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Heine

On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany

And Other Writings

Edited by
Terry Pinkard

Cambridge
Texts in the
History of
Philosophy

Series editors

KARL AMERIKS

*Professor of Philosophy at the
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The main objective of Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy is to expand the range, variety, and quality of texts in the history of philosophy which are available in English. The series includes texts by familiar names (such as Descartes and Kant) and also by less well-known authors. Wherever possible, texts are published in complete and unabridged form, and translations are specially commissioned for the series. Each volume contains a critical introduction together with a guide to further reading and any necessary glossaries and textual apparatus. The volumes are designed for student use at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and will be of interest not only to students of philosophy but also to a wider audience of readers in the history of science, the history of theology, and the history of ideas.

This volume presents a colorful and entertaining overview of German intellectual history by a central figure in its development. Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), famous poet, journalist, and political exile, studied with Hegel and was personally acquainted with the leading figures of the most important generation of German writers and philosophers. In his groundbreaking *History* he discusses the history of religion, philosophy, and literature in German up to his time, seen through his own highly opinionated, politically aware, philosophically astute, and always ironic perspective. This work, and other writings focusing especially on Heine's rethinking of Hegel's philosophy, are presented here in a new translation by Howard Pollack-Milgate. The volume also includes an introduction by Terry Pinkard which examines Heine both in relation to Hegel and Nietzsche and as a thinker in his own right.

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HEINRICH HEINE

*On the History of Religion and
Philosophy in Germany and
Other Writings*

EDITED BY

TERRY PINKARD

Georgetown University

TRANSLATED BY

HOWARD POLLACK-MILGATE

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Introduction

At his death in 1856, Heinrich Heine was the most widely read poet in Europe. He was also a prolific essayist and critic, and his poems have been set to music more often than those of any other poet. Both in his own time and in ours, he has been known as a “political poet” since he championed the cause of the oppressed, and as a friend of sorts of Karl Marx, he was regarded as a “socialist” poet for many years, even though he himself was as wary of Marx’s communism as he was distrustful of the emerging commercial and industrial society around him.

Heine was also not merely a German poet, but a German Jewish poet (who for a while had rather *pro forma* converted to Christianity), and the anti-Semites in Germany did their best to make sure nobody forgot the “Jewish” part. If anything Heine seemed to regard himself as a German *European*; in 1822 while still in Berlin he himself noted, “I love Germany and the Germans; but I love no less the inhabitants of the rest of this earth, whose number is forty times greater – and it is surely love which gives a man his true value. I am therefore – thank God – worth forty times more than those who cannot pull themselves out of the swamp of national egotism and who love none but Germany and the Germans.”¹ But when, in the aftermath of Napoleon’s defeat in Russia and then a few years later in Waterloo, the various governments of the German principalities began their authoritarian crackdown on “demagogues” (the term of art used for alleged “subversives”), not unsurprisingly anti-Semitism began to increase. In 1831, Heine had decided that for the time being, Paris would

¹ Cited by S. S. Prawer, *Heine’s Jewish Comedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 57–58; Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Werke in vier Bänden* (Düsseldorf: Artemis und Winkler, 2001), vol. II, p. 467.

be a safer home for him than Berlin or Göttingen; however, his temporary exile became permanent after 1835, when the Prussian government banned publication of his work and then the German *Bundesversammlung* issued a decree forbidding publication of many authors including him. His exile was sealed in 1844 when the Prussian government issued an order for Heine's arrest if he were ever to set foot on Prussian soil. But if their goal was to silence Heine or diminish his popularity, they failed utterly. Heine continued to weave his magic with the German public until his death, although he always remained a controversial figure.

As Heine's biographer, Jeffrey L. Sammons, has noted, it is very hard to pin down Heine on virtually anything, since he early on created a persona for himself that he himself continually shifted around; as Sammons remarks, "Heinrich Heine" is "a central, commanding, fictional figure in the works of Heinrich Heine."² Even his birth date is relatively hard to fix, since Heine himself regularly entered very different dates and years on various official and unofficial papers. In that light, it is not surprising that the twenty-five-year-old Heine himself noted in his 1822 *Letters from Berlin* that as far as he was concerned, the highest freedom comes at a masked ball:

What does it matter who is beneath the mask? The quest is enjoyment, and for that one only needs human beings. Nowhere can one be a human being more fully than at a masked ball, where the waxen mask hides our usual mask of flesh, where a simple *Du* [the familiar form of address in German] restores the primordial sociality of familiarity, where a Venetian cloak (*Domino*) covers all pretensions and brings about the most beautiful equality and the most beautiful freedom – the freedom conferred by masks, *Maskenfreiheit*.³

In fact, his name, "Heinrich," only came later; he was born Harry Heine in Düsseldorf (apparently on December 13, 1797). His father, Samson Heine, was a middle-class cloth merchant. His uncle, Salomon Heine (his father's brother), became an immensely wealthy banker in Hamburg and exercised a formidable influence on Heinrich for most of his life. Heine never quite got over the idea that his uncle could make him rich overnight with a large gift of money that his uncle would in fact never miss; but the

² Jeffrey L. Sammons, *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1979), p. 5.

³ Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II, p. 466.

uncle was a bit suspicious both of Heine's vocation as a poet and of what he saw as Harry's rather spendthrift ways, and the trials and travails of Heine and uncle Salomon, with the contentious and continual back and forth between them, form part of the fabric of almost all of Heine's adult life.

In Heine's youth, the part of Germany he lived in was ruled by the French in the progressive spirit of the Revolution, and this clearly made a mark on him; for the rest of his life, he was to be dedicated to the principles of liberty and equality and to be the sworn enemy of all the illiberal and repressive tendencies that he saw at work in the Germany of his day, seeing very early on some of the more sinister dangers beginning to take root in the land of his birth. He sardonically remarked to a friend in a letter written in 1823 that "although I am a radical in England and a carbonaro in Italy, I don't adhere to the demagogues in Germany; for the quite accidental reason that if the latter were to be victorious, a few thousand Jewish throats – and the best ones at that – would be slit."⁴ Around the same time, he wrote a verse play, *Almansor*, which nominally dealt with the expulsion of the Muslims from Spain, but whose subtext was the precarious status of Jews in Germany. One of the characters, Hassan, responds to the news that the Spanish are burning copies of the Koran in Granada with the line "That was only a prelude, for where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn human beings too."⁵ That youthful line became one of Heine's most often-cited phrases and proved to be eerily prophetic; in the great Nazi book burning in Berlin in 1933, the works of Heinrich Heine were among those consigned to the flames.

The young Harry Heine was pushed to go into the family business and was apprenticed first in 1815 to a Frankfurt bank owned by friends of his uncle Salomon, and then in 1816 to work for Salomon himself at his bank in Frankfurt. After he finished his apprenticeship, his uncle set him up in 1818 with a cloth business called "Harry Heine & Co.," which the young Harry ran without any attention to detail. By 1819, Heine's father, Samson, was suffering from a variety of illnesses which made it impossible for him to run his own business. Apparently Salomon Heine, in a mixture of compassion, family loyalty, and arrogance, stepped in,

⁴ Cited in Prawer, *Heine's Jewish Comedy*, p. 177; Letter to Moritz Emden, February 2, 1823.

⁵ Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II, p. 859. ("Das war ein Vorspiel nur, dort, wo man Bücher / Verbrennt, verbrennt man auch am Ende / Menschen.")

paid off Samson's debts, took over all aspects of running the family, and liquidated the badly run "Harry Heine & Co.," thus freeing the young Harry to pursue university studies. Salomon paid for him to study law at Bonn University, and Harry enrolled there in 1819, switching in 1820 to Göttingen University (where he ran into fierce anti-Semitism amongst the fraternity set). Harry paid only passing attention to his legal studies, but he raptly attended the lectures given by August Wilhelm Schlegel, the great translator of Shakespeare, who had earlier (with his brother, Friedrich) participated in establishing "romanticism" at Jena at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century.

