit a minority, who regard Spinoza as thoroughly Machiavellian in his political philosophy,¹²² and it would be consistent with the popular view of that tradition of political thought (almost to the point of cliché) to claim that if people do not believe in article six of his universal faith (concerning salvation), then ‘there is no reason why they should obey God rather than their desires’.¹²³ After all, there is nothing quite like the threat of hell fire and the promise of eternal bliss to maximise obedience among the simple populace—or so runs an argument which must rank amongst the most popular in modern, anti-religious polemic. Had this been Spinoza’s *modus operandi*, however, it seems likely that he would have been more discrete in the formulation of the articles, since he is candid about the full extent of the diversity he allows *within* the articles of faith he proposes; indeed, Spinoza goes on to name a whole range of theological beliefs which are ‘irrelevant to faith’ in its fundamental character.¹²⁴ On the issue just discussed above—the necessity of believing in salvation in order to live the virtuous life—Spinoza is forthright ‘Nor, again, does it matter for faith whether one believes that...the rewarding of the good and the punishing of the wicked is natural or supernatural.’¹²⁵ As I highlight in the previous chapter, it is implicit in the *Theologico-Politicus* and explicit in the *Ethica* that Spinoza favoured a natural interpretation of the rewards of virtue and the perils of vice, but, even in the posthumous *Ethica*, his favoured concepts retains sufficient continuity with those

¹²¹ See *ibid*, p. 8: in the Preface to the main text, Spinoza writes derisively of the ‘masses’ with their ‘superstition’, ‘prejudices’ and ‘obstinacy’; he did ‘not invite the common people to read this work, nor all those who are victims of the same emotional attitudes.’

¹²² See Curley, ‘Kissinger, Spinoza, and Genghis Kahn’, in *Companion to Spinoza*, pp. 315 – 342.

¹²³ Spinoza, *TPT*, p. 167.

¹²⁴ They include the finer points of God’s omnipresence and his freedom of will (see *ibid*, p. 168).

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 168.

in the *Theologico-Politicus* for us to take Spinoza at his word when he outlines the articles of universal faith.¹²⁶ But let us put to one side the question of Spinoza's private convictions and consider the articles as they stand.

It is not self-evident why any historians should think that this creed is more inclusive or less controversial than Lord Herbert's 'common notions'. The rather mystical notion of a person being imbued with Christ 'according to the spirit', when they accept the 'mercy and grace' of God, might be explained away as a rhetorical flourish, perhaps to appeal to Spinoza's mostly Christian audience. But this is no stray remark. As we saw in Chapter Eight, Spinoza saw Jesus as exemplifying the highest ethical standards, and the bearer of wisdom which he claims is rightly called 'divine', but his role is of even wider significance: in Spinoza's *Theologico-Politicus* Jesus is the historical embodiment of the theological abstractions he recommends to all persons who want clarity in matters of faith. Once again, Spinoza discloses his position through a contrast with Moses:

[A]s a result of revelation or basic principles revealed to him, he [Moses] perceived a way by which the people of Israel could well be united in a particular territory to form a political union or state...But he did not perceive, nor was it revealed to him, that this way was the best of all ways...Therefore he perceived all these things not as eternal truths, but as instructions and precepts, and he ordained them as laws of God...With regard to Christ, although he appears to have laid down laws, we must maintain that he perceived things truly and adequately; for Christ was not so much a prophet as the mouthpiece of God. It was through the mind of Christ...that God made revelations to mankind...[and] Christ was sent to teach not only the Jews but the entire human race.¹²⁷

Any supercessionist overtones here are best understood with regard to the 'instrument' of revelation: the person of Christ is the *medium* of the message, with his reputedly universal ambitions. Like Reimarus, on Spinoza's account the essentials of the religion Jesus preached are not to be understood as a new dispensation:

Before the coming of Christ the prophets used to proclaim religion as the law of their own country...whereas after the coming of Christ the Apostles preached religion to all men...The books of the New Testament contained no different doctrine, nor were they written as documents of covenant, nor was the universal

¹²⁶ See Spinoza, *Ethics*, schol. to prop. 35.

¹²⁷ Spinoza, *TTP*, p. 55.

religion...anything new, except in relation to men who knew it not. "He was in the world," says John the Evangelist, ch. 1 v. 10, "and the world knew Him not."¹²⁸

(ii) Spinoza and the Divine Right of Our Political Masters

One of the ironies about Spinoza's approach to religion when he comes to consider the public sphere is that, having sketched the history (as he understood it) of the universal religion passing from the parochial guardianship of ancient Israel, onto Jesus and his universalising followers,¹²⁹ Spinoza proceeds to bring key features of religion under the control of the sovereign power, albeit one in which Spinoza thinks there ought to be freedom of thought and speech of a kind one would not normally associate with such a centralised religious authority.¹³⁰ Having considered the fundamentals of faith, Spinoza goes on to consider the foundations of the state and the distinction between the public religious sphere and the private.¹³¹ Fusing his metaphysics with his politics, Spinoza asserts,

Nature's power is the very power of God, who has sovereign right over all things. But since the universal power of Nature as a whole is nothing but the power of all individual things taken together, it follows that each individual has the sovereign right to do all that it can do; i.e. the right of the individual is co-extensive with its determinate power.¹³²

The right to assert this God given power in the public sphere—in such a way that it might impact on the whole of the political community and curtail the freedom of individuals in the interests of the wider community—belongs to the sovereign, be it a king or (Spinoza's preference) an elected assembly, and this right concerns religious affairs no less than matters of law and order or taxation. Spinoza's theoretical underpinnings are, at this point, consistent within the second and third types of political theology outlined above: his *Deus sive Natura* formula forms the background to Spinoza's reflections on the

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 153.

¹²⁹ According to Spinoza, once the Kingdom of Israel was destroyed, 'their revealed religion ceased to have the force of law. We cannot deny that, as soon as the Hebrews transferred their right to the king of Babylon, the kingdom of God and the divine law came to an abrupt end' (Ibid, p. 222).

¹³⁰ Freedom of thought and speech is the theme in *ibid*, chap. 20.

¹³¹ See *ibid*, especially chap. 19.

¹³² *Ibid*, p. 179.

question of right, which occupy such a prominent place in modern political thought. The echoes of his older contemporary, Thomas Hobbes, are unmistakable.¹³³

When I said above that only those who hold the sovereign power have an overall right and that all law is dependent on their decision alone, I intended not only civil but religious law; for in the case of the latter, too, they must be interpreters and guardians...God has no special kingdom over men except through the medium of temporal rulers. Furthermore, the practise of religion and the exercises of piety must accord with the peace and welfare of the commonwealth, and consequently must be determined only by sovereigns...¹³⁴

The problems posed by despotic rulers, who interpret religion and piety in a way that they insist is in the interests of the commonwealth, was not lost on Spinoza,¹³⁵ and, despite his 'might is right' tendency, he conceded that 'if those at the head of government are heathens' then it is an option to 'make no contract with them'.¹³⁶ This might be considered an empty gesture, however, given that Spinoza acknowledges no transcendent values which might be appealed to against the abuse of power by a sovereign; again, for Spinoza, right is co-extensive with power:

[T]he divine teachings revealed by the natural light or by prophecy do not acquire the force of command from God directly; they must acquire it from those, or through the medium of those, who have the right to command and to issue decrees, and consequently it is only by their mediation that we can conceive of God reigning over men and directing human affairs according to justice and equity.¹³⁷

So when it comes to 'God reigning over men' and right religion prevailing within a commonwealth, much depends on the character of a nation's ruler and their personal religious orientation. For those who think it odd that in a modern democracy like the

¹³³ See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pt i.

¹³⁴ Spinoza, *TTP*, p. 219.

¹³⁵ Spinoza argues that this is not just a problem regarding heads of government, since clerics are just as likely to go astray (see *ibid*, p. 226). This is surely correct, but Spinoza is surprisingly insensitive to the dangers of reserving so much authority in spiritual matters for the governing political power, clearly feeling that the dangers of this are outweighed by the threat that 'private citizens' might 'seditiously seek to be the champions of religious law' (p. 226): for all that the Hebrew prophets were 'endowed with a divine virtue' (p. 226), Spinoza judges that it was kings not prophets who exerted the more positive influence over the people, since they had the power to do so; prophets, according to Spinoza, had the effect of 'provoking men rather than reforming them' (p. 266). On this preference for kings over prophets, Spinoza could scarcely be further away from modern liberal sensibilities.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 189.

¹³⁷ *Ibid* p. 222.

United States, the religious faith of a prospective presidential candidate should be of such importance to the mainly Christian electorate, and that so much emphasis should be placed on their personal moral character—over against, say, a particular programme of policies—would do well to read Spinoza, who wrote for a predominately Christian audience and insisted that ‘indications of divine justice are only to be found only where just men reign’.¹³⁸ The idea that for a nation to be truly ‘under God’, as the revised Pledge of Allegiance reads,¹³⁹ then one must first and foremost have a just and pious man leading the nation at the *political* level, is a strong point of emphasis in one of the most notoriously ‘impious’ philosophers of the early modern period: certainly the modern American electorate show no appetite for making contracts with ‘Heathens’, as is their right, according to Spinoza.

(iii) The Political Ramifications of the Christ Event

The irony here is that according to Spinoza, Jesus acquires his place in the history of religion precisely because he used his moral-theological insight, rather than political power, to articulate the principles of the ‘universal religion’ in such a way as it was open to all persons. But what authority, what right, did he have to preach a faith which, in Spinoza’s own judgement, has universal application? Spinoza could brush this question off by saying that Jesus only taught the religion of the heart, never challenging the state’s right to dictate the official religion; he may, in this connection, have cited Jesus’ instruction to ‘give to Caesar’s what is Cesar’s and to God’s what is God’s’,¹⁴⁰ but he does not take this option. Not wishing to challenge the historical record of early Christianity as a movement of free association—or proposing (as Reimarus would) that Jesus saw himself as ‘King of the Jews’—Spinoza makes the following moves: 1) he acknowledges that Jesus’ disciples had the authority to teach a religion of universal meaning and application; but 2) he argues that this was a *sui generis* event in the history of the tradition, rooted in the divinely ordained authority of Jesus:

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 222.

¹³⁹ Written in 1892 by the Baptist minister Francis Bellamy, the Pledge of Allegiance was officially adopted by congress in 1942. In 1954, in the midst of the Cold War, pitted against an officially atheistic enemy, President Eisenhower signed an amendment to include the words ‘under God’: see Richard J Ellis, *To the Flag: The Unlikely History of the Pledge of Allegiance*, Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2005.

¹⁴⁰ See Matthew 15:15-22.

And after Christ saw that they would be dispersed throughout the whole world, he taught that they should practise piety to all without exception. If I am now asked by what right were Christ's disciples, men of private station, enabled to preach religion, I reply that they did so by right of the power they have received from Christ against unclean spirits (Matth. ch. 10 v. 1). For I expressly stated above...that all men are bound to keep faith even with a tyrant except for him to whom God, by sure revelation, has promised his special aid against the tyrant. Therefore no one may take precedent from this unless he has the power to perform miracles...Thus it must be granted that the authority which Christ gave his disciples was a unique occurrence, and cannot be regarded as an example for others.¹⁴¹

With this argument Spinoza strays into the first form of political theology identified in my typology: normative political arguments underpinned by premises drawn from revelation. This is the most problematic of all political theologies, precisely because the contents of revelation are central to so many intractable religious divides, and, as such, they do not recommend themselves as a touchstone for a cohesive political community. Admittedly, Spinoza's approach is aimed at negating the right of persons to use such theological resources to usurp the right of a sovereign authority to rule. This is actually consistent with a strong and on going tradition of political thought whereby the radicalism (possibly sedition) of Jesus and the disciples at the outset of the religion is taken to be a once and for all, never to be repeated, event in the history of the tradition. As such, the modern Christian can safely defer to the policies of their political masters, whose authority derives in part from the fact that their moral-theological outlook is judged to be broadly consistent with the deposit of universal faith:¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Spinoza, *TPT*, p. 224.