In 1821, Harry Heine moved to Berlin University, which proved to be decisive for his later decision to pursue his true vocation as a writer and poet. He attended Hegel's lectures and befriended him, and he made acquaintances among the various movers and shakers in Berlin literary circles, including another Jewish figure, Rahel Levin Varnhagen von Ense, the celebrated hostess of one of Berlin's most famous salons and a woman of formidable intellect and literary interests. He also became a member of the Association for the Culture and Science of Judaism, a group founded in the face of a growing backlash against Jewish emancipation and whose explicit mission was to study "scientifically" Jewish history and culture, detached from Christian interpretations and distortions of that culture and even detached from orthodox Jewish interpretations of it.

In joining the Association, Heine also made friends with somebody who was to color his more philosophical thought for the rest of his life: the jurist and philosopher Eduard Gans. Both Gans and Heine came to Hegelianism as young Jews, each wanting to affirm their Jewish identity within the context of also being German. In the immediately post-Napoleonic milieu of Germany, that had at first seemed easily achievable; there had, after all, been various emancipation edicts, and there was a feeling that progress was quite simply in the air, that there was now no way to turn back the clock. However, after 1820 the repressive measures taken up by the Prussian government and the increasing strength of the forces of reaction throughout Germany had thrown all of that into question.

Against that background, both Heine and Gans at first responded in similar ways to Hegelian philosophy: each saw it as an insightful articulation of what it was they were trying to accomplish for themselves in the context of German life in the 1820s. Each found in it a proposal for a way in which he might live a somewhat alienated life but could nonetheless

find a place for himself and therefore be reconciled, be “at home” in the modern world.

Two elements of their own biographies were crucial to this: each found an initial attraction to Hegelianism as an articulation of their own “self-division,” *Zerrissenheit*, and each experienced their world not in a sense of being “homeless” within it but in the sense of both belonging and not belonging to a cultural and social order with which they identified, from which they nonetheless felt estranged, and which never fully accepted them. Indeed, it was both Heine’s and Gans’s “outsider” status as Jews who were neither at home in orthodox Judaism nor at home in the context of Christian German life which gave them a fresh perspective on Hegelianism that differed from other, more utopian left-Hegelians.⁶ If anything, both Gans and Heine are much earlier versions of what the historian Peter Gay characterized as role of the “outsider as insider” in German culture.⁷

Eduard Gans himself met Hegel after coming to Berlin and after having finished his legal studies in Heidelberg (having done his doctoral work with Hegel’s old friend and comrade in arms there, Anton Thibaut). In addition to being an obviously gifted jurist and political philosopher, Eduard Gans was also one of the founders and became president of the Association for the Culture and Science of Jews; in his presidential addresses to the group from 1821 to 1823, he returned again and again to the issue of what constituted Jewish identity and what constituted *European* (and interestingly, not necessarily *German*) identity, and between 1821 and 1822, the Hegelian stamp on his answers became more evident.⁸

⁶ A major exception to the tendency to see Heine’s more philosophical writings as only an expression of some kind of attachment to Saint-Simonianism is to be found in Nigel Reeves, *Heinrich Heine: Poetry and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974). Reeves sees it as a founding text of “left Hegelianism,” but he takes that in the familiar way to be utopian, to be a secularizing of the Christian theodicy and the establishment not of salvation in heaven but of socialism on earth. The best account of the development of “left Hegelianism” in English (and which goes a long way to clearing up the deficiencies in the standard story) remains John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁷ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

⁸ The influence between Hegel and Gans went both ways; because of Gans’s influence, Hegel ended up changing his long-held, more or less genteelly anti-Semitic attitudes to Judaism and came to describe Judaism as the first religion of freedom, rather than in terms of hidebound legalism and egoism (as he done ever since his youth). This is the argument I make in Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). In Gans’s first presidential address to the group (on October 28, 1821), he spoke of the basic issue facing the group to be that of

Gans was especially attracted to three items in Hegel's philosophy. First, there was Hegel's argued view to the effect that what was genuinely *at work* in modern life – what in Hegel's special vocabulary counted as *mirklich*, *effectively* real – was a moral and political concept (one might even say a moral-political *ideal*) of freedom as self-determination. Second, Hegel's very original philosophy of history explained that the normative hold of this ideal of freedom had to do with the way in which it had come to be required of modern life by virtue of the very determinate failures of past forms of European life (paradigmatically, both in the collapse of the ancient world and the gradual and catastrophic failure of aristocratic court culture to sustain any normative allegiance to itself). Third, there was Hegel's idea that understanding these ideals *as* ideals requires understanding how they are supported in practices and institutions, and does not rest simply on moralistic appeals to strength of resolve on the part of individuals.

From Gans's own standpoint, however, these aspect of the Hegelian philosophy offered the best way for a young Jewish intellectual and budding academic like himself to understand the role of Judaism in modern life. As Gans saw it, Hegel's philosophy argued that minority identities could in principle sustain themselves if they were willing to identify themselves with the principle of *freedom* at work in the modern European social and political order; such minorities had their place within Hegel's own very complex account of the way in which such freedom was gradually being given shape in the institutionalization of a market society with careers open to all, and in the formation of a constitutional state that protected the basic rights of its members. This offered a blueprint, as Gans took it up, for how Judaism could be modernized without being abandoned. To become fully modern (which for Gans, as for Hegel, was summed up by the term "Europe") did not mean that one abandoned one's past. Being "taken up" or "absorbed" into European life did not mean for religious minorities that their traditions and identities would come to an end: as Gans put it in his second presidential address to the Association, "Aufgehen ist nicht untergehen" ("Absorption is not vanishing").

establishing a "reconciliation" (*Versöhnung*) between the Jewish identity of its members and their identity as Germans. In his second address (on April 28, 1822), however, Gans posed the question as: "What is Europe at the present time? And what are the Jews?" See Eduard Gans, "Erste Rede vor dem 'Kulturverein'," in Norbert Waszek, *Eduard Gans (1797–1839): Hegelianer – Jude – Europäer. Texte und Dokumente* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1991), pp. 55–62; and "Zweite Rede vor dem 'Kulturverein'," in Waszek, *Eduard Gans*, pp. 62–75.

Moreover, in his own lectures on Hegel's political philosophy in 1832–1833 (about a year after Hegel's death), Gans took Hegel's thought (which had led to Hegel's endorsement of constitutional monarchy) in a more republican direction, even going so far as to propose, among other things, the form of a state whose head was not a "prince" (a *Fürst*), and his example was the United States of America. In his lectures, Gans argued that because in America, "all the medieval traditions are not there, as they are in Europe," it was able to do without a prince, and, he added, "it may still take thousands of years for the state that has emerged from the concept, like that in North America, to emerge in Europe and before those [medieval] conditions die out."⁹ Also unlike Hegel, Gans formulated a theory of the necessity of oppositional parties within a Hegelian state.