¹⁴² This tradition is alive today in Western democracies whenever Christian politicians, and public intellectuals, defy the warnings of the leaders of their Church and imply that moral-theological right lies on the side of the sovereign power. There are many examples of this, but interesting recent ones can be seen in the form of influential Catholic intellectuals in the United States who subordinate the teaching of a reigning Pontiff—mainly on economic and geo-political issues—to the interests of the administration in Washington. But the important point to note is that this is by no means always played out in such a way that politicians and intellectuals appear as reluctant, world-weary actors in the fallen kingdom of man, inevitably estranged from those higher values which cannot find expression in public life where pragmatism rules; nor is this a case of a Pope being judged to be overextending the magisterium and interfering in the affairs of the nation state (the classic Lockean objection). Rather, the situation is one whereby a political administration and their intellectual sympathisers become rival interpreters of those higher values. One might cite the example of the prominent Catholic writer and diplomat Michael Novak, dispatched by President George W Bush to persuade Pope John Paul II of the righteousness of the Second Gulf War (2003). History shows he failed in this mission, and that it made no difference to the prosecution of the war. The US administration Novak was acting on behalf of was not merely making a decision in a complex world where the traditional doctrine of just war was no longer considered fit for purpose; on the contrary, the administration was perceived by some prominent Catholic observers as engaging sympathetically with the Catholic just war tradition and was making its own case for invasion on those terms: see the late Richard Neuhaus, 'Iraq and the Moral Judgement', *First Things*, Oct 2005,

Thus we cannot doubt that in modern times religion...demands outstanding moral qualities, not lineage, and therefore does not exclude those who hold the sovereignty...And since (as I have already shown) God's kingdom consists simply in the rule of justice and charity, or true religion, it follows (as we asserted) that God has no authority over men save through the medium of those who hold the sovereignty.¹⁴³

On the one hand, Spinoza is able to appeal to Christian revelation as a legitimate source of teaching vis-à-vis the universal faith—presumably carrying with it the authority to defy such theological bedrocks of the Roman Empire as polytheism—on the other hand, he is able to appeal to that same 'singular event' to provide a warrant for the right of a governing power to rule on all matters with respect to the practise of religion. In the absence of anything comparable to the miracles performed by Jesus, thereby demonstrating their divine authority, any challenge to the sovereign's authority can only be injurious to the state. According to Spinoza, we live in a post-prophetic age, and private persons are in no position to know what is good for the commonwealth.¹⁴⁴ Referring back to an age when men openly challenged the religious rule of kings in ancient Israel, he argues that,

if there had been no prophets who by *special revelation* could assuredly grant pardon for regicide, the kings would have had absolute right over all matters, both sacred and secular. Hence sovereigns of our own times, who neither have

accessed 25 Aug 2011: <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/03/iraq-and-the-moraljudgement-13> What relevance does all this have to Spinoza? In his own argument about the Church-state problematic, Spinoza identifies the papacy as an institution which has ably exploited the entirely understandable value people place on their relationship with God and their prospects for salvation. For much of Western history the papacy has been perceived as the absolute authority on these matters, and so he 'began gradually to establish his ascendancy over all the kings until he actually attained the pinnacle of dominion' (*TTP*, p. 226). Such is the power of religious authority over human minds, that papal authority could not be undone but by other 'churchmen' (p. 226: presumably a reference to the great reformers). But Spinoza does not see this as a counter example to his own argument, but, rather 'a clear indication of the strength and power of religious authority', (p. 226) which 'gives further warning of the necessity for the sovereign to keep it in his own hands' (ibid, p. 226). Where I am suggesting there is a resonance with the ideas of Spinoza and the contemporary US (one could possibly produce other examples) is the continuing importance of *religious* authority for the credibility of a ruling administration and its policies.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 225. Spinoza does not appeal to chap.13 of Paul's Letter to the Romans to formulate his doctrine, but his thinking does at times bear comparison to the 'divine right' theorists. For Spinoza, however, the divine right belongs to whoever happens to hold the power: king, military dictator, or, Spinoza's preferred choice, a man of good moral character who is the elected head of a democratic government and will uphold the principles of the universal faith. It is this mix of democratic and religious tendencies which makes Spinoza such an interesting thinker to consider when we look at the religio-political anatomy of the United States.

¹⁴⁴ See ibid, p. 223.

prophets nor are bound by right to acknowledge any (not being subject to the laws of the Hebrews)...possess this right absolutely.¹⁴⁵ (My emphasis)

Spinoza seems to be guarding against religious popular enthusiasm from below while leaving the door open for religious dictatorship from above.¹⁴⁶ Spinoza's own preference for democracy and free speech would, in his ideal state, mitigate against the latter scenario and justifies his place in the canon of philosophers who have contributed to the modern principle of tolerance and freedom of expression. On the other hand, the idea that one should as a matter of course invest sole authority in the sovereign power to be the interpreter of religion, whether that authority be an individual or an elected assembly, seems to leave too much to moral chance, and has a most dubious history in the modern world. Given his view that right is co-extensive with power, and that there is no standard of justice against which to judge the assertion of power outside the context of a civil order where a sovereign formulates law, it is questionable whether Spinoza's philosophy provides the moral resources with which to condemn the theocratic tyrant in the way we have come to expect of a liberal political theorist.¹⁴⁷ And here, in Spinoza, the unique Christian revelation, the *sui generis* passing of the torch from Jesus to his disciples, renders illegitimate future attempts by religious leaders and communities to establish institutions, public forms of worship, and public duties towards persons which are not approved by the sovereign:

But since it is the duty of the sovereign alone to decide what is necessary for the welfare of the entire people and the security of the state, and to command what it judges to be thus necessary, it follows that it is also the duty of the sovereign alone to decide what form piety towards ones neighbour should take, that is, in what way every man is required to obey God.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 228 – 229.

¹⁴⁶ Spinoza's distrust of the mob was not without grounds, and his attitudes were probably reinforced by events following the publication of the *TPT*. In 1672 the former leader of the Dutch Republic, Johan De Witt, who resigned after an invasion by Louis XIV and a surge in popularity for the House of Orange, was visiting his brother, Cornelius, who was in prison at The Hague. Alerted to his presence, an angry crowd dragged the two men from the prison and eviscerated them. While in the role of Pensionary, De Witt established himself as one of Europe's leading statesman, and, significantly, he seems to have resisted calls for an outright ban on Spinoza's book (see Israel, *Radical*, pp. 275 – 276).

¹⁴⁷ As one sympathetic commentator has written: 'If we cannot make sense of the idea that people have a natural right to such things [the 'things' referred to here are 'lives', 'property' and 'honour' of Britons under the heel of the Roman Empire], then we seem to be handicapped in the criticism we want to make of the Roman conduct (or of a tyrant's treatment of his own people' (Curley, 'Kissinger, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan', p. 335).

¹⁴⁸ Spinoza, *TPT*, p. 223.

This figure head of the radical Enlightenment might also be seen as the high philosophical advocate of a religio-political conservatism in thrall to the natural-divine right of governments, whether that government be headed by hereditary monarch or elected executive.

4. Locke on Toleration

(i). *The Context for Locke's Intervention: A Brief Sketch of the Background*

In his *Epistola de tolerantia* (1689), and other texts on the same theme,¹⁴⁹ John Locke takes on the seventeenth-century preoccupation with religious toleration much more directly than Spinoza, and with even more direct appeals to Jesus in justifying tolerance as a virtue of government. Like Spinoza, Locke wrote against a background of domestic disputes concerning the limits of religious freedom: after the Restoration, there was an urgent need in England to negotiate the differences between conforming and dissenting Protestants while inflicting minimal damage to the integrity of the established Church or threatening the civil peace.¹⁵⁰ There were two principal solutions on the table, the policies of comprehension or toleration (the latter was frequently referred to as 'indulgence'): comprehension recommended certain reforms of the Anglican Church to accommodate those who could not, in good conscience, remain in its current form;¹⁵¹ toleration recommended the release of dissenting Christians from their obligations to the established Church, assuming such congregations posed no threat to the peace of the commonwealth.¹⁵² Indeed, proposals were drawn up to implement a policy of comprehension where possible and toleration where necessary as a reform of the Act of Uniformity in 1667 and 1668. These proposals were debated in Parliament, and writers made their case for change (or not),¹⁵³ but there was no legislative action at that time,

¹⁴⁹ These would include the earlier *Essay Concerning Toleration*, composed in the 1660s and unpublished in Locke's lifetime, and the second (1690) and third (1692) *Letter for Toleration*: see J. R. Milton and Philip Milton (eds.), *An Essay Concerning Toleration: And Other Writings on Law and Politics (1667 – 1683)*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006. *Epistola de tolerantia* was quickly translated into English by William Popple: see Mark Goldie (ed.), *John Locke: A Letter Concerning Toleration and Other Writings*, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010, pp. 36 - 67.

¹⁵⁰ See Milton and Milton, General Introduction to *Essay Concerning Toleration*, pp. 1 – 161: 11.

¹⁵¹ The major points of dispute were between the majority Anglicans and the Presbyterians: the issues at stake ranged from the practise of kneeling to receive holy communion to some of the Thirty Nine Articles concerning Church government (see Milton and Milton, Introduction, pp. 14 – 22).

¹⁵² See *ibid.*, pp. 14 – 22.

¹⁵³ There is a concise review of the key literature in *ibid.*, pp. 22 – 26.

with the proposals failing to win sufficient support from either Parliament or Charles II.¹⁵⁴ It is in this context that Locke developed his thinking on the subject.¹⁵⁵

(ii) *The Demarcation of Church and State*

Locke's attitude to speculative theological opinions in the *Letter Concerning Toleration* has close affinities with Spinoza's, in so far as members of a political commonwealth should be permitted to hold and voice conflicting opinions on religious matters:

[T]he Magistrate ought not to forbid the Preaching or Professing of any Speculative Opinions in any Church...if a Roman *Catho-lick* believe that to be really the Body of Christ which another man calls Bread, he does no injury thereby to his Neighbour. If a *Jew* do not believe the New Testament to be the Word of God, he does not thereby alter anything in men's Civil Rights...I readily grant that these Opinions are false and absurd. But the business of Laws is not to provide for the Truth of Opinions, but for the Safety and Security of the Commonwealth...¹⁵⁶

Central to Locke's argument is the distinction between the functions of Church and commonwealth, with a view to demarcating the roles of their respective leaders. For Locke, a commonwealth is 'a Society of Men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing of their own *Civil Interests*.'¹⁵⁷ And the governors of such a commonwealth should only concern themselves with '*Civil Interests*', which Locke identifies with such mundane (but important) matters as 'Life, Liberty, Health, and Indolency of Body; and the Possession of outward things, such as Money, Lands, Houses, Furniture'.¹⁵⁸ What the governors of such a commonwealth 'neither can nor ought' to concern themselves with,¹⁵⁹ however, is 'the Salvation of Souls.'¹⁶⁰ For Locke, the reason the jurisdiction of a governing power does not extend to the care of souls is the same reason that it is not the business of any private individual:

[I]t appears not that God has ever given any such Authority to one Man over another as to compel anyone to his Religion. Nor can any such Power be vested in

¹⁵⁴ See *ibid* pp. 14 – 22.

¹⁵⁵ Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* appeared in the same year that the Act of Toleration was passed: the legislation granted freedom of worship and assembly to dissenting Protestants.

¹⁵⁶ Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 55.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 38.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 39.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 39.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 39.

the Magistrate by the *Consent of the People*, because no man can so far abandon the care of his own Salvation as blindly to leave to the choice of any other...¹⁶¹

In keeping with the religious culture of his age, Locke takes it that the salvation of the individual's soul is the proper concern of religion, and, as an heir to the Protestant tradition, such a matter is ultimately the concern of each individual and their personal relationship with God. That argument is an example of political theology of the second kind: normative political arguments are advanced on the basis of 'premises which are theological, even though not drawn (only) from Revelation'. Locke's arguments presuppose the truth of a particular, albeit minimalist, theological background, from which he argues that religious compulsion is wrong not only for the temporal strife it causes, but that it is ineffective, even counter production, with respect to the ultimate goal of religion.¹⁶²

For Locke, only a freely consenting religious conscience can ever be pleasing to God, and the forum where free souls may congregate to worship and cultivate their shared vision of the road to salvation is what we call a Church:

A Church then I take to be a voluntary Society of Men, joining themselves together of their own accord, in order to the publick worshipping of God in such manner as they judge acceptable to Him, and effectual to the Salvation of their Souls...No Man by nature is bound unto any particular Church or Sect, but everyone joins himself voluntarily to that society in which he believes he has found that Profession and Worship which is truly acceptable to God.¹⁶³

The essentially voluntary nature of the religious life means that leaders of a Church have even less right than the leaders of a commonwealth to compel participation. I say 'even less' because it is not given to the Church to use coercion or confiscation for any end at all: 'The end of a Religious Society (as has already been said) is the Publick Worship of God and, by means thereof, the acquisition of Eternal Life. No Force is here to be made use of upon any occasion whatsoever. For force belongs wholly to the Civil Magistrate'.¹⁶⁴

Having argued for the separation of religious and civil powers philosophically, morally and theologically, Locke draws on concrete episodes from England's recent past to sound a warning against an established Church's right to insist on conformity, arguing

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 39.