There was, however, a deeper issue at work in Gans's appropriation of Hegelianism. However much Hegel's theory seemed to offer an account that made room for a modern form of Judaism within the context of Christian Europe, there remained the overall problem of just how much of Hegel's philosophy of history had to be accepted. In particular, Judaism presented Hegel with a particular problem. Egyptian, Greek, and Roman religion had had their moment on the world stage, and they vanished as they were supplanted by more rational religions, with all others finally being supplanted by the "consummate" religion, Christianity. Yet the Jews remained. Even though Hegel himself was in print as calling for full civil rights for Jews, and even though under the influence of Gans he came to change his entire evaluation of the importance and status of Judaism, his own theory still committed him to the view that it was in some very deep sense *irrational* to be Jewish in the modern world, much in the same way as it would be irrational to worship Pallas Athena in contemporary Europe. This was, of course, something that Gans and his friends could not easily accept. Gans thus formulated his own problem of being Jewish and being modern in different, non-Hegelian terms: the Jews, he proposed, went along the path of "their own history, parallel alongside world history," and the issue now was how the two parallel streams were to flow together without the Jews "vanishing" into the larger stream of world history culminating in modern Europe.¹⁰ Unfortunately, when Gans applied to be a professor in law at Berlin, the law faculty

⁹ Eduard Gans, *Naturrecht und Universalrechtsgeschichte*, ed. Manfred Riedel (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), p. 100.

¹⁰ See Eduard Gans, "Zweite Rede vor dem 'Kulturverein'," in Waszek, *Eduard Gans*, p. 66.

fought against taking a Jew into the faculty; the case was settled when the king abolished the entire edict of Jewish emancipation in order to prevent Gans from assuming such a position. (The king's action became known informally as the "*lex Gans*.") In 1825, Gans *pro forma* converted to Christianity, and the professorship became his.

Rewriting Hegel

Heine also had himself cynically baptized into the Protestant faith in 1825, and it is a staple of the Heine literature just how troubled Heine was by Gans's defection, as if he could forgive himself for his weakness but not Gans, who was seen by so many as the leading figure in the struggle for emancipation. Even worse: although Heine himself described his own baptism scornfully as his "entry ticket into European culture," Heine, unlike Gans, did not find that any doors at all opened up for him as a result, and it soon set in on him that he had made a terrible mistake, although he never officially recanted it.¹¹

His own career as a poet and writer, however, flourished rather early and continued to do so. He was able to abandon the plans his uncle had for him (to be a jurist, the field in which he actually got his doctoral diploma) and to focus on what he eventually succeeded at: becoming one of the most successful writers of his day. In 1834, shortly after he began his life as an exile in Paris, he wrote a series of articles that were collected and published in 1835 as *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*. This was in part a response to Madame de Stael's famous book, *De l'Allemagne (On Germany)*, which had appeared with great success in 1810 and which established the view that Germany was the "homeland of thought" ("*la patrie de la pensée*"), that is, a land of poets and philosophers who were content to live in a world of thoughts to compensate for their lack of any political culture. Heine had always taken great exception to that description, and when the chance came to write, in effect, a rebuttal, he jumped at it. Written in his clear, sardonic, and witty style, the articles were in effect Heine's own reworking of Hegel's philosophy of history.

¹¹ For example, see the letter to his friend Moser in January 1826: "I am now hated by Christian and Jew. I very much regret having been baptized; I see no sign that things have gone better with me since then. On the contrary: I have experienced nothing but misfortune from that day on." Cited in Praver, *Heine's Jewish Comedy*, p. 207. Heine also notes something very similar in a passage from the *Geständnisse*.

He had heard Hegel's lectures on the subject in 1823 (and probably also those on political philosophy in 1822), and he had surely discussed Hegel's philosophy with Gans and the other Hegelians of the Association, so he was not exactly a neophyte on the subject. He also had his own strong views on the relation between poets and historians; indeed, in 1834, as he was working on the book, he expressed his views on historical writing in a letter to the great French historian, Jules Michelet: "You are the true historian because you are at the same time a philosopher and a great artist . . . You believe in progress and in providence. In that belief we are one."¹² In his own youthful eyes, Heine also met both conditions.

The book has not been taken seriously as a post-Hegelian commentary; it has almost always been read as an example of Heine's own personal commitments, in particular his flirtation with Saint-Simonianism. Like Gans, Heine at first took a keen interest in the Saint-Simonian movement since on its surface it seemed to have a lot in common with Hegelian thought and even looked as if it might provide the necessary complement to Hegelianism in its concern with industrialization, the "social question," and the like. However, as Heine's biographer Sammons has made clear, closer acquaintance with the movement very quickly cooled Heine's initial ardor for it.¹³ Moreover, as Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch has shown, Gans lost his interest in it as he began to see its relative incompatibility with (and relative shallowness *vis-à-vis*) Hegelian thought, and it is hard to imagine that Heine was unaffected by his friend Gans's rejection of the doctrine. The biographical material on Heine, together with those attitudes on the part of Gans, make the view of him as a Saint-Simonian less plausible.¹⁴

Now, to be sure, the book also contains several examples of Heine's less than fully factual approach to some of the matters discussed, such as his quip that there is no need for him to give a biography of Kant since, after all, Kant had no life, or that Kant demolished God in his first *Critique* but, feeling sorry for the bad mood in which such a view

¹² Cited in Praver, *Heine's Jewish Comedy*, p. 6.

¹³ Sammons, *Heinrich Heine*, pp. 159–168. Sammons also uses Heine's unpublished note on the Saint-Simonian leader, Prosper Enfantin, to illustrate Heine's attitude to the movement after he had come to know it, that in "His incarnation as Enfantin, God has made the extreme sacrifice – He has made himself ridiculous" (p. 165). Heinrich Heine, *Aphorismen und Fragmente*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. IV, p. 709.

¹⁴ See Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch, *Religiöse Hingabe oder soziale Freiheit: Die saint-simonistische Theorie und die Hegelsche Sozialphilosophie* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2006), chapter 10.

left his poor manservant, decided to put Him back in the picture in the second *Critique*. Heine's lively style also takes what might be called a somewhat comic approach to the problems of post-Kantian philosophy, and that unfortunately has helped to reinforce the charge of "frivolity" against it, a common enough charge against Heine's writings even in his own day. However, the suspicion that because it is comical it must also be frivolous, together with the view that Heine's treatment is only some kind of watered down version of Saint-Simonian views, fails to grasp the immense importance that Hegelianism had for Heine. Indeed, what informs Heine's writings on that point is not Saint-Simon's view of the struggle of the senses with the body, but rather Hegel's own emphatic doctrine, found in his lectures on aesthetics, that the "Ideal" for art, its ultimate aim, is the expression of the unity of soul and body in aesthetic form, such that the "inner" and the "outer" are in perfect harmony – something which Hegel thought was achieved only in classical Greek art. Beneath the exuberant wit that is so characteristic of all of Heine's writing, there is a serious thesis at work; indeed, the seriousness of the thesis could perhaps only be made manifest by the ironic wit with which it is presented.