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 39.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 40.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 42.

(contra Spinoza) that the leadership of a Church is more likely to be influenced by the reigning political establishment than the other way round (Henry VIII, Edward VI, [Bloody] Mary I and Elizabeth I) are his chosen examples),¹⁶⁵ whereby the Church is used to cover for the religious dictatorship of a tyrannical individual or governing assembly with no natural or God-given authority over the souls of citizens.¹⁶⁶ The implications of all this for the governance of religious affairs within the state are strikingly different to Spinoza's when it comes to outward worship, which in the latter's framework is entirely left to the will of the sovereign. Again, using a political-theological argument of the second type, Locke argues,

Concerning outward worship, I say, in the first place, that the Magistrate has no Power to enforce by Law, either in his own Church or much less in another, the use of any Rites or Ceremonies whatsoever in the Worship of God. And this, not only because these Churches are free Societies, but because whatsoever is practised in the Worship of God is only so far justifiable as it is believed by those that practise it to be acceptable unto Him.¹⁶⁷

Unlike Spinoza, Locke presupposes a form of religion whereby salvation is understood unequivocally as a state to be sought in the afterlife, and is guaranteed only by a person having pleased God. This other worldly *telos* of the religious life seems to have made it easier for Locke to imagine a separation of religious and civil affairs than it was for Spinoza, with the latter's impersonal God and naturalistic conception of salvation. John R Milton and Philip Milton have identified 'the setting of boundaries' as an important characteristic of Locke's religio-political reasoning,¹⁶⁸ and these boundaries help to explain why when it comes to such matters as public worship, 'a Lockean commonwealth

¹⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁶⁶ In universalising his case Locke was able to undermine the intellectual integrity of the case for conformity, at least for those who were not wedded to some form of English exceptionalism. Locke considers the hypothetical case of two minority Christian communities (Armenian and Calvinist) based in Constantinople, and asks which has the right to force conformity on the other. According to Locke, appeals to orthodoxy will simply not do, 'For every Church is Orthodox to itself; to others, Erroneous or Heretical' (*Ibid.*, p. 44). The implication of this is that there is no independent, universally recognised authority to judge what counts as orthodox; as such, 'The Decision of that question belongs only to the Supreme Judge of all men' (p. 44). Having already argued for a separation of powers, civil and religious, Locke then considers whether the civil authority has any right to take sides in this case, and presents his reader with the rhetorical question, 'Will any man say that any Right can be derived unto a Christian Church over its Brethren from a Turkish Emperor?' (p. 44). Assuming his readers' answer will be an emphatic *no*, he draws the following conclusion: 'The Civil Power is the same in every place. Nor can that power, in the Hands of a Christian Prince, confer any greater Authority upon the Church than in the Hands of a Heathen; which is to say, just none at all' (p. 44).

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁶⁸ Milton and Milton, Introduction, p. 29.

is more secular than a Hobbesian one'.¹⁶⁹ They might have said that a Lockean commonwealth is more secular than a Spinozist one, too.¹⁷⁰

(iii) The Limits of Toleration

If Locke comes close to defining the relationship between Church and state in a manner which is recognisable to members of modern democracies, the arguments he uses are more explicitly theological than any we are likely to encounter today. Moreover, the limits he places on toleration would be quite foreign to the contemporary spirit. If Locke thought that the attempt to control religion constituted a greater threat to the peace and justice of nations than the proliferation of religion, this inclusive tendency did not extend to the proliferation of irreligion: 'Promises, Covenants, and Oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist'.¹⁷¹ Here we are back within the context of political theology of the second type,¹⁷² and the normative judgement which flows from this is a stark one: 'those who *deny the being of a God*' are 'not at all to be tolerated',¹⁷³ since 'The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all. Besides also, those that by their Atheism undermine and destroy all Religion, can have no pretence of Religion whereupon to challenge the Privilege of a Toleration.'¹⁷⁴ Some judge this to be a major deficiency in Locke's theory, which commentators have marginalised in arguing for the Englishman's importance in the development of modern liberal thought.¹⁷⁵ Roman Catholics are also famously (or infamously) excluded from Locke's system, not as a matter of principle, but as a matter of practical and political safeguarding: if a commonwealth could be persuaded that its Catholic population did not

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 32.

¹⁷⁰ In his *Tractatus Politicus* (1677), Spinoza argues that 'it is very important, that the temples consecrated to the national religion should be large and costly, and that only patricians or senators should be allowed to administer its principal rites, and thus that patricians only be suffered to baptize, celebrate marriages, and lay on hands, and that in general they be recognized as the priests of the temples and the champions and interpreters of the national religion': *Tractatus Politicus*, R. H. M. Elweschap (ed.), A. H. Gosset (trans.), London: G. Bell & Son, 1883, chap. viii, sect. 46.

¹⁷¹ Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 60.

¹⁷² Locke might have appealed to the Bible as a theological source for the practise of oath taking, although in the New Testament the whole practise of swearing oaths is called into question (see Matthew 5:34-37, James 5:12, and Hebrews 7:21).

¹⁷³ Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 60.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 60.

¹⁷⁵ Indeed, Israel argues, 'As a system it not only *did* not, but inherently *could* not, concede a full equality of religious status and expression to agnostics, Buddhists, Confucianists, Hindus or Muslims' (*Contested*, pp. 139). Israel may be rights on agnostics, but Locke does not regard the state as a fundamentally Christian construct, so it hard to see why his system *inherently* forbids equality of status; as he Locke says: 'Neither pagan, nor Mahumetan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth, because of his Religion' (*Letter Concerning Toleration*, pp. 58 – 59).

'arrogate unto themselves the Power of disposing Kings',¹⁷⁶ and abandoned the antinomianism which justified the suspension of moral and social norms in the defence of high religious truths,¹⁷⁷ then toleration would be conceivable. Spinoza's more general commitment to freedom of thought and speech would seem to counter this kind of intolerance, but given the tenants of the universal faith, and the absolute right of the sovereign to demand that this (or any other theology they prefer) be the public standard of piety, Spinoza is perhaps not (for practical purposes) that far removed from Locke on this point, even if Spinoza was not as convinced as Locke of the deleterious effects of irreligion on civil society. Moreover, for all his championing of freedom of speech, it amounts to little if 'all men are bound to keep faith even with a tyrant.' What Spinoza's system gives with one hand, it threatens to take away with the other.¹⁷⁸

(iv) Jesus in Locke's Argument

Locke's philosophical and historical arguments are proceeding by, and thereafter supplemented by, direct appeals to Jesus and the early Church, and this is no mere theological after thought. For Locke, tolerance is not merely to be adopted as a prudential stance in times of extreme religio-political ferment; rather, 'Toleration' is 'the chief Characteristic Mark of the true church...If the Gospel and the Apostles may be credited, no Man can be a Christian without charity and without *that Faith which works*, not by Force, but by *Love*.'¹⁷⁹ Locke cites Luke 22:25, where Jesus warns his disciples not to be like the gentiles who Lord it over their subjects.¹⁸⁰ 'The Business of True Religion', says Locke, 'is quite another thing.'¹⁸¹ Religion is directed towards 'the regulating of Mens Lives, according to the rules of Vertue and Piety.'¹⁸² Spinoza would not have dissented from this, but whereas Spinoza insisted on the right of the magistrate to legislate on such matters as official creeds, public worship etc, arguing that Jesus' authority to promulgate on religious matters as a private person was due to a unique revelation, Locke takes Jesus as the exemplar for Christian commonwealths to take heed of always and everywhere.

¹⁷⁶ Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 60.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 59 – 60.

¹⁷⁸ Compare Spinoza's acquiescence to tyrannical rule with John Locke's defence of revolution in the second of his *Two Treatise on Government* (1689), which was translated into French and warmly received by French radicals with revolutionary impulses: see Jacob, 'The Crisis of the European Mind: Hazard Revisited', in Phyllis Macka and Jacob (eds.), *Politics and Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 253 – 260: 257.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 36. The reference here is to Galatians 5:6.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 36.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 36.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, p. 36.

When considering those who would deny, by force, the right of private persons to organise themselves to worship as conscience permits, Locke offers the following advice:

If, like the Captain of our Salvation, they sincerely desired the Good of Souls, they would tread in the Steps and follow the perfect Example of that Prince of Peace, who sent out His Soldiers to the subduing of Nations, and gathering them into His Church, not armed with the Sword, or other Instruments of Force, but prepared with the Gospel of Peace and with the Exemplary Holiness of their Conversation. This was his Method.¹⁸³

One of Locke's main warrants for religious toleration is nothing other than the imitation of Jesus and his gospel: the privacy and spontaneity of authentic religious expression, which governments and Churches alike have feared and wished to control, is something Locke defends as wholly consistent with the spirit of primitive Christianity, the court of appeal for so much reforming Christian thought, through the Reformation and into the Enlightenment:

Some, perhaps, may object that no such Society can be said to be a true Church unless it have in it a Bishop or Presbyter, with Ruling Authority derived from the very Apostles, and continued down to the present times by an uninterrupted Succession. To these I answer. *In the first place*, let them show me the Edict by which Christ has imposed that Law upon his Church...For the Promise he has made us that *wheresoever two or three are gathered together in his Name, He will be in the midst of them*, Matthew 18:20, seems to imply the contrary.¹⁸⁴

Locke insists on the continuing relevance of the gospel's message 'that the true Disciples of Christ must suffer Persecution',¹⁸⁵ refuting the notion that 'the Church of Christ should persecute others, and force others by Fire and Sword to embrace her Faith and Doctrine'.¹⁸⁶ Such a policy is something Locke 'could never yet find in any books of the New Testament.'¹⁸⁷

While Locke may have looked in vain for any theological warrant for religious coercion in the New Testament, any serious student of Christian history will be aware that others reached a very different conclusion, and it is a weakness of Locke's masterful letter

¹⁸³ Ibid, pp. 37 – 38.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 41.

¹⁸⁵ Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 42.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 22.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 22.

that he does not meet these arguments head on.¹⁸⁸ What might be considered an oversight in Locke, however, was a major preoccupation of our next author.

6. Bayle on Toleration

(i) *The Context for Bayle's Confrontation with Luke 14:23*

One passage from the New Testament stands out above all others as the most influential proof text for coercive uniformity in matters of religion: Luke 14:23. The Gospel's context for the passage is Jesus' Parable of the Great Banquet: a man of means had invited some guests to dinner, but they all refused the invitation, offering a range of excuses; the dinner was almost ready, and, not wanting it to go to waste, the host opened his house to all and sundry, welcoming the poor and the sick, but still there was room for more. At this point in Luke's rendition of the parable, we get the crucial verse: 'καὶ εἶπεν ὁ κύριος πρὸς τὸν δοῦλον, Ἔξελθε εἰς τὰς ὁδοὺς καὶ φραγμοὺς καὶ ἀνάγκασον εἰσελθεῖν, ἵνα γεμισθῇ μου ὁ οἶκος' (Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the roads and the pathways, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be full'). From Augustine onwards this text was used to justify compulsion in religion, and, as such, those sympathetic to peaceful coexistence between religions have sometimes cast Augustine as 'Le prince et patriarche des persécuteurs' (the prince and patriarch of persecutors).¹⁸⁹

Academic students of the Bible are familiar with the tradition of mercilessly long commentaries on canonical texts, but even in a field renowned for scholars extracting so much from apparently so little source material, Bayle warrants a special mention for producing a seven hundred and seventy four page commentary on just a single injunction from Luke 14:23.¹⁹⁰ But Bayle's *Commentaire Philosophique sur ces Paroles de Jésus-Christ, "Contrain-les d'Entrer* (1686 – 1688) is notable for much more than its heft. It is simultaneously more focussed and expansive than Reimarus and Spinoza's treatment of toleration; considered together with his *Pensées Diverses* (see above), his position is more inclusive than the policy recommended by Locke; and perhaps most significantly of all, Bayle takes seriously the possibility that the teachings of Jesus himself might actually advocate a policy that persons of good character and education could consider offensive

¹⁸⁸ Indeed, he was criticised, by more Augustinian inclined theologians, on this and other points: see Jonas Proast, *The Argument of The Letter Concerning Toleration Briefly Consider'd and Answer'd*, Oxford, 1690.

¹⁸⁹ E. Lamirande, quoted in P. R. L. Brown, 'St Augustine's Attitude to Religious Coercion', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. 54, pts 1 & 2, 1964, pp. 107 – 116: 107.