Like Hegel, Heine was interested in the "phenomenology" of historical movement, the "true motion" of spirit in history, and, like Hegel, he was therefore interested in the *meaning* of historical events, not the discovery of some kind of social scientific law of history. For Hegel, the meaning of history was (to put it in Hegel's own vernacular) that of spirit coming to a full self-consciousness of itself. Put in more colloquial terminology, this amounts to the claim that what we are to make of history has to do with the ways in which humans, as self-interpreting animals, had found various collectively established self-interpretations to be unlivable, unsustainable and to lead to other versions; the *meaning* of historical events has to do with how each new version at least implicitly understands itself to be making good on the failures of the past in terms of the cards that had been dealt it, and this culminates in modern Europeans being called to establish and institutionalize their own freedom. In this interpretation of history, Hegel thus radicalized Kant's own claim in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* that the failure of all prior moral theory lay in its failure to understand that, to be binding, moral law had to be *self-legislated*. Hegel (following Fichte's and Schelling's leads on the matter) extended this beyond morality to issues of all normative authority. Kant's

account of the moral law's obligatory force lying in our being the *author* of that law contained a paradox within itself: we can be obligated only by non-arbitrary laws, and we can be obligated only by self-authored laws, and therefore we can author an obligatory law to ourselves only if we presuppose a law that is not self-authored in terms of which we author the law. Or, to put it in terms that states the paradox fully, if we are to be bound only by a law that is self-authored, we must first be bound by a law that is not self-authored, which (because it is not self-authored) is therefore not binding on us. Hegel saw that this had to be given an explanation that tamed the apparent contradiction in it. Part of that overcoming lay in the history of religion as culminating in Christianity, in which a divine person gives us the law that in effect says: Be free! On Hegel's account, this religious way out of the paradox gives us a "picture," a "representation" (*Vorstellung*) of an external, authoritative person who is decidedly *not* the product of our own willing, but who is nonetheless *authoritatively* (as the "divine man") giving us the law that is "really" our own will; for "us moderns," however, such a "representational" account is now to be supplanted by the fully conceptual, philosophical account of our own free willing (as subject only to those laws of which it can regard itself as the author). In the Hegelian story, a good part of the rational superiority of Christianity to all other religions, including Judaism, is due to the fact that all the other religions can only represent the "divine" author of the law as something either indeterminate or so distant from us (as Hegel thinks is the case with the Jewish god) that we receive either no determinate law or no law that we can really call our *own*. Moreover, in becoming human and issuing the law as a person, the divine, as Hegel says, has finally fully revealed itself, leaving no mystery any longer to itself.

Hegel's contemporaries took this account in two ways. One group took Hegel to be offering an orthodox Christian account and regarded his claim that philosophy had supplanted religion as a fancy way of saying that philosophy *merely* reaffirmed the content of Christian religious thought as fully rational, as if philosophy itself could not contravene what it was that revealed religion propounded. The other group took Hegel to be saying that once one had modern philosophy in hand, one did not need the religious account any more since one had the true (that is, rational and secular conceptual) rendering of what had been only a more pictorial, popular idea of the same thing, even if the development of modern philosophy required a corresponding development in the history of religion for it to

be in the proper historical position to claim this. Heine's position was more or less in the latter camp.

In Hegelian fashion, Heine begins his account on a Hegelian note by telling his readers, innocently enough, that his account has to do with the development of Christianity and how it led to German philosophy. However, he quickly shifts his inquiry into a post-Hegelian tone, claiming: "The ultimate fate of Christianity thus depends on whether we still need it." Rather than seeing Christianity as the "consummate religion" of freedom, as Hegel had done, Heine (using Hegel's term of art) sees the "genuine Idea of Christianity" ("*die eigentliche Idee des Christentums*") as being that of a kind of *sickness*, the roots of which lay in the early Church's implicitly having internalized the ideas of Gnosticism, which it then turned around and condemned as heresy: body and soul are separate, and the pleasures of the body are evil, the province of Satan, while the soul is pure and "can rise aloft, all the more nobly, into the lucid sky, into the bright kingdom of Christ." Why, Heine asks, could such a religion that inflicts such pain on people, which makes them so *ill*, take hold? And what would justify it? The answer, which sounds as Nietzschean as the question, is that Christianity offered consolation to the weak who were derided and exploited by the strong; Christianity, that is, found its value in "taming the strong, strengthening the tame" and offering the downtrodden the consolation of reward in heaven. Heine notes, again in tones to be taken up later by Nietzsche, "Even if many a one of us has already convalesced, he still cannot escape the general atmosphere of the sick-room, and he feels himself unhappily to be the only healthy one among the infirm." It is only when Luther in his "divine brutality" broke with the established Church and established the rights of the claims of reason on Christianity that "we see the Jewish-Deistic element again on the rise. Evangelical Christianity emerges." With that, the principle of freedom of thought soon followed as the new Idea (or *Idee* in the Hegelian sense) worked itself out, and that in turn established the primacy of the universities in Protestant life (a connection so close that, as Heine puts it, with the destruction of the "universities, the Protestant Church will fall," a sentiment also expressed by Hegel in private correspondence to Immanuel Niethammer).¹⁵

¹⁵ In a letter to Niethammer in 1816, Hegel claimed, "Protestantism is not entrusted to the hierarchical organization of a church but lies solely in general insight and *Bildung*," adding, "our universities and schools are our church. It is not the clergy and religious worship that counts as in the Catholic Church." *Briefe von und an Hegel*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix

The conclusion Heine draws from this is Hegelian, but with a new twist. Virtually parroting Hegel at first, Heine claims that as a result of the rise of Protestantism, the content of modern literature must therefore be “subjective, lyrical, and reflective.” But Heine twists Hegelianism into the opposite direction when he points out that the result of the triumph of Protestantism is not, as Hegel seemed to think, the supremacy of the Protestant Christian Church as the only genuine *modern* (and therefore *rational*) religion but simply the prosaic fact of European modernity itself: the advent of industrialization, the aftershocks of the French Revolution, the coming to power of the merchant class, and the condition in which “the authorities have collapsed; reason remains the one lamp of humanity, and one’s conscience is the only staff in the dark labyrinth of this life,” such that “the general character of modern literature consists of the fact that now individuality and skepticism predominate.” (In a later unpublished set of notes, Heine noted that the new “worldly redeemer” – the new messiah – would arrive not on the back of a donkey but via the railway, bringing with him the blessings of “industry, labor and joy.”¹⁶)

This move into prosaic modern life is possible only because Luther translated the Bible, the book the Jews had preserved (as Heine describes it elsewhere) as their “portable fatherland” (“*aufgeschriebene Vaterland*”).¹⁷ Indeed, it is only when Christianity ceases being “Catholic” (and therefore Gnostic) and becomes instead Protestant, that is, “Judeo-Deistic,” that it approaches becoming “modern” at all. Reversing Hegel’s own list of valuations, Heine claims that seen in this light, it was the Jewish reverence for the law that made *them*, not the Christians, the first truly *modern* people, and it is that reverence for the law that is now being realized in modern Europe. The Kantian overtones to Heine’s claim are surely intended. The charges that Hegel himself had in his youth made against the Jews were

Meiner Verlag, 1969), vol. II, no. 272; *Hegel: The Letters*, trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1984), p. 327. In another letter he reiterated the point: “Our more immediate safeguard is thus the universities and general institutions of instruction. All Protestants look upon these institutions as their Rome and council of bishops . . . The sole authority [for Protestants] is the intellectual and moral cultural education of all, and the guarantors of such cultural education are these institutions . . . *general* intellectual and moral education is what is holy to Protestants.” Hegel, *Briefe von und an Hegel*, vol. II, no. 309; *Hegel: The Letters*, p. 328.

¹⁶ See Heinrich Heine, *Aphorismen und Fragmente*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. IV, p. 735.

¹⁷ “I say the discovery of the Bible, since the Jews, who rescued it from the great fire of the Second Temple and carried it around with them in exile like a portable fatherland for the entire Middle Ages, kept this treasure carefully hidden away in their ghetto.” Heine, “Aus den Memoiren des Herren von Schnabelewopski,” in *Sämtliche Werke*, p. 600.

the same charges he also made against Kant, namely, that both adhered to a too rigoristic subordination of life to the law, a subordination that divides people into two parts (inclination and reason) and which, Hegel claimed, is overcome only in Christianity. In the new turn that Heine gives to the argument, however, it is in fact *Christianity* that split people in two, and it is the Jews who “from the start . . . carried within themselves the modern principle, which is only today unfolding itself among the European peoples.”¹⁸ “Cosmopolitanism,” Heine says, “genuinely sprang from the soil of Judaea” by virtue of the way in which Jesus (Spinoza’s “divine cousin,” as Heine calls him) universalized the Jewish reverence for the law, which eventually metamorphosed into the Kantian reverence for the moral law within.