¹⁹⁰ The work originally appeared in multiple volumes. I am referring here to the two volume English edition, translated anonymously in 1708. I will follow the pagination of a recent edition which largely follows the latter translation: Bayle, *A Philosophical Commentary on These Words of the Gospel, Luke 14:23*, John Kilcullen and Chandran Kukathas (eds. and trans.), Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund Inc., 2005.

to reason and morality. It is the burden of the *Commentaire*, however, to refute any such reading.

Bayle was Huguenot, a French Calvinist, who converted to the Church of Rome in his youth while receiving a Catholic education,¹⁹¹ but swiftly fell out of love and returned to the Protestant fold.¹⁹² This religious about-face came at a most importune time, and would prove extremely costly for Bayle and his family. Bayle was born during the reign of Louis XIV, when the freedoms secured for the Huguenots by Henry IV in the Edit of Nantes in 1598 were under threat by a belligerent clergy,¹⁹³ whose tireless petitioning of Louis XIV to deal with the heretics in his kingdom eventually paid dividends.¹⁹⁴ As an apostate, Bayle's position in French society was arguably more precarious than if he had remained a confessing Calvinist throughout,¹⁹⁵ and a period of self-imposed exile followed his rejection of Catholicism. Having returned to France under an assumed name,¹⁹⁶ Bayle secured a position as professor of philosophy at the Protestant Academy of Sedan. Bayle held the post until the institution was closed by royal decree in 1681, at the start of a decade when Huguenot churches were being closed down; in some cases, knocked down. As a Protestant, hiding the secret of his brief conversion, Bayle's academic career in France was over. He fled to the Netherlands, where he took up the chair of philosophy at the École Illustre in Rotterdam.¹⁹⁷ This change of environment marks the beginning of Bayle's prodigious publishing career, though not the beginning of his prodigious writing,¹⁹⁸ and it was in this context, among the Protestant refugee community in the Netherlands, that Bayle composed the *Commentaire*.¹⁹⁹

(ii) *Bayle's Philosophical and Theological Perspective on Luke 14:23*

There is no doubt that part of Bayle's motivation for challenging the principle of religious coercion was the sense of injustice that he and other Huguenots felt at the persecution of

¹⁹¹ In his early twenties, Bayle was educated at a Jesuit College in Toulouse, where he was introduced to the Aristotelian philosophy which still informed much Catholic thought. Bayle was sufficiently impressed by this system to embrace Catholicism for a period: see Kilcullen and Kukathas, editorial Introduction to *Philosophical Commentary*, pp. ix – xxii: ix – x.

¹⁹² Bayle's positive encounter with Catholicism was already fading by the time he came to defend his Master's thesis in 1670 (see *ibid*, p. x).

¹⁹³ See *ibid*, xiv.

¹⁹⁴ See *ibid*, xiv – xv.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid* x: 'Under French law "relapsed heretics" incurred heavy penalties.'

¹⁹⁶ In the first instance Bayle fled to Geneva where he worked as a private tutor; having returned to France, he adopted the name Béle (see *ibid*, x).

¹⁹⁷ See *ibid*, p. x.

¹⁹⁸ Bayle started publishing works on philosophy and religion from as early as the 1660s, but the works for which he is most famous were published during his second and permanent exile.

¹⁹⁹ See Kilcullen and Kukathas, Introduction, p. xi.

the Calvinist faithful by the *ancien regime*. But if Bayle was to mount a challenge, then he had to think beyond some of the dominant trends in the Calvinist religious tradition which dominated his early youth, and to which he ostensibly returned after his ill-fated conversion to Catholicism.²⁰⁰ Protestants who remained unwaveringly loyal to Jean Calvin in religio-political matters were not well placed to persuade others of the wickedness and folly of religious persecution, when the founder of their Church was widely regarded, and not without reason, as an enthusiastic persecutor of heretics in his own right.²⁰¹ Calvin, who supported the right of the sovereign power to enforce religious conformity and purge a commonwealth of heretical influence,²⁰² had no sympathy with the argument advanced by Locke, which pointed out that every religious community is orthodox according to the theological criteria of the community in question. For Calvin, the problem with religious intolerance was not one of principle: persecution in the name of religious truth was to be commended; the problem lay with the failure of some governments, and the individuals they ruled, to see that this truth lay solely in Protestant Christianity. The pragmatism of the Protestant Locke—with his concessions to the fallibility of human judgement in the absence of an agreed religious epistemology to determine the finer details of doctrine—was wholly lacking in Calvin; for the latter, to even raise these questions was to begin to turn away from God and the truths of faith originating in the *sensus divinus*.²⁰³ So where did Bayle turn for his arguments?

We have already seen that Bayle was a pioneer of historical criticism, paying close attention to the reliability, context and detail of his sources. But in his opening argument of the *Commentaire*, this many sided man of letters gives short shrift to both the preferred method of the modern exegete, concerned with establishing the literal sense through historical-grammatical analysis, and the older tradition of hermeneutics which insisted on a literal / historical sense of the text as a preamble to the more important spiritual meaning:

I leave it to the Criticks and Divines to comment on the Text in their way...My design is to make a Commentary of an uncommon kind, built on Principles more

²⁰⁰ Whether Bayle remained a Calvinist to the end of his days is a matter of debate: Israel gives the impression that he did not (see *Radical*, pp. 339 – 341; *Contested*, pp. 145 – 154).

²⁰¹ As noted already, Calvin was the driving force behind the execution of Michael Servetus. His thoughts on the political authority's rightful 'business to prevent true religion...from being besmirched and violated' are contained in bk. iv, chap. 20 of *Institutes* or: 'Calvin on Civil Government', in *Luther and Calvin*, pp. 47 – 86: 50.

²⁰² See Kilcullen and Kukathas, Introduction, p. xv.

²⁰³ See *ibid*, pp. xv – xvi.

general and more infallible than what a Skill in Language, Criticism or Common-place can afford.²⁰⁴

Against a very strong tradition of scholarship which casts Bayle as a sceptic and fideist in matters of philosophy and religion, Israel portrays Bayle as a rationalist infidel arguing his case for toleration at the bar of secular reason.²⁰⁵ Israel's rationalist reading of the *Commentaire* is not without warrant, but his summary of Bayle's arguments ignore the theologically grounded natural law ethic which is at the very heart of his biblical hermeneutic, and which in turn informs his reasoning.

As I stressed in previous chapters, in the age of Enlightenment, where 'reason' was routinely invoked by writers with divergent worldviews, it is worthwhile asking that kind of rationalism we are dealing with. The tendency to see Bayle as a proto secular rationalist finds support in his apparent subordination of all theological considerations to the faculty of reason and the practice of philosophy in biblical hermeneutics, ethics and politics:

Thus the whole Body of Divines, of what Party whatsoever, after having cry'd up Revelation, the Meritoriousness of Faith, and Profoundness of Mysterys, till they are quite out of breath, come to pay their homage at last at the Footstool of the Throne of Reason, and acknowledg, tho they won't speak out...That Reason, speaking to us by the Axioms of natural Light, or metaphysical Truths, is the supreme Tribunal, and final Judg without Appeal of whatever's propos'd to the human Mind. Let it ne'er then be pretended more, that Theology is the Queen, and Philosophy the Handmaid; for the Divines themselves by their conduct confess, that of the two they look on the latter as the Soverign Mistress.²⁰⁶

If one were to chose a quote which is indicative of philosophy's supposed assent to power in the 'making of modernity', one could do worse than nominate this one from Bayle.²⁰⁷ But when we come to consider what Bayle understands by 'Reason', which he takes to be the defining characteristic of the 'Soverign Mistress' that is philosophy, he is actually working in a theological tradition which runs from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas, and

²⁰⁴ Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, pt i, pp. 65 – 66.

²⁰⁵ He certainly does not dissent from an opinion of one of Bayle's contemporaries: that he belonged to the 'notre partie' (quoted in Israel, *Radical*, p. 339), referring to 'those who identify God with Nature, meaning non-providential "deists", pantheists, and atheists' (p. 339).

²⁰⁶ Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, p. 67 – 68.

²⁰⁷ *Philosophy and the Making of Modernity* is the subtitle to Israel's *Radical Enlightenment*, and the supremacy of philosophy over theology is a consistent theme.

which was still very much in evidence, to different degrees, in the early modern rationalism of René Descartes, G. F. Leibniz and Nicolas Malebranche.²⁰⁸ Descartes' reluctance to declare any intellectual lineage is often taken at face value by those beguiled by his pose of originality, but his rhetorical break from the last is undermined by the scholastic conceptual scheme that even he, when pressed, admitted undergirded his theorising.²⁰⁹ The influence of the metaphysical thought of the Catholic Descartes on the Protestant Bayle remained long after the latter broke from his brief communion with Rome.²¹⁰

According to Israel, 'In the opening chapter [of the *Commentaire*] "natural reason" is proclaimed the only instrument which can guide us.'²¹¹ Indeed, Israel goes on to say that, 'so emphatic is Bayle's assertion of the "jurisdiction del la lumière naturelle" that one can even read his aside about the Socinians stretching reason too far as subtlety sarcastic and insinuating.'²¹² Israel is struck by the philosopher's insistence that 'no amount of Biblical admonition, could make things contrary to the basic axioms of our reason such as the "whole is greater than its part"',²¹³ and he thinks it remarkable that Bayle should argue that theologians implicitly accept the natural light of reason as the intellectual high court in which their deliberations must terminate. But Bayle's conception of reason and nature are theological, 'that internal still Revelation, by which God

²⁰⁸ See Nicholas Jolley, *The Light of the Soul: Theories of Ideas in Leibniz, Malebranche, and Descartes*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

²⁰⁹ See Cottingham, 'A New Start? Cartesian Metaphysics and the Emergence of Modern Philosophy', in *Cartesian Reflections*, pp. 53 – 74.

²¹⁰ See Ryan, *Bayle's Cartesian Metaphysics*. One of the most important roles played by God in the philosophy of Descartes is as an epistemic guarantor: our cognitive capacities can aspire to truth, to know reality through clear and distinct ideas, because a benevolent God ensures that this is so (see *Meditations* three and four). For Descartes, the natural light of reason is a reflection of the divine light which has illuminated all creation and enables rational beings to understand themselves and the world. Bayle is writing in this vein when he justifies the status he accords to reason in biblical hermeneutics: 'tis this, there being a distinct and sprightly Light which enlightens all Men the moment they open the Eyes of the Attention, and which irresistibly convinces 'em of its Truth; we must conclude, it's God himself, the essential Truth, who then most immediately illuminates 'em, and makes 'em perceive in his own Excellence the ideas of those eternal Truths contain'd in the first Principles of Reason' (*Philosophical Commentary* p. 68). This rationalist view of God as creator, and enabler of our understanding, is prominent in the metaphysical tradition in which both Descartes and (more briefly) Bayle were schooled; it is perhaps manifest most plainly in the Christian tradition in Aquinas' treatment of God's relationship to the human intellect in *ST* (vol. i), pt i, q.105, art. 3; the roots of this go back to Plato, however, whose ideas were Christianised by Augustine and St Bonaventure (1221 – 1274), and this all formed part of the philosophical inheritance of Descartes (see Cottingham, 'Plato's Sun and Descartes's Stove', in *Cartesian Reflections*, pp. 272 – 318).

²¹¹ Israel, *Radical*, p. 336.

²¹² *Ibid*, p. 336.

²¹³ *Ibid*, p 336: other examples used by Bayle, and reiterated by Israel, include the logical necessity 'that if from two equal quantities one subtracts equal amounts, the residues must be equal', and the logical fallacy that one might 'supposed the essence of a thing can truly survive its destruction.' Compare this with Aquinas' treatment of God's power in q. 25 art. 4 of the *ST*, where he argues that 'there does not fall under the scope of God's omnipotence anything that implies a contradiction' (vol 1. p. 139). Here it is God, not merely human knowledge, that is bound by reason.

discovers to all Men the very first Principles.’²¹⁴ Moreover, Bayle’s supposed insistence on this natural light of reason as the ‘only instrument which can guide us’ refers specifically to the *interpretation* of scripture already understood as revelation, ‘especially in Matters of Practice and Morality’,²¹⁵ and outside the context of certain Protestant and fideistic Catholic circles, this is not in the least bit remarkable. Indeed, many of Bayle’s key philosophical reference points, when explaining his hermeneutical principles, come from the scholastic and Catholic rationalist tradition: from Aquinas,²¹⁶ Francisco Suarez,²¹⁷ Robert Bellarmine,²¹⁸ and Valerianus Magnus.²¹⁹ These authors were not always cited in agreement, but they contributed much to the intellectual tradition in which Bayle worked; much more so than his contemporary Spinoza, who had published his own thoughts on toleration less than a decade before, and who receives one derogatory remark.²²⁰ Why might elements of scholasticism have served Bayle’s purposes in the *Commentaire*?