Indeed, the truth about Christianity in Germany is that it has long since ceased to be the *actual* religion in German life – to be, in Hegel’s sense, *at work* in everyday life – even if it nonetheless remains the official state religion. In Heine’s famous phrase: “No one says it, but everybody knows it; pantheism is the open secret of Germany . . . Pantheism is the clandestine religion of Germany.” In Heine’s version of how that came to pass, after Luther had brought the Bible to the German language, the next step was to demystify that book itself, a task whose preparatory work Heine attributes to Lessing, the great eighteenth-century hero of German letters. For Lessing, the slavish attention to the literal words of the Bible threatened to conceal the genuine truth in Christianity, and that genuine truth turned out to be, well, Deism and then ultimately a religion of the (moral) law. That in turn only prepared the German intelligentsia for the reception of that *genuinely* modern thinker, Spinoza, in whom, as Heine puts it, we are stirred “with the winds of the future.” Spirit and matter, which Christianity had rent asunder, were reunited in Spinoza’s thought but only in a way that was equivalent to pantheism. In Heine’s account, Spinoza’s thought indeed supplanted what came before in a *practical* way, to which Heine gives a formulation that again smacks of

¹⁸ In *Shakespeares Mädchen und Frauen*, Heine notes: “But not only Germany bears the physiognomy of Palestine; the rest of Europe too is raising itself up to the Jews. I say ‘raising itself up,’ for from the start the Jews carried within themselves the modern principle, which is only today unfolding itself among the European peoples . . . The Jews adhered only to the law, to the abstract thought, like our more recent cosmopolitan Republicans, who respect as their highest good, not the land of their birth or the person of their prince, but only the law. Cosmopolitanism genuinely sprang from the soil of Judaea; and Christ who . . . was actually a Jew, genuinely founded a propaganda of world-citizenship.” Heine, “Jessica,” in *Shakespeares Mädchen und Frauen*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. III, p. 659.

Nietzsche: “The attempt to implement the Idea of Christianity failed most miserably, and this unfortunate effort demanded incalculable sacrifices from humanity – whose dismal consequence is the social unease in all of Europe today.” In this failure of Christianity to realize itself, it has produced an “ill” social order that has now “grown tired of such hosts and hungers now for nutritious food, true bread and beautiful meat.”

This practical failure of Christianity meant that for people now nourished on Spinozistic pantheism, “the task now is to become healthy,” which meant that modern Europeans had become ready for the Kantian revolution, in which in Kant’s words, “philosophy is to be put in a precarious position, which should be firm even if there is in neither heaven nor on earth anything upon which it depends or is based.”¹⁹ Thus, Moses Mendelssohn’s description of Kant as the “all-destroyer” is, in Heine’s terms, completely apt, for the Kantian revolution itself is part of a larger world-historical event on the horizon in contemporary European culture that is in the process of being culminated; again anticipating Nietzsche’s more famous formulation, Heine notes that with the arrival of Kantianism on the scene, “Our heart is full of terrible compassion – It is ancient Jehovah who is readying himself for death – . . . Do you hear the bell ringing? Kneel down – Sacraments are being brought to a dying God.”

In Heine’s account, the death sentence passed on God went into its final funeral march to the gallows when Kant destroyed all prior metaphysics; Kant’s undoing of the metaphysical tradition removed the one last hope of defending a form of life already in the process of expiring; the nail in the coffin was Kant’s own substitution of human spontaneity and the “kingdom of ends” for religion (thus removing even the weak appeal to “tradition” to hold on to what was already on its way out). For Heine, what followed Kant could only be a denouement. If, as Heine puts it, Kant was the Robespierre of the philosophical revolution, then Fichte was its Napoleon. Kant still felt himself bound by the forms of intuition in theoretical knowledge, even if had thrown off all such shackles for practical thought. It was Fichte, who by generalizing the problem in Kant’s practical philosophy about self-legislation into a universal problem for all normative authority, solidified the Kantian revolution into a system. Playing no doubt on Hegel’s own account in the *Phenomenology*, Heine draws the conclusion that just as Napoleon solidified the Revolution into

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 34 (AA 425).

an empire, the move from Kant to Fichte solidified the same revolution, only in philosophy; the political revolution in France passed over into Germany, where it became a revolution in thought. As Fichte himself put it (in terms that almost ensured that he would be always misunderstood), the “I” must posit the “Not-I”; that is, if the subject of thought and action is to be the final source of all normative authority, then it must somehow authorize itself to bestow such authority on other things. To do this, it must “posit” that there is something external to itself to which it answers for its authority, but, paradoxically, which it itself endows with the authority to direct it. There is no other possibility, Fichte thought: either the “dogmatist” is right, and it is the object of knowledge which guides us in some fashion (which, so Fichte seemed to think, would lead to some version of what Wilfrid Sellars later called the “myth of the given”); or the “idealist” is right, and it is the subject which guides itself and bestows on itself the authority to guide itself (which, to appropriate John McDowell’s metaphor, leaves it in the danger of spinning frictionlessly in the void, which is what led Fichte to posit the necessity of the “Not-I” in the first place). But also like Napoleon, Fichte bit off more than he could chew and quickly vanished from the philosophical scene, as did Napoleon’s empire from the political scene, but not before both had changed the landscape of everything around them.

Continuing the metaphor, Heine notes that the restoration that put Charles X back on the throne in France found its counterpart in Schelling becoming Fichte’s successor at Jena: Schelling “restored” Spinozism to its rightful place in German philosophy. Schelling saw that Fichte’s tortured use of the distinction of the “I” and the “Not-I” rested on his prior assumption that the distinction itself between what is subjective and objective had to be itself *either* a subjective *or* an objective distinction (corresponding to the distinction of “idealist” versus “dogmatist”). Schelling, in effect, said no, it was neither; or, rather, that it was both at once. Thus, Schelling set up a two-track way of doing philosophy, in which one track starts from self-consciousness (Fichte’s “I”) and, in Kantian/Fichtean fashion, looks for the conditions of possibility of self-consciousness, which finally culminates in a doctrine of nature as consisting of objects in space and time behaving according to determinate laws; the other track starts from a theory of nature (as the natural sciences have discovered it to be), and shows how the tendencies in nature themselves lead to the emergence of self-conscious agents. Both “tracks” have their

unity in the “absolute,” which, since it is neither subjective nor objective but prior to both, can itself only be the object of an “intellectual intuition” and cannot be discursively articulated. In effect, Schelling restored Spinoza’s idea that there is only *one* substance, of which both mind and matter were simply attributes or ways of appearing. Our grasp of this one substance, the absolute, is of course non-discursive, which leads Heine to the conclusion that

Schelling now abandons the way of philosophy and seeks, by means of a kind of mystic intuiting, to arrive at an intuition of the absolute itself; he seeks to intuit it in its center, in its essentiality, where it is neither something ideal nor something real, neither thought nor extension, neither subject nor object, neither spirit nor matter, but . . . who knows! / This is where philosophy ends in Mr. Schelling and poetry, or I would say, folly, begins.

(Heine could just as well have said: Schelling’s philosophy is the night in which all cows are black.)