(iii) *Christian Rationalism: Philosophy and (two kinds of) Theology*

In the first article of the first question of the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas poses the question, ‘Whether, besides philosophy, any further doctrine is required?’²²¹ He thinks another doctrine is required, namely ‘sacred doctrine’, by which he means that part of theology, of our knowledge of God, which is taught in scripture,²²² but it is noteworthy that the question is posed that way around: the legitimacy of sacred doctrine is put to the question by Aquinas, while philosophy is *presupposed* as an authoritative science. In the eighth article of the same question, Aquinas asks whether sacred doctrine is a subject matter for rational argument rather than the deposit of divine authority alone. Aquinas insists that it is, and, moreover, that it does not differ from other intellectual disciplines in this regard.²²³ The hermeneutic employed by Bayle is best understood as part of a European reemphasis on Christian rationalism rather than the birth of some form of

²¹⁴ Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, p. 80.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²¹⁶ On Aquinas and Thomism, see *ibid.*, pp. 110 – 113, 257 – 258, 505, 522, 524.

²¹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 91, 541.

²¹⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 413 – 414, 541.

²¹⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 67, 74. Whereas Suarez and Bellarmine were famous Jesuits, Magnus was a Capuchin.

²²⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 537.

²²¹ Aquinas, *ST* (vol.1), pt 1, q. 1, art. 1, p. 1.

²²² See *ibid.*, q. 1.

²²³ See *ibid.*, q. 1, art. 8. Aquinas here explicitly affirms something Bayle claims other theologians do implicitly: taking the authority of scripture as the point of departure for a *process of reasoning* which tries to render their interpretations of scripture *intellectually persuasive*.

secular critique.²²⁴ It is the extent to which he uses this rationalist hermeneutic to argue for wide-ranging religious toleration that marks him out from many of his rationalist predecessors.

One of the problems with—or necessary caveats to—the claim that philosophy triumphed over theology in the Enlightenment, even within the ‘radical’ Enlightenment, is the failure to specify exactly what theology was held to be in this often polemical context: more often than not, it refers to a biblical theology which makes truth claims about God, the world and human conduct, the authority for which is ostensibly drawn from *scripture alone*. As Aquinas says, ‘theology included in sacred doctrine [derived from scripture] differs in kind from that theology which is part of philosophy’,²²⁵ and so much of what is understood as philosophy in the early modern period is theological in its orientation, when considered in Aquinas’s latter sense.²²⁶ One of the characteristics of the Enlightenment is that the ‘book of nature’ was reasserted in European thinking about theological and moral truth after a period where the ‘book of scripture’ had dominated.²²⁷ And as so often happens when intellectuals feel that one important element in their tradition is dominating the discourse to the detriment of the tradition overall,²²⁸ a counter offensive is launched from within, and those charged with causing a pernicious imbalance by the abandonment of certain cardinal virtues are subjected to considerable opprobrium. This is accompanied by a forceful reassertion of those allegedly neglected virtues. So it was with the ‘theologians’ of the seventeenth and eighteenth-

²²⁴ Whether the concept of critique belongs exclusively to secular discourse has emerged as a lively research topic, prompted in part by supposed conflicts between Western democratic traditions and those of the Islamic world: see Talal Asad, Judith Butler, Saba Mahmood, and Wendy Brown, *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech*, California: University of California Press, 2009.

²²⁵ Aquinas, *ST* (vol. i), pt i, q. 1, art. 1, p. 1.

²²⁶ To take just four major figures from the seventeenth century, we could identify clear examples of this in Descartes, Leibniz, Malebranche, and possibly Spinoza, along with innumerable lesser lights.

²²⁷ The Reformation is obviously the seminal transformation in this regard. The shift in the opposite direction, towards rationalism, is evident in the three Christian philosophers cited above, who wrote little about the Bible, but, for many philosophers of the period, engagement with both ‘books’ was more balanced: see Popkin and Force (eds.), *Books of Nature and Scripture*.

²²⁸ To take three wildly different examples, beginning with the most historically relevant, whereby some Protestant Reformers’ denigrated reason over against faith, when the authority of the latter was reasserted against the purportedly rational deliverances of a clerical elite. Leaping forward into modern American politics, one might cite the rise of neo-conservatism in the Republican party in the late twentieth century, which was accompanied by the denigration of features of the more traditional (or paleo-conservative) element of the tradition, with the anti-imperialist pretensions of the latter recast as complicity in the domination of undemocratic regimes over their own people, and antithetical to an established conservative commitment to objective and universal values. Finally, one could take a major trend in twentieth-century literary criticism, when some critics dramatically announced the ‘death of the author’ in response to a perceived over emphasis on the recovery of a writer’s intentions, challenging this form of criticism with a call to return to the integrity of the text as it stands and the response of its readers. These radical internal oppositions do not usually last, but they represent important renegotiations of the balance of influence and power within traditions.

century who, according to Bayle, had sacrificed the 'universal Light, which God defuses in the Souls of Men',²²⁹ in favour of 'the literal and popular Meaning of the Words' of scripture,²³⁰ and had thereby 'led us into the lowest Conceptions imaginable of the Deity.'²³¹

(iv) Natural Law

Natural law resists easy definition, but at its heart is a robust moral realism, a rejection of positivism, and the insistence that 'good and evil are the conditions of legal obligation.'²³² What criteria we use for defining good and evil is, of course, a matter of perennial dispute, but God's 'imprint' on the natural world has proved a persistently popular source of appeal. When considering the rules of justice, including those rules which claim to have biblical authority, Bayle argues that we must 'resolve things to their first Origin, and regulate 'em by that natural Law which irradiates the human Mind, before any positive Law is propos'd'.²³³ And when Bayle argues that God simply cannot be thought to command something which we know by that natural law to be wrong, he is working in that scholastic tradition whereby faith and reason are in harmony. Ironically, however, the Christian philosopher who Bayle actually cites in this context is his primary opponent throughout the third and fourth part of his treatise, Augustine. In order to overthrow the literal reading of Luke 14:23, Bayle adopts the Augustinian formulation, 'That all literal Construction, which carries an Obligation of committing Iniquity is false',²³⁴ which has its roots in that Platonic rejection of literal readings of divine iniquities in classical Greek drama: Plato resurfaces, incognito, as a peace envoy in Rotterdam just as he had done in Cambridge earlier that century.

How we judge what is an iniquity is, then, is a matter of reason, and Bayle discusses at length why compulsion in religion is, in general, against reason.²³⁵ That Bayle

²²⁹ Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, p. 69.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

²³² d'Entrèves, *Natural Law*, p. 79.

²³³ Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, pt ii, p. 184.

²³⁴ Augustine, quoted in *ibid.*, pt i, p. 66.

²³⁵ Arguments in the first part of the *Philosophical Commentary* include the creation of moral contradictions in Christian nations, leading to social disorder and acts of depravity (see chaps iv, vi, x); providing a justification for the leaders of non-Christian nations to persecute Christian minorities (chap. v); and undermining one of the most popular charges levelled against Islam (chap. vii), and the pagans of antiquity (chap. ix), by behaving in the same way. Like Locke, Bayle permits intolerance if a religious minority is judged to pose a threat to a legitimate state authority, and, like Locke, he has Catholics in mind (pp. 46 – 50).

had developed a natural law ethic, which he judged to be in harmony with a biblical faith, is evident from the first chapter of the *Commentaire*:

I am verily persuaded, that Almighty God, before ever he spoke by an external Voice to Adam, to make him sensible of his Duty, spoke to him inwardly in his Conscience, by giving him the vast and immense Idea of a Being Sovereignly perfect, and printing on his Mind the eternal Laws of Just and Honest ...²³⁶

Bayle's striking contention that 'even...the reveal'd Truth of Adam was subordinate to the natural light in him'²³⁷ is defended 1) on the basis that Adam required a rational mind to even recognise that the revelation of God's law was properly binding on him; and 2) on the basis that his breaching of that revealed law was due to a failure to exercise natural reason's rightful dominion over the passions.²³⁸ In the Bible humans are created before anything is revealed to them as law, and their *natural* capacity for sound judgement and good action (prior to the fall) is not seriously questioned by the two greatest Christian philosopher-theologians prior to the Enlightenment: indeed, Aquinas is able to quote Augustine approvingly in this context when he writes, 'To regard what is truth as false, is not natural to man as created; but is a punishment of man condemned.'²³⁹ Aquinas and Augustine differ some what over the extent to which they think the 'punishment of man condemned' undermines their capacity to attain truth and to avoid sin: Augustine was at war with the Pelagian heresy and so was inclined to emphasis the shadow cast by sin; even so, he acknowledged that grace could enable man to perceive the true and to do the good;²⁴⁰ Aquinas granted greater power to natural reason to perceive the truth and do the good, while conceding that grace was required for our ultimate perfection;²⁴¹ Bayle granted more power still.²⁴²

²³⁶ Ibid, p. 70.

²³⁷ Ibid, p. 70.

²³⁸ See *ibid*, p. 70.

²³⁹ Aquinas, *ST* (vol. i) pt i, q. 94, art. 4, p. 481.

²⁴⁰ Augustine argued that, 'The most certain sciences are like things lit up by the sun so as to be seen. Now God Himself is He Whom sheds the light. And reason is in the mind as sight is in the eye': Aquinas cites this as an argument against the ideas that persons can attain truth without grace in *ibid* (vol. ii), pt ii, q. 109, art. 1. p. 1123.

²⁴¹ See *ibid*, pt, ii, q. 109 – 110. For Aquinas, the corruption of nature by original sin is more destructive to our desire for good than for knowledge (q. 109, art. 2).

²⁴² See *Philosophical Commentary*, pt iv, pp. 496 – 500, where Bayle doubts the singular importance of original sin as the 'Cause of all the false Judgements which Men make' (p. 496). Bayle takes one theological flash point crucial to this subject, centring round two competing propositions—1) that '*God wills that all Men shou'd be sav'd, and affords 'em Aid sufficient for this purpose*' (p. 532); and 2) that '*God wills not that all Men shou'd be sav'd, and does not afford 'em all Aid sufficient for this purpose*' (pp.

(v) Jesus and Gospel Morality

In terms of the part that Jesus himself plays in Bayle's engagement with the context for Luke 14:23, perhaps the most significant material comes in his reflections on 'Gospel-Morality'.²⁴³ For Bayle, 'Gospel-Morality' refers to the overall moral 'Spirit of the Gospel',²⁴⁴ which he wants to distinguish from the literal rendering of this or that passage, so that 'Gospel-Morality' has the cumulative authority to critique apparent departures from the overarching normative tendency, departures which would be 'contrary to the whole Tenor' of Jesus' teachings.²⁴⁵ Before he can use this hermeneutical device as a critique, however, as someone who keeps reminding the reader he is 'writing as a Philosopher',²⁴⁶ and not 'merely as a Divine',²⁴⁷ Bayle has to argue for its interpretative authority. 'Gospel-Morality', the overall spirit of Jesus' teaching, is understood by Bayle to be a development of that morality which is grounded in the basic principles of natural reason. Once validated as such, it carries even greater authority than if it been acquired by reason alone: '[H]aving more fully explain'd all the Dutys of Morality',²⁴⁸ taking them 'farther than God had originally reveal'd by natural Religion; it follows, that every Action in a Christian, which is not agreeable to the Gospel, is more unjust and more enormous, than if simply contrary to Reason'.²⁴⁹ But in what sense did Jesus take morality farther?

The expansions of morality Bayle is thinking of concern the counterintuitive features of Jesus' teaching, such as self-denial, the refusal to take revenge, or even to defend oneself against enemies.²⁵⁰ Bayle acknowledges that these precepts might very well be taken to be against our rational natures, 'for nothing is more agreeable to natural Light than defending one's self when assaulted, than revenging an Injury, than caring for

532 – 533). He judges both propositions to be well supported by scriptural and philosophical argument, such as an open minded enquirer, without prior investment in one side or the other, could be excused for being at a loss to know how to establish the truth of the matter (pp. 532 - 536). This is the kind of evidence one could cite in reading Bayle as a skeptic. There is, however, an implicit preference for the former proposition in Bayle's appreciation of 'Free-will' (p. 476), 'Determination towards truth' (p. 476) and the influence of education as a response to original sin (see, pt 4, chap. XV). Here, as so often in the Enlightenment, there are echoes of Erasmus.

²⁴³ See *ibid*, pt i, chap. 3.

²⁴⁴ See *ibid*, chap. 3.

²⁴⁵ See *ibid*, p. 80.

²⁴⁶ See *ibid*, p. 80.

²⁴⁷ See *ibid*, p. 80.

²⁴⁸ See *ibid*, p. 80.

²⁴⁹ See *ibid*, p. 80.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 81.

the Body'.²⁵¹ But he insists that 'Gospel-Morality' forces us to acknowledge deeper truths about the obligations we have to others in light of our relationship with God—truths which may not be self-evident from the natural light of reason, but which are a fitting and rational development on this firm foundation:

Does not this Light inform all, who contemplate it duly, and who raise themselves above the sable Clouds with which the Passions and earthly Vapour of the Body overcast the Understanding, that 'tis honest and praise-worthy to forgive Enemy's, to moderate our Resentments, and subdue our Passions?...That being the case, t'was easy to perceive that nothing cou'd be more reasonable than enjoining Meekness of Heart, Forgiveness of Injurys, Mortification, and Charity.²⁵²

Bayle, writing in an age of rationalism, was keen to make the gospel conform to the *lumière naturelle*, but he does not underestimate the challenge posed by Jesus to our basic intuitions; indeed, like other writers of his generation, Bayle thought that the miracles performed by Jesus functioned to impress upon our sometimes unreflective minds the divine truth of 'that Gospel-Morality', which expands but does not contradict reason:

[A]ll the moral precepts of the Gospel are such, as when weigh'd in the balance of natural Religion, will certainly be acknowledg'd Sterling: And JESUS CHRIST having, over than above this, wrought a vast number of Miracles, so that only the Repugnancy of his Doctrine to some evident Truths of natural Religion, cou'd give the least ground for doubting the Divinity of his Mission.²⁵³

So the authority of the 'Gospel-Morality' has been established by the natural light of reason, which serves to confirm the godly source of the miraculous works of Jesus; all that is left is to show now, then, is that this ethic counts against a literal rendering of Luke 14:23. Of course, the kind of moral virtues highlighted by Bayle in the above quotations—meekness, exercising control over resentments and passions, forgiveness, charity—are precisely the kind of traits one might associate with a policy of tolerance, but Bayle goes further, insisting that a policy of religious compulsion is fundamentally at odds with the character of Jesus found in the Gospels:

²⁵¹ Ibid, p. 81.

²⁵² Ibid, pt i, pp. 81 – 82.

²⁵³ Bayle, *Philosophical Commentary*, pt i, p. 81.

[T]he principal Character of JESUS CHRIST, and, if I may say, the reigning Qualitys of his Soul, were Humility, Meekness, Patience: *Learn of me, says he to his Disciples, for I am meek and lowly in heart.* He's compar'd to a Lamb led to the slaughter, which opens not its mouth: Blessed, says he, are the Meek, and the Peace-makers, and the Merciful. When he was revil'd, he revil'd not again, but committed himself to him who judgeth right.²⁵⁴

Not only does Bayle think that religious intolerance is contrary to the general thrust of that 'Gospel-Morality' manifest in the person of Christ, he thinks there is evidence for a more or less direct repudiation of such a policy:

He'll have us bless those who persecute us, and pray for those who persecute us; and far from commanding his followers to persecute Infidels, he won't allow 'em to oppose their Persecutions, otherwise than by Flight: *If they persecute you, says he, in one City, fly to another.* He does not bid 'em stir up the People against the Magistrates, call to their aid the Citys which are in their interest, lay formal siege to that which had persecuted 'em, and compel 'em to believe: No, *Go forth from thence, says he, and remove to another place.*²⁵⁵

This repudiation extends to Jesus' understanding of the true nature of discipleship, as freely given commitment to his leadership.²⁵⁶

In advancing arguments of the kind we have been considering, Bayle is engaging in the first and second types of political-theological discourse outlined above: some of his political arguments clearly depend on premises that are theological,²⁵⁷ and they are developed by appeal to revelations which expanded on the deposit of natural reason through the teachings of a figure who 'spoke...on the part of God.'²⁵⁸ What Jesus spoke 'on the part of God' concerned nothing less than how one becomes one of his people; as a shepherd of God's people,

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 83.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 85.

²⁵⁶ See *ibid*, pp. 83 – 84.

²⁵⁷ In addition to the epistemological and moral warrants provided by God, there are other arguments which depend on theological premises, including the argument that 'Acts of Religion purely external can't please God' (*Ibid*, p. 8; see also pp. 76 – 77); that 'God ought not nor can be imitated in the Conversion of Hereticks' (p. 20; see also pt iii, pp. 301 – 303); that 'God does not require us to labour for the Salvation of our Brethren, by disobeying his Orders' (p. 21; see also pt ii, pp. 311 – 312).

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pt i, p. 81. I have concentrated on Jesus, but Bayle also appeals to Paul, especially his Letter to the Galatians, when attempting to argue for a greater sense of proportion with respect to the sin of heresy (see, pt iv, pp. 500 – 504); and he turns to I Corinthians when arguing for the primacy of that 'faint Dawn' of conscience when making our moral judgements (pt ii, p. 262).

He opposes his own Mission to that of Thieves and Robbers, who break into the Fold, to carry off the Sheep by force which don't belong to 'em...When he ascends into Heaven, he commands his Apostles to go and convert all Nations; but then 'tis only by Teachings and by Baptising...²⁵⁹

It is clear that Bayle intended these political-theological arguments to speak to the concrete cases of religious intolerance which had attended the lives of religious minorities during his own time, especially the Huguenots,²⁶⁰ and, in a striking passage, Bayle juxtaposes the restraint shown by Jesus in his dealings with a stubborn, unreceptive audience with the kind of drastic messages measures taken by some of his modern day followers:

When he sees himself forsaken by the Multitude, he does not arm those Legions of Angels, which were always as it were in his pay, nor send 'em in pursuit of the Dissenters, to bring 'em back by force...I don't think it possible to imagine anything more impious, or more injurious to JESUS CHRIST, or more fatal in its Consequences, than his having given Christians a general precept to make Conversions by Constraint...Into such Abysses do the infamous Patrons of the literal Sense plunge themselves; who better deserve the Title of Directors-General of the Slaughter-House and Shambles, than that of Interpreters of Scripture.²⁶¹

The visceral character of Bayle language here display a level of personal investment and anger which was evident, if to a lesser extent, in Locke and Reimarus's writings on tolerance, and which was certainly bubbling under the surface in the cool reflections of Spinoza. And in another passage, Bayle brings together the natural-theological and scriptural objections to a literal rendering of Luke 14:23, in a neat summary which he sets against concrete examples of the coercive and retributive practises which were carried out in the name of Christ in Bayle's own time:

Let's now sum up the Argument thus: The Literal Sense of this Gospel-text, Compel 'em to come in, is not only contrary to the Lights of natural religion, which are the primary and original Rule of Equity, but also to the resigning and essential Spirit of the Gospel it self, and of its Author; for nothing can be more opposite to

²⁵⁹ Ibid, pt i, p. 84.

²⁶⁰ See *ibid*, pp. 39 – 41, 54 – 56, 57 – 64; pt i, pp. 159 – 161.

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, pt i, pp. 84 – 85.

this Spirit, than Dungeons, Dragoons, Banishment, Pillage, Gallies, Inflictions, and Torture. Therefore this literal Sense is false.²⁶²

Bayle's commentary on Luke 14:23 may have not have made use of a traditional *Hermeneutica sacra*, but the presuppositions of that hermeneutic, and many of the conclusions, were manifestly theological: a theological-philosophical hermeneutic intended to have very definite political implications.

7. Conclusion: Theistic and Christo-centric Discourses of Toleration

Just as the so called 'first Quest' chronicled by Schweitzer did not really mark the beginning of European attempts to hypothesise about Jesus as a historical figure, nor did it mark the beginning of modern attempts to think about Jesus politically—either as a political figure of his own time, or as a reference point for the politics of modern times. The writers considered in this chapter—Reimarus, Spinoza, Locke and Bayle—all thought it necessary to go back to the roots of Christianity in order to address the political challenges of their present, one of the most pressing being the question of religious toleration.

Spinoza and Locke are at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of their assessment of the relationship between Church and state in controlling the content of religion in the public sphere. Locke, with his other worldly conception of the *telos* of religion saw the Church as an essentially independent body of feely consenting souls, with the governing power employed merely as the keeper of peace and enforcer of contracts. Spinoza, with his immanent conception of the religious life, saw the 'God given' ruling power as the guarantor of any religious life at all,²⁶³ and, along with that role, he insists on that ruling power's right to authorise and privilege one religion over others in the public sphere. Spinoza identified the right to assert religious authority with Jesus, but, as a private individual, with no official political status or power, Jesus had to be an exception to his rule: in Spinoza's political theology, only prophets whose missions are adorned with miracles have any right to publically subvert an established political authority. Spinoza saw no such prophets in seventeenth-century Europe: Jesus and his disciples seem to have been the last of them. As a private individual, but one committed to freedom of

²⁶² Ibid, p. 84.

²⁶³ Bayle also acknowledged the role of the non-Christian state, whether by design or benign indifference, in facilitating the preservation of Christianity in the early centuries of its existence, when 'intervals of Peace and Respite...contributed mainly to the Establishing [of] the Christian religion' (ibid, p. 61).

speech, Spinoza had no qualms about proposing a creed for modern Christian nations, and, with its references to God and his attributes, to Christ, to sin, and salvation, the 'infidel' philosopher's creed is not without its theological demands. Like Spinoza, Reimarus followed the road frequently travelled by Enlightenment thinkers, proposing a shared theological baseline for religious respectability. For Reimarus, if a person adheres to the love command, of God and neighbour, then they are following the essence of Jesus' teaching and can therefore reasonably be regarded as a member of, or fellow traveller with, the Christian tradition.

Locke and Bayle focus less on establishing a tolerable theological consensus, devoting more attention to the personal character of Jesus, the overall content of his teaching and the manner of his public mission. This mission was thought not to be coercive in character, and any attempt to present religious compulsion as authorised by him is a slight against the 'Captain of our Salvation' (Locke), who spoke 'on the part of God' (Bayle). It is true that the majority of the arguments advanced by these two writers are not drawn from scripture; rather, they philosophise on moral and practical political considerations. What I have tried to show, however, is that the concept of moral and political reason at work in these writers (especially Bayle) is one grounded in a tradition of natural law, whereby Jesus' mission expands (but does not contradict) the horizons of our God given rationality, and does so in such a way that, should the natural light of reason be dimmed by sin, then the divinity of that mission is reinforced by miraculous displays of God's power. For many intellectuals in the Enlightenment, the political tolerance of religious diversity would have been as welcome as any supernatural miracle. Some of the Enlightenment figures I have considered here, had no qualms about appealing to the (elsewhere disputed) supernatural miracles of Christ to add theological weight to their arguments for radical reform in this sphere of political and social life.

CONCLUSION

History

The catalyst for this study was the persistence of a view, especially within New Testament studies, that the historical study of Jesus began abruptly with the publication of Herman Samuel Reimarus's *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger* (1778), a perception which has its origins in Albert Schweitzer's *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* (1906). What this enquiry has shown is that this impression errs in two directions, simultaneously overestimating and underestimating Reimarus with respect to his writings on Jesus and Christian origins.

The traditional view overestimates Reimarus because, while the aforementioned text was influential for the great German tradition of biblical criticism running from the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth, the central historical innovation Reimarus is often credited with, that of separating the religious and political aims of Jesus from those of his disciples and the Gospel writers, had been made decades earlier. Some of his predecessors lacked Reimarus's linguistic and philological skills (Thomas Chubb), but they nevertheless possessed the critical spirit and historical consciousness to reimagine Christian origins in novel ways (Chubb, John Toland and William Tindal). In the case of Jean LeCerc, we have the marriage of philological excellence and historical consciousness coming together to produce a robust narrative account of Jesus which largely conforms to the traditional Christian picture, challenging the view that historical reconstruction was, from the outset, theologically destructive.

These writers worked against the background of important changes to the way European thinkers understood their relationship to the universe and to the human past, changes which were centuries in the making and which served to displace the Bible as the provider of an all-encompassing cosmic narrative into which all of human history was subsumed. This 'great reversal' in the Bible's place as *the* resource for reconstructing the past, must also be seen alongside the rise of historical skepticism in the seventeenth century—which sounded a warning against complacency among Christians with respect to the religion's historical foundations—and the rise of empirical science. The apologetic works offered by major figures in historical criticism such as Hugo Grotius and Richard Simon, which centred on the Gospels, can be read as counterpoints to that very skepticism, and an attempt to meet the demands for empirical evidence. Reimarus's connection with all these writers has been well established through his citations of them

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in his own work, through his correspondence, his travelling to major centres of European learning, and his vast library.