With the metaphorical crowning of Hegel as the king of German philosophy in Berlin, the German “philosophical revolution,” Heine says, “is over. Hegel completed its great circle.” (In a work written earlier, with the same metaphors of Kant as Robespierre, etc., Heine called Hegel “the Orleans” of philosophy, making reference to the way in which the Duc d’Orléans, under a constitutional settlement, stepped in as the “bourgeois king” to replace the despised restoration monarch, Charles X, in the French Revolution of July, 1830.)

Heine gives almost no characterization of Hegel’s philosophy at all, nor does he point out to the reader that he or she has just read a treatise “on the history of religion and philosophy in Germany” that is itself a development of certain Hegelian ideas taken in a very different direction. Heine apparently felt that he had exhibited Hegelian philosophy enough not to have to explain it.²⁰ Although this has been noted by almost all

²⁰ In his *Confessions (Geständnisse)* written near the end of his life, Heine claims that he at first intended to write a short essay explaining the Hegelian philosophy as an appendix to a new edition of *Towards a History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* but after two years of work on the manuscript, he found it not to his liking, to be too abstract and pointless: “I was attempting to translate these formulas from the abstract school-idiom into the mother tongue of healthy reason and general comprehensibility, French. The translator must know for certain what he has to say, and even the most embarrassed concepts are forced to let fall their mystical garments and show themselves naked. You see, I had resolved to present Hegelian philosophy in its entirety in generally comprehensible form, as a supplement to be absorbed into the new edition of my book

commentators on Heine's book – and it is, after all, a rather obvious point – it has also been often taken, very wrongly, I think, to be evidence for Heine's lack of interest in "bourgeois" Hegelian philosophy and evidence for his "socialism" or at least his "radical politics" (a view that was actively promoted by eminent critics such as Georg Lukács in the old Eastern bloc). But, as noted earlier, the truth of the matter is that for virtually his entire life, Heine subscribed to a version of Gans's own interpretation of Hegel's political philosophy: Heine endorsed a version of Hegel's conception of a *free* life being led in terms of its embodiment in the characteristic modern institutions of family, civil society, and a state based on representative (but not necessarily democratic) constitutional government; that government, though, was supposed to be interested in the social question, and it was supposed to contain an opposition party within itself.²¹ In his "English Fragments," written in 1828, Heine made his Gans-Hegelian sympathies clear:

It is no longer the crowned chieftains but the people themselves who are the heroes of modernity, and these heroes have themselves also committed themselves to a Holy Alliance; they stick together where it counts for common rights, for the international right of religious and political freedom; they are bound together through the Idea, they have sworn themselves to it and shed their blood for it, they themselves have even become the Idea – and hence the hearts of the people painfully shudder when anywhere, even in the most remote corner of the world, the Idea is insulted.²²

De l'Allemagne. I worked at this for two years, and only with anguish and exertion did I manage to overcome the refractory material and to present the most abstract parts in the most popular way possible. But when the work was finally complete, I was grasped by an uncanny horror when I looked at it. It seemed to me as if the manuscript was looking at me with strange, ironic, even malicious eyes. I had arrived at a strange quandary: author and work no longer fit together." Heine, *Geständnisse*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II, p. 769.

²¹ See Sammons, *Heinrich Heine*. Sammons, whose biography of Heine has been deservedly praised as among the best works on Heine, nonetheless overlooks this point because, I think, of his failure to appreciate the link between Heine and Gans, even though he himself in a second-hand way offers up some of the best evidence for it. Sammons sums up Heine's political position by noting that Heine "does not appear to me to have had any ideas at all on the formal structure of political institutions, except that he disliked parliamentarianism, wanted to see the overthrow of the nobility, and was in an abstract and highly personal sense inclined to monarchism" (p. 330). That statement could equally well apply to Hegel (except for the part about the nobility – Hegel was simply indifferent to the nobility, although he gave them a nominal place in his system of the representation of estates in the *Philosophy of Right*). Heine's own life-long political beliefs fairly well match up to Gans's own reconstruction of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, not so much to Hegel's book itself.

²² Heine, "Englische Fragmente," in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II, p. 414.

However, it is obvious that there is at least one crucial aspect in which Heine departs from orthodox Hegelianism, namely, in his disagreement with Hegel over the status of Christianity in keeping the new, modern order in Germany together. Hegel, of course, thought that Protestant Christianity (in its subordinate status to philosophy) was the only sufficiently modern, rational religion and was adequate to serve as the civic religion certainly of Germany and even of the new emerging European order as well. However, without any argument or explanation, Heine simply notes that after Hegel established himself at the pinnacle of German philosophy, “all we see since then is the development and expansion of the doctrine of *Naturphilosophie*,” surely an odd thing to think of as the development of Hegelian philosophy. (It is almost as if Heine is saying that Hegel may be the “bourgeois king,” but the “restoration king,” Schelling, remains the king in the hearts of the people.) After he had recanted his views on religion and become disenchanted with Hegel after about 1848 (when his great illness set in), Heine revealed how he had understood the Hegelian philosophy of religion to be really a form of atheism. Both he and Gans had taken the twin Hegelian doctrines of, first, the superiority of Protestant Christianity to all other religions and, second, the assumption of religion into philosophy (and into subordination to philosophy) to be an overall argument to the effect that religion *per se* really did not count any more (or that it remained at work only for those people for whom neither art nor philosophy were approachable or efficacious). However, once one had fully understood that religion was only an intuitive, pictorial presentation of the deeper conceptual truth about freedom as the basic “norm” of modern life, one simply did not need religion any more. (Interestingly, the same did not hold for art; art presented in sensuous form what philosophy presented in conceptual form, but philosophy could never replace the concreteness and impact of art.)

When Heine wrote his book in the early 1830s, he seemed to share something like that view of religion, but he had doubts as to whether the replacement of the Christian religion with the new philosophy (or with whatever was supposed to be its successor) would produce something which could in fact play the same role in the social whole that Christianity had done. His work concludes with some well-known and often-cited dark warnings about the German love of battle and conquest, all of which have since been taken as fearsome premonitions of the Hitler nightmare yet to come (as they in fact partly are). The problem, as Heine sees

it, is the same one Nietzsche raised in the *Genealogy of Morality* when he remarked: "Have you ever asked yourselves properly how costly the setting up of every ideal on earth has been?"²³ Heine himself notes that "the *Naturphilosoph* will enter into terrible association with the original powers of nature. He will be able to conjure up the demonic forces of old-Germanic pantheism, and that lust for battle which we find among the old Germans will awaken in him," whereas "Christianity – and this is its greatest merit – has to some extent tamed that brutal Germanic lust for battle, but could not destroy it." It is also clear here that, in Heine's eyes, for "Germany" one could pretty well substitute "modern Europe." Although reason may be *at work* in the modern world, it is, to Heine, unclear if it can be *enough* at work to hold modern life together.

However, Heine is not making the kind of claim (later put forth most famously by Theodor Adorno) about any kind of "dialectic of Enlightenment," about emancipatory reason turning around to produce new conditions of dependence; his worry is not, that is, that "reason" has somehow produced *Naturphilosophie*, which in turn has thrown the claims of reason up in the air and reinstated irrationality. It is whether the modern disposal of tradition and "all prior metaphysics" can practically sustain itself, and Heine suggests that there is something more to the story than the Hegelian triumph of a social and political order consisting of universal but abstract rights to life, liberty, and property, the limited but crucial role of a morality that appeals to conscience, and a constitutional state based on a market-based, civil society and the sanctity of marriage in the form of a nuclear family. But, as Heine chillingly warns, given how Christianity has tamed people, in a German state finally freed from the moral constraints of Christianity, "a play will be enacted in Germany which will make the French Revolution look like a harmless idyll."

Hegel, Nietzsche, or Heine?