With the possible exception of LeClerc's,¹ most of the historically substantial, or at least historically novel, treatments of Jesus and Christian origins during the Enlightenment were undertaken by writers associated with non-Trinitarian forms of Christianity (the early Chubb, William Whiston), with deism (Reimarus) or atheism (d'Holbach). These theological or atheistic worldviews all leant themselves to a naturalistic, historical-critical understanding of Jesus. In the case of atheism, material history and human psychology is more or less all there is to be investigated when studying the origin of religions; with deism, God's general providence can be discovered through the investigation of nature, including those human beings who feature in the history of revealed religions; in non-Trinitarian Christianity, the humanity of Jesus is emphasised, and so the human centred drivers in historical narrative, such as personality and intentionality, are more likely to be considered appropriate explanatory categories. Atheism was not an option for Reimarus, and it was rather rare in the Enlightenment anyway, so it was non-Trinitarian Christianity and deism which provided the theological context for Reimarus's intervention. For Reimarus personally, while he sympathised with both Arianism and Socinianism, he found his spiritual home in the *natürlichen Religion* of the providential deist.

The historical images of Jesus produce during the Enlightenment were less concerned with challenging religious authority per se, than with the traditional sources of religious authority. The Catholic Church and its approved theologians had been the original targets for reforming critics. More significantly, for the development of historical criticism, was the challenge posed by radical Protestants (and former Protestants) to scripture: for many of these critics, the Bible itself had to be reformed before it could be declared a safe resource for religious truth. Historical criticism was one way of perusing this reforming enterprise, and the historical Jesus became the touchstone for religious authority once the Bible had been cleansed of its sins, or at least its intellectual and moral errors. This narrowing of religious authority had orthodox forerunners, however, whether in the turn to the humanity of Jesus by St Frances and his followers; or the Erasmanian vision of moral reform, based on the recovery of the values of primitive Christianity and

¹ Even LeClerc has been accused of Socinianism, both by contemporaries and later historians of the movement: see Klauber, 'Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism', where we find evidence that Bayle (no stranger to the finger of religious suspicion) noted 'Socinian tendencies' (p. 627), while his nemesis Simon was rather more direct (p. 622, n. 37).

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living the *philosophia Christi*. What Frances and Erasmus did not envisage, however, is that the historical Jesus could be represented in substantially different ways to the Jesus of the Gospels, shorn of some or all of his supernatural attributes. But that was the conclusion of some of those Enlightenment writers who pursued Christocentric / Jesus-centred programmes of religious reform through historical criticism.

(ii) *Morality*

The other problem with the customary view of Reimarus with New Testament studies is that it underestimates the scope of his intellectual interests, which found expression in and through his critical writing on Jesus. The rise of a 'strictly historical' study of Jesus is sometimes difficult to distinguish from the proliferation of heterodox conceptions of Jesus and Christian origins, all of which claimed greater authenticity than more orthodox representations. A writer like Chubb certainly made historical judgements about Jesus and the Gospels, but he and many of his fellow Anglophone critics seem to have been driven primarily by moral concerns in their production of heterodox images of Jesus and the early Church.² This might help to explain why Chubb did not consider it essential to offer a developed explanation for Jesus' apocalyptic utterances in the Gospels, making his reconstructive less historically compressive than Reimarus's subsequent attempt. But Reimarus was also a highly moralistic critic, who wrote about the nature of morality under divine providence, and who brought that moral emphasis into his writings about Jesus. Although Reimarus's account of Jesus and Christian origins is rightly seen as theologically deflationary, there are some things he thought ought to be preserved from the tradition, not least of which was the salvific morality and piety preached by the historical Jesus. This dimension of the Christian tradition had already been 'ring-fenced' by writers from Erasmus to Spinoza and was reaffirmed by Reimarus and, to an even greater degree, by his publisher, G. E. Lessing. In the wake of the *Fragmentenstreit*, the morality of Jesus was taken up as the living exemplar of Kant's philosophical moral system; it found expression in the liberal lives tradition of nineteenth-century German scholarship; and the radical ethical vision of Albert Schweitzer, for whom Jesus functioned not as an affirmation of, but as a challenge to, liberal modernity. As I have shown, however, these familiar moral narratives were all developments of an ethical emphasis in Western conceptions of Jesus and Christianity which had been taking shape in Christian

² A point emphasised in Moore and Sherwood, *Biblical Scholar*, pp. 54 – 48.

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thought at least since the Reformation: an emphasis championed by Erasmus, whose vision of reform proved conducive to many scholars from within the Protestant tradition during the Enlightenment, who radicalised his ethical challenge to the Church by placing greater emphasis on Jesus as a historically situated reflection of the moral character of God, rather than as Erasmus' God-incarnate who founded a Church which continues to function as God's presence on earth. The moral character of Jesus was evaluated and elevated by, among others, the British and Irish 'deists' in the philosophical spirit of the natural law tradition reinvigorated by early modern scholasticism, but, in the hands of Reimarus (at least in the final two *Fragments*), this Jesus of moral reason functions not as a reforming influence over the Church, but as a source of moral-theological authority whose aims as a historical figure simply did not cohere with those of orthodox Christianity. Reimarus's strategy of Christian theological repudiation, rather than reform, was and remains an exception to the general trend within critical scholarship on Jesus.

The more general preoccupation with the moral among writers in this study had pre historical-critical foundations, growing out of anxieties about the relationship between God and goodness. The sovereignty of the good and its identification with the nature of God was affirmed by Christian Platonism and, more prevalently, through frequent borrowings from a resurgent scholasticism, especially Thomism. When, at the Council of Trent, the *Summa Theologica* was laid beside the Bible on the altar,³ Thomas Aquinas was established as the supreme intellectual authority for the so called Counter Reformation. But just as the reforming impulse heralded by Luther, with its full blooded return to scripture, would quickly develop in ways that the original reformers did not envisage, so too the rationalism of the Thomist legacy would filter out into an increasingly eclectic intellectual culture, helping to define the questions and furnish answers for philosophers and theologians often working quite independently of the aims of the Church. In the Enlightenment, theological-moral rationalism and the historical-critical method operated as a partnership in critiques of the Bible, and, more often than not, in the moral elevation of Jesus.

(iii) Political Theology

The political dimension of Reimarus's writings about Jesus is also apt to be forgotten. The whole relationship between Jesus and politics in the minds of intellectuals in the early

³ See Stone, 'Scholastic Schools', p. 304.

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modern period was complex. Part of the problem with clarifying this relationship is the relatively narrow conception of 'the political' as a category of discourse during the period. Nevertheless, two prominent perspectives can be discerned. On the one hand, the 'cosmic Christ', 'Christ the King', was still considered by many to be the ultimate ruler of all nations, albeit a ruler assisted in his providential role by earthly representatives, often kings, who were assigned the task of governing persons during their relatively brief existence before passing over to their ultimate judge. On the other hand, there was a growing sense that it was theologically problematic to associate God-incarnate with the same Church / state institutions which were judged by some to have led their countrymen and women through civil and international conflict of the bloodiest kind, scarring the souls of aristocrat and peasant alike. Earthy kingdoms, with their material politics of power, were considered an unsuitable preoccupation for Jesus. This was certainly the view of Chubb who—in a tradition which is found in Luther and again in Locke—views the true gospel of Christ as one concerned with that kingdom which is not of this world. The business of power politics is a necessary, mundane affair, which exists in uneasy tension with the humility of the Christian message and its focus on the spiritual destination of man. One of Reimarus's most innovative arguments was to locate this tension within Jesus himself: yes, Jesus taught humility and offered sound advice for those concerned with the proper goal of religion, eternal salvation, but he was a man, a political animal, with the ambitions common to men of all times, who saw himself as the anticipated leader of his people in a restored Israel. Writing from the point of view of Lessing and his hopes for the enlightenment of this people, John Riches argues that by presenting Reimarus's reconstruction for consideration by the reading public, Lessing was 'pressing for an account of Jesus as an initiator of change within a given religious and political history';⁴ the upshot of which would be that,

At the heart of the Christian religion would then stand a figure whose humanity was not simply a passive and pliable instrument of the divine will, but a real source of creativity and change and initiative...In this way Lessing hoped to make his contribution to the emancipation of the German people from the tyranny imposed on them by the unholy alliance of the Orthodox and the Princes.⁵

⁴ Riches, 'Lessing as Editor', p. 252.

⁵ Ibid, p. 252.

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Whatever Lessing's hopes for Reimarus's reconstruction as a tool of liberation, it was the destructive element which impacted on his readers. The reception of the *Fragments* was such that Jesus and his disciples were as likely to be read as power hungry fanatics as creative, liberating historical actors.⁶ But the constructive hopes of the Reimarus-Lessing project were real enough, even on the part of the former. Reimarus may have taken Jesus to be a political-theological failure in his own lifetime, but he had no qualms about using Jesus as a source of political-theological authority in the eighteenth-century, and in a much more concrete and prosaic way than the one outlined by Riches. Jesus was judged by Reimarus to have been a more inclusive teacher than Moses, so modern states purporting to be Christian should mirror that inclusivity. Moreover, in so far as moral virtue and the hope of eternal life were the most enduring aspect of Jesus' religious legacy, then, if devotees of natural religion shared those values, they should be tolerated in modern Christian nations. But Reimarus was just one of many Enlightenment figures to use Jesus to defend religious toleration. His predecessors include Locke, Bayle, and Spinoza. Locke and Bayle found evidence in the Gospels for Jesus' own support for religious toleration, whereby Christ's teachings were found to be consistent with, and even to expand on, the truths of reason and natural law. The two writers had different ideas about the scope of toleration, however, with Bayle sanctioning a freedom of conscience which, for Locke, would threaten to spill over into amoral permissiveness. Locke was nevertheless a progressive of his time, and his critics continued to invoke Luke 14:23 to resist toleration.

In Spinoza's reflections on religious history, Jesus and his disciples constitute the last legitimate act of religious defiance against the sovereign power, and Spinoza found in the unique Christ event (including the great commission) the natural-theological authority for transmitting the universal faith, which he felt offered the Church sound guidance for drawing acceptable boundaries around religious diversity. These 'uncontroversial' tenants of faith were certainly broader than anything to be found in the dominant Christian denominations of the time, but, if upheld to the letter by a sovereign, they would threaten to limit the scope of religious dissent. Locke went further and argued for the outright exclusion of atheists from the remit of any policy of toleration. Religious tolerance still has its limits today in European societies, evidenced by various bans on the public display of religious symbols, from headscarves to crucifixes, and the constructions

⁶ This was Kant's complaint against 'the fragmentarist', who suggested that Christ staked 'his life for just a political though illegal purpose' (*Religion with the Boundaries*, n. to p. 96).

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of minarets. It should not surprise us, therefore, that there were even greater limits still among many of the most progressive of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Then, as now, Jesus was invoked by writers supporting positions across the socio-political spectrum. The protean nature of his representation in the Gospels suggests that this will be ever thus.

Radical Religious Enlightenment

Most historians of biblical studies would grant the importance of situating the history of the discipline within some wider intellectual framework. The approach taken in this study has been somewhat different. Rather than just sketching the wider intellectual context for changes in biblical hermeneutics, an attempt has been made to use one of the central concerns in biblical scholarship, the study of Jesus, as a way of unlocking the intellectual life of the Enlightenment. What makes this subject an effective tool to penetrate the intellectual context of the age in question, is the obvious (but worth repeating) truth that the European Enlightenment fell within a period which was still overwhelmingly Christian. And when examining any period in the history of European Christian culture, we can learn a significant amount about the intellectual *zeitgeist* by paying careful attention to how the thinkers of the age are imagining and invoking this figure, whose pervasive influence on Western culture is a historical truism.⁷ What this study has shown is that there were a host of philosophers, theologians, historians and biblical critics, who were engaged with the Enlightenment aims of human advancement—moral, material and political—who thought that at least one crucial dimension of that project was the determined re-examination of the origins of Christianity and to define, or redefine, their relationship to those origins. This would come as no surprise to the greatest recent explicator and champion of the ‘secular’ wing of the Enlightenment: in his remarks on David Sorkin’s *Religious Enlightenment*, Jonathan Israel writes, ‘Sorkin is right to argue that enlightenment and faith went together for most participants in the Enlightenment, and that this is a major topic that has been relatively neglected.’⁸ The present study has shown how the figure of Jesus functioned in some major ‘Enlightenment projects’.