The immediate post-Kantians wanted to use Kant to get beyond Kant, which led to the various different post-Kantian systems which culminated in Hegel's system, each of which claimed, using the rhetoric of the day, to be playing down the Kantian letter in order to work in the Kantian spirit.

²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 70.

Similarly, some of the immediate post-Hegelian generation wanted to use Hegel to get beyond Hegel. Gans pushed the Hegelian system in directions that were already internal to the system's own dynamic, but he stayed overall close to the letter of the system.²⁴ Heine undertook a more radical rewriting of the Hegelian philosophy of history which, although remaining in the spirit, departed far more audaciously from the letter. In doing so, he gave us a view that in one sense stands midway between Hegel and Nietzsche. One of the problems of the emerging commercial culture of the nineteenth century was that it threatened to eat up the human capital that had provided the revolutionary impetus for its creation in the first place. In casting off religion, modern Europeans were moving toward the freedom that Kant said characterized morality: it was to be firm while realizing that nothing in either heaven or earth supported it. With all irony intended, Heine noted that nowadays, after Kant, "Humanity does homage today to the system of earthly utility; it thinks seriously about a prosperous, bourgeois order, about a sensible household budget, and about comfort for its old age." Nietzsche's worry about "last men" living lives of "pitiable comfort" is not far off from this view.

However Heine's essay should be viewed not as merely some stage along the way from Hegel to Nietzsche but as an alternative and competing account. Nietzsche called for a new kind of person who could live without the metaphysical consolations of the past, but Heine did not, as it were, simply fail to take that next Nietzschean step. Heine was at home in the modern world but not fully "of" it. Although the easiest way to think of Heine, the life-long exile in Paris dreaming of Germany, is to view him as the embodiment of modern "homelessness" (which was Adorno's take on Heine), it fails to do justice to the specific kind of alienation both he and Gans shared: this was a matter of belonging and not-belonging, of identifying with an order and not being fully identical with it, a matter

²⁴ Although staying closer to the letter of Hegel's system than Heine did, Gans nonetheless downplayed certain key element of Hegel's system, particularly the way in which "absolute spirit" (that is, art, religion, and philosophy) performs an *Aufhebung* of the realm of politics and world history (interpreted as the history of states, that is, of *politics*). Angelica Nuzzo argues that in fact this is not just incidental to Gans's Hegelianism; for Gans, so Nuzzo argues, absolute spirit "no longer possesses the status of a self-sufficient, form of spirit from on high . . . They [art, religion, philosophy] belong to world history itself." In Angelica Nuzzo, "Begriff und Geschichte – Eduard Gans' Stellung zu Hegels Systematik der Philosophie," in Reinhard Blänkner, Gerhard Göhler, Norbert Waszek (eds.), *Eduard Gans (1797–1839): Politischer Professor zwischen Restauration und Vormärz* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2002), pp. 137–151 here p. 150.

of existential *ambivalence* and not just homelessness.²⁵ Heine's lyrical poetry was formed around this problem; as Adorno himself noted, it used the language of everydayness, even of everyday banality, but added ironic twists to it, usually at or near the end of a poem, to transform the "everyday" into something else. Adorno took Heine's use of irony to be his way of coming to terms with "the dawning realization of the impossibility of poetry itself."²⁶ That is in part true; Heine's use of irony was a way of maintaining a commitment to art and to poetry *together with* the full self-consciousness that in modern commercial society it was becoming more and more of a problem. Even in his very earliest successful poetry, *The Book of Songs*, he manages to mesh the images and sound of romantic poetry with the more prosaic elements of modern life, with its emerging commercial ethos and crass sentimentality.

Two short and well-known poems from Heine's works illustrate Heine's use of irony for his transfiguration of the commonplace, particularly in the way he adapted old romantic tropes to new ironic uses. In one of them, he takes a standard romantic line and twists it to show its tried and true nature:

Das Fräulein stand am Meere
Und seufzte lang und bang,
Es rührte sie so sehre
Der Sonnenuntergang.

"Mein Fräulein! sein Sie munter,
Das ist ein altes Stück;
Hier vorne geht sie unter
Und kehrt von hinten zurück."

[The young lady stood on the seashore, / And sighed long and anxiously, / So much did the sunset move her.

"My young lady, perk up, / It's an old story / It goes down in front of us, / And behind us it returns again."]

This is the kind of ironic, shrug of the shoulders, "yes, we've all heard that before" move that Heine likes to push on to one of the tried and true tropes. But compare that with another well-known poem by Heine:

²⁵ See Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Der Fall Heine* (Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000).

²⁶ Theodor Adorno, "Toward a Reappraisal of Heine," *Vermischte Schriften* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), vol. XX, p. 448.

Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen,
Die hat einen andern erwählt;
Der andre liebt eine andre,
Und hat sich mit dieser vermählt.

Das Mädchen heiratet aus Ärger
Den ersten besten Mann,
Der ihr in den Weg gelaufen;
Der Jüngling ist übel dran.

Es ist eine alte Geschichte,
Doch bleibt sie immer neu;
Und wem sie just passiert,
Dem bricht das Herz entzwei.

[A young man loves a girl who has chosen another, / This other one
loves another girl and has married her.

Out of anger, the girl marries the very first man who comes her way, /
The young man is beside himself about it.

It is an old story, but it remains ever new. / And when it has just
happened to somebody / It breaks his heart in two.]

The twist on the trope points out that yes, of course it is tried, true, trite and banal . . . except when it happens to you. The shrug of the shoulder there is out of place. The unity of the universal (the tried, true, even the trite and banal, or what one might call the “philosophical” component) and the particular (the lived experience, the actual encounter with, for example, having one’s heart broken, or what one might call the “existential” component), the “old piece” which is something which has always happened, always will happen, but which always hits us anew whenever it happens, is very much a component of Heine’s lyrical, ironical maneuvers. On the one hand, Heine’s use of irony resembles the teaching of the classical stoics, whose point was to remind us of the therapeutic use to which the knowledge that such things are indeed “old stories” can be put. For the stoics, we were continually to remind ourselves that they “happen to everybody,” so that we are more likely not to be put off by them when they in fact do happen to us; on the other hand, they are the kinds of things that always are new to the person undergoing them, so treating them as tried and true (and trite) misses their point, and merely pointing out their banality (as tried and true) is itself a piece of banality.

Heine's technique of taking a banal and tired out mood of a traditional love poem and then "breaking the mood" through an ironic turn-around was yet another way in which he absorbed the Hegelian lessons of the modern self as existing in a kind of perpetual alienation – an internal division of the self from itself, which love promised to heal but which was always provisional, always subject to both disappointment *and* renewal. This provided Heine with the means to give what looked like a tired genre a new form of aesthetic tension. It enabled him to lift the ordinary out of its banality by transfiguring it into ironic poetry; that was Heine's *métier*, which few can match.

In his Hegelian commitment to and even celebration of the ordinary while all the time maintaining a critical stance towards it, Heine prefigures not so much Nietzsche as Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein is reported to have said, "I am not a religious man but I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view."²⁷ Heine could have said the same. Nor is Heine's irony that of a person who cannot justify his basic commitments and wishes to avoid that uncomfortable fact by shrugging his shoulders and laughing it off; it is more of the irony of seeing that our commitments are not yet reconciled with each other and that this lack calls out for a kind of intellectual honesty about itself. It includes both a commitment to the ideals of poetry itself and a refusal to compromise, for the sake of politics, what Heine, a master at his art, took to be good poetry, without at the same time falling into the trap of arguing that politics was somehow therefore a less worthwhile or less noble endeavor than art.