⁷ My concern has been with the intellectual context of philosophy, theology and biblical studies, but the same point could be made / illustrated about Jesus in Western art and literature, or in the full range of discourses which help to constitute human culture: see, for example, Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, Chicago Ill. / London: Chicago University Press, 1996; Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*; John Schad (ed.), *Writing Bodies of Christ: The Church from Carlisle to Derrida*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011; Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Terror*.

⁸ See Israel’s endorsement on the rear cover of Sorkin’s *Religious Enlightenment*.

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crossing the so called 'radical' and 'moderate' divide, from Reimarus, Locke and Chubb ('moderates') to Spinoza, Bayle and Toland ('radicals'). I do not argue that the thought of such 'radicals', or 'moderates' for that matter, could not be developed along more secular lines; in some cases, it certainly was. Nor would I disagree that a more thoroughly secular vision is evident in the writings of writers such as J. O. La Mettrie, Denis Diderot or David Hume. But the minority status of secular thought in the 'centuries of Enlightenment', in a way that would be recognisable as such today, needs to be recognised for an honest discussion to be had about the nature of our relationship to the age.

'There is something about the Enlightenment',⁹ writes the historian David Bell, before going on to give a concise summary of what that 'something' is:

Today, few educated men and women spend much time debating whether Western civilization took a disastrously wrong turn in the High Middle Ages. They do not blame all manner of political ills on Romanticism, or insist that non-Western immigrants adopt Renaissance values. But the Enlightenment is different. It has been held responsible for everything from the American Constitution to the Holocaust. It has been defended as the birthplace of human rights and condemned as intolerant, cold, abstract, imperialist, racist, misogynist, and anti-religious.¹⁰

What I would add to Bell's account, is that for some time now the Enlightenment has functioned, in certain quarters, in something approaching the way Christian origins once functioned for earlier modern intellectuals attempting to understand their own spiritual and intellectual roots: as a historical backdrop and battleground for competing cultural identities and intellectual commitments. This was especially true of Christian origins in the Enlightenment and throughout the nineteenth century, and it continues today. Whether considering first-century Christianity, or the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Enlightenment, some modern writers produce (or just imagine) versions of the age which seem to provide an edifying precedent for later developments, and use these versions for polemical purposes against perceive threats to the 'progress' heralded by that formative age. At the opposite end of the spectrum, others scholars are inclined to reject the supposed characteristics of the age in question as a wrong turn in the history of human thought. Leaving first century Christianity to one side, for anyone wanting to

⁹ David A Bell, 'Where Do We Come From? (review of Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*), *The New Republic* (on-line), 08 Jan. 2012, accessed 21 July 2010: <http://www.tnr.com/article/books-and-arts/magazine/100556/spinoza-kant-enlightenment-ideas>

¹⁰ Ibid.

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define themselves in relation to the Enlightenment, it is important to be reminded of how much of the thinking in the period was actually forged in both destructive and constructive conversation with the Bible and Christian origins. This conversation was conducted through the prism of competing philosophical and theological positions which, in many cases, are rooted in centuries of Western Christian thought, with undoubted borrowing from Jewish and Islamic traditions (a topic beyond the scope of this thesis). Indeed, so varied is the history of Christian thought that it is sometimes very difficult to determine when we are actually dealing with a new critical discourse which challenges the Church while falsely claiming Christian ancestry, and when we are in fact dealing with the return of minority voices within Christendom to challenge orthodoxy, whether in its Catholic or Protestant forms.

(ii) The Heretical Imperative¹¹

Religious intolerance was still widespread during the Enlightenment, but whereas radical religious dissent might once have been a capital crime; in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, imprisonment, banishment or social exclusion were more likely scenarios. With the slow decline of religious persecution in Europe, and a slow increase in the toleration not only of unorthodox belief but publically expressed opinion—when publishing was developing, across borders, at a rate censors could not possibly keep pace with—Europe became a playground for religious heresy. In addition to the sense of ‘permanent Reformation’ evident in certain quarters of radical Protestantism, long suppressed heretical tendencies within the Christian tradition resurfaced, including, especially, varieties of anti-Trinitarian thought and a strong tendency towards Pelagianism. Chubb, the sage of Salisbury, is a good example of the influence of these heresies in the early eighteenth century, and their creeping acceptability. Chubb was controversial, of course, but he was no social pariah, in spite of being one of the most complete modern heretics in England.¹² The emergence of these heresies as ‘acceptable’ forms of public discourse—

¹¹ This phrase is taken from the title of Peter Berger’s *The Heretical Imperative, Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1979. Berger’s book is not concerned with the Enlightenment period. Heresy, of course, has its origins in the Greek *αἵρεσις*, (choice). In addition to alluding to its traditional meaning, as an indicator of religious deviancy, I am also using it in the broader sense of autonomous and individual religious commitment and choice, which was an especially elevated value in some forms of Enlightenment discourse, and its stock seems to have been rising ever since.

¹² Just as Gay saw the ‘rise of modern paganism’ as most fully expressed in David Hume (see *Modern Paganism*, chap. 7, sect. 3), the less grand figure of Chubb embodies many of those heretical leanings which seem to me indicative of some important currents in the Enlightenment. What’s more, Chubb’s consistency heretical perspective (usually Arian, nearly always Pelegian) was developed in direct dealings with the Gospels and historical Christianity, unlike Hume who is perhaps without peer in the art of goading Christian

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as opposed to private beliefs where they surely never went away—helps to explain the renewed focus on the *humanity* of the ‘Son of God’ in the Enlightenment, on the *rationality* of the gospel, and on the *freedom* of human beings to obey the requirements of morality, thereby securing the salvation offered to *all* by the grace of God. This picture of human nature, which stressed the effectiveness of reason, the freedom of the will, and the universal capacity for virtue may seem like a proto secular humanist impulse, but it can also be seen as a development of that Pelagian tendency which Christian thinkers from Augustine to Luther had tried and failed to defeat. By the eighteenth century, this heretical anthropology had become thoroughly integrated into the thought of those who continued to claim a spiritual affinity with Jesus and Christian origins. Of course these tendencies are most clearly seen in those who claimed some form of Christian identity, but, as I tried to show, non-Christians, from Spinoza to Reimarus, also showed clear affinities with features of those heretical traditions; more fundamentally, however, as ‘heretics’ they made their own *choices* or *decisions* about Jesus as a historical person, asserting their independent perspective on him as a theological figure who speaks to the modern world. These perspectives were informed by existing theological and philosophical traditions, but they were subservient to none.

In his *Enlightenment Bible*, Jonathan Sheehan writes,

If the answer to the question “Why should I read the Bible?” was, before 1700, overwhelmingly “because it reveals the means to your salvation,” by the middle of the eighteenth century, Protestant answers began to proliferate, jostle and compete with the standard one. In a sense, the Enlightenment Bible was this series of alternative answers.¹³

It may appear that my *Enlightenment Messiah* is the series of alternative answer to the question, ‘Why should I continue to concern myself with the figure of Christ?’ And in one sense, this study had all been about alternative approaches to this figure, but the question of salvation did not disappear, nor Jesus’ role within. If for those modern ‘Pelagians’ original sin is to be rejected as a universal truth of human anthropology, what role does Christ have in the quest for salvation? In the judgement of some observers of the Enlightenment, writers such as the British and Irish ‘deists’ dispensed with any such

sensibilities within his works of history and philosophy while rarely engaging directly with the concrete specifics of Europe’s still dominant religion.

¹³ Sheehan, *Enlightenment Bible*, pp. xii – xiii.

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role. In his assessment of the work of Anthony Collins, James Herrick makes the wider claim that, ‘There is *no evidence* that he or *any* other *Deist* accepted the specific content of the Christian gospel or understood Jesus of Nazareth to be humankind’s savior’ (my emphasis).¹⁴ In the case of Collins he may be right, but precisely what is the ‘specific content of the Christian gospel’? And what does it mean for Jesus to be ‘humankind’s savior’? Scholars sometimes write as if answers to these questions were carved on tablets of stone and enshrined in some unimpeachable sanctum; in truth, these questions have always been posed and a bewildering range of answers suggested, even if most of them have become footnotes in the history of Christian thought.¹⁵ In the wake of the Reformation, the greatest of all challenges to Christian unity in the West, these questions were being posed with renewed urgency.¹⁶ Does this mean there was no orthodox or mainstream Protestant Christianity to be subverted by intellectuals such as the Anglophone ‘deists’? Certainly not, but it does mean there are good reasons for exercising caution when trying to draw clear lines between the thought of these early modern heterodox writers and older traditions in the history of Christian thought.

The prominence given to Jesus as a teacher of repentance and virtue in the work of radical writers in the Enlightenment is widely acknowledged. It is less commonly acknowledged that the moral virtue he represented, over against belief in Christological doctrine, *was the way of salvation* (Spinoza’s words no less than the Anglophone ‘deists’) in the minds of many of those writers engaged in critical reassessments of Jesus and his place in history. To be sure, such sentiments were unorthodox, and this view would then, as now, be seen by many as theologically reductive vis-à-vis Jesus’ role, but holders of such sentiments are in good Christian company (or at least ancient company). In his study of the idea of grace among the fathers of the Church, Thomas Torrance found it ‘astonishing’ that there was so little appreciation of the significance of Christ’s death.¹⁷ On examining the text of *1 Clement* he thought it ‘difficult to see any place for Christ in the Christian salvation beyond that of a preacher of the “grace of repentance.”’¹⁸ Repentance featured in the fourth of Lord Herbert’s five *universal* theological principles,

¹⁴ Herrick, *Radical Rhetoric*, p. 26.

¹⁵ For a study of this during the first four centuries, see Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths we Never Knew*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

¹⁶ For a sense of the range of theologies addressing the question of salvation before, during and in the aftermath of the Reformation (c.1400 – c.1650) see the collection by David V N Bagchi and David Curtis Steinmetz (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

¹⁷ Thomas Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1948, p. 137.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 46.

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and, was central to the religious thought of Spinoza, LeClerc, Chubb, Reimarus and countless other Enlightenment figures. Reflecting on the early centuries of Christianity Jaroslav Pelikan argues that

it is clear than meditation on the life and teachings of Jesus was a major preoccupation of the piety and doctrine of the church...Christ as example and Christ as teacher were constant and closely related doctrinal themes, but precisely because salvation, however it may have been defined, was the fundamental truth of the gospel, the imitation of Christ as example and the obedience to Christ as teacher must be seen in their close connection with it.¹⁹

There may not be any exact parallels with the early Christian communities described here and some of the more radical writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century writers in this study, but it is problematic to see them all as promoters of 'moralism bereft of the idea of salvation',²⁰ and wrong just to see them as modern religious skeptics, without precedence within the Christian tradition that so many of them always insisted they were in dialogue with.²¹

Whatever ideas these writers had about the soteriological role of Jesus, they shared the value of autonomous assent to some form of religion, usually a form of Christianity, on terms agreeable to the individual conscience. This value developed in the Reformation, and it was radicalised and intellectualised during the Enlightenment. Ever since the Enlightenment, modern thinkers writing more or less independently from any specific religious or political institution, have been defining their individual world views in conversation with the most iconic figure in Western religion. New Testament scholars may claim, with good cause, to have applied the norms of modern historical-critical method to present an evidence based picture of Jesus as a figure of first-century Palestine, but, by broad scholarly consensus, the main sources for the historical Jesus remain the Gospels, which are available for anyone to read (as Schweitzer reminded the 'proud' historical critic). Major public writers from Friedrich Nietzsche to Joseph Ratzinger—as well as countless lesser known political protestors and cultural critics—have taken the historical Jesus,²² or the historic, Bible Christ,²³ as an essential figure to be

¹⁹ Pelikan, *Catholic Tradition*, 142 - 143

²⁰ Ibid, p. 143.

²¹ This was characteristic of the writings of such famous anti-Trinitarians as Whiston and Priestley, and even those who are often judged to have left the Christian fold entirely, including Toland and Woolston.

²² This is a reference to Martin Kähler's 1896 *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus: The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ*, Carl E Braaten (trans.), Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964. The distinction made is between the *historische Jesus* revealed by the

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reckoned with in the articulation and criticism of the values of the present, and the proposing of higher values for a greater future.

scholar's contingent reconstructive methodology, and the *geschichtliche, biblische Christus* who actually made history and continues to do so.

²³ Although the pontiff's title Benedict XVI is highly visible on his books on Jesus, they are actually written under the private name of Joseph Ratzinger: penned in his own name, making his own judgements on perhaps the most sensitive religious subject in Christendom, and submitting his thoughts to the (sometimes fierce) criticism of the international reading public. When we try to understand the origins of such a publishing phenomenon, mention must be made of the age of Enlightenment and its multifaceted values, especially the open exchange of ideas on religious matters.

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