Heine's commitment to poetry in the face of conditions that seemed to make it less relevant, if not impossible, was indeed mirrored in his ironic politics. He remained committed to the liberal, egalitarian ideals of his youth even as he became progressively more disenchanted with how those ideals had worked themselves out in practice (in the few places where they had even been tried). Near the end of his life, he stated his fears that the "dark iconoclasts" of communism (some of whom were friends of his) would come to power and destroy virtually everything he held dear in art and life; yet he also confessed that they seemed to be the only ones who were seriously dealing with the problems of poverty and exploitation that he saw as endemic to the modern free-market commercialism, so that

²⁷ Cited from Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 83.

part of him wished them success even if it did mean the destruction of his own ideals. In his system, Hegel had promised a rebirth of something like the classical reconciliation of self-conscious freedom and social order within the structures of the modern world. Instead, Heine eschewed such a grand synthesis, offering instead only his commitment to hold on to his liberal ideals of art and politics without yet being able to offer a solution to what seemed to be the emerging social problems of the new order.²⁸

Satisfaction and dissatisfaction

In 1848, Heine suffered a physical breakdown that was to leave him in pain and paralyzed until his death in 1856, confined to his bed in what he laconically called his “mattress crypt.” Despite being in great pain and drugged continuously with morphine, Heine kept his wit and refined his talent, turning out some of his finest verse in that terrible period of his life. He also made a very public return to a form of religion, to a personal God, a move which he realized he himself would have viciously lampooned had it occurred earlier and been done by somebody else. None the less, the pantheism he celebrated as the “secret religion of Germany” was rejected in favor of something else, although what else was unclear; in one of his poems from this period, “*Gedächtnisfeier*” (“Memorial Celebration”), he even begins with the lines “Keine Messe wird man singen, / Keinen Kadosch wird man sagen, / Nichts gesagt und nichts gesungen / Wird am meinen Sterbetag” (“No Mass will be sung, / No Kaddish will be said / Nothing said, nothing sung / On anniversaries of my death”). Even if it was clear that Heine was returning to some kind of religion, it was not orthodox Judaism to which he was returning, and it certainly did not seem to be Christianity. He is even supposed to have said that “I have not returned to Judaism, since I never left it,” which, as Sammons notes,

²⁸ See the *Entwurf der Vorrede to Lutetia*, written in 1855, where Heine says: “Alas, I foresee it all, and an indescribable sadness seizes me when I think of how communism threatens my poetry and entire old order of the world with destruction – and nonetheless I freely admit that the same communism (even though it is completely inimical to all my interests and inclinations) exercises a magic over my mind which I cannot ward off, for in my heart two voices speak in favor of it, two voices that cannot be silenced but which perhaps are only diabolical enticements – but I was once so possessed by them that no exorcizing power can bring them under control – for the first of these voices is that of logic – the devil is a logician, so Dante says – and a terrible syllogism bewitches me, and since I cannot deny the premise: ‘That all people have the right to eat,’ I must also draw all the conclusions.” Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. IV, p. 817.

cannot be taken literally.²⁹ Heine, ever the ironist, never conclusively stated just what it was to which he was returning.

For Heine, the problem had always been with how one was to live both with the satisfaction with liberal modernity itself (and its potential for the further development of freedom) and the dissatisfaction with the shoddiness and injustice of modern industrial life. This issue of living with injustice in a promising order of freedom and equality was coupled with Heine's own sense of both belonging and not belonging to that order and with the problem of how to hold fast to one's commitment to a better, more just order without being thereby swallowed in one's own irony about the situation. Heine's art and his politics remained committed to a social order that promises freedom, equality, and solidarity and to the demand that this order actually deliver on its promises. This meant that the artist does not succumb to the temptation to avert his eyes from the problems of those who wield no power in it and from the handy way in which those with power easily exploit those without it and justify it in the name of "progress." Heine welded together, both in his personal life and in his writings, irony *and* commitment to what can be called the "liberal ideals" of freedom, equality and solidarity, to the ideal of a social order in which all people can lead their own lives with dignity. Neither we nor the Germans have a single word for this experience of belonging and not belonging, of satisfaction colored with dissatisfaction at the injustice of which we are a part: "Alienation" is certainly part of it, but it is only part of the experiential phenomenon. Perhaps the correct words are simply "Modern life itself."

²⁹ Cited in Sammons, *Heinrich Heine*, p. 305.

Chronology

- 1797 December 13: Harry Heine is born in Düsseldorf; parents are Samson Heine and Elizabeth van Geldern Heine. Samson Heine is a cloth merchant.
- 1807–1814 Heine attends the Düsseldorf Lycee (run by Catholic priests). Without graduating, Heine leaves the Lycee in 1814 and is enrolled in a business school.
- 1815 Heine does an apprenticeship in Frankfurt with the banker Rindskopf.
- 1816 Heine is sent to Hamburg where he works for the bank, Heckscher and Co., owned by his immensely wealthy uncle, Salomon Heine, with whom Heine has a life-long and rather checkered relationship.
- 1817 Heine publishes his first poetry (under a pseudonym).
- 1818–1819 Salomon Heine sets up Heine in business in Hamburg as a merchant (Harry Heine and Co.) dealing mostly in cloth; Heine's lack of interest and slipshod management quickly bankrupts the company and Salomon Heine quickly liquidates it.
- 1819 Heine returns to Düsseldorf; Salomon Heine promises him three years of financial support for him to study law in Bonn; this is extended for an additional two years.
- 1819–1820 Heine studies law in Bonn; disinterested in his legal studies, he attends the lectures of August Wilhelm Schlegel on literature and is inspired by the example of Schlegel and by his thoughts on literature. Schlegel makes Heine into a sort of protégé. Heine begins work

- on his first tragedy, "Almonzor," in which one of his most famous lines appears: "That was only a prelude, for where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn human beings too."
- 1820–21 Heine attends Göttingen in the Winter Semester, continuing his legal studies. He is expelled for a half year from Göttingen in January 1821 on grounds of "dueling."
- 1821 Heine goes to Berlin, entering the university there in April 1821. He quickly gains entrance to the best salons in the city, spending much time in the salon run by Karl and Rahel Varnhagen. He attends Hegel's lectures and befriends him. He makes the acquaintance of leading literary figures in the Berlin scene. Parts of his tragedy, "Almonzor," appear. A collection of poetry also appears. He becomes a member of the Association for the Culture and Scientific Study of Judaism, of which Eduard Gans is president. Heine travels in Poland and his travel piece, "On Poland," appears in 1823.
- 1822 Heine publishes "Letters from Berlin."
- 1823 Heine ends his studies in Berlin and travels in Germany. A collection by Heinrich Heine, "Tragedies including a Lyrical Intermezzo" is published. "Almonzor" is given a performance in Hamburg which is not entirely successful.
- 1824 Heine enrolls again in Göttingen in January; he travels back to Berlin, and he makes a hiking trip through the Harz mountains. He writes "Die Harzreise" ("Journey Through the Harz"), which after its appearance in 1826 gains him a wide audience and begins his rise to fame.
- 1825 Heine cynically converts to Protestant Christianity, claiming it is his "entry ticket into European culture"; he adopts a Christian name, and Harry Heine becomes Heinrich Heine. (His full Christian name is Christian Johann Heinrich Heine.) In July, he finishes his law studies and graduates with a doctoral degree in law.
- 1826 Heine publishes *Travel Sketches (Reisebilder)*, which becomes the first part of a successful series of such

- Travel Sketches, which greatly elevate Heine's literary reputation.
- 1827 Part two of the Travel Sketches appears.
Heine publishes what will become his most famous and most successful collection of poetry, *The Book of Songs* (*Buch der Lieder*).
Heine travels to England. On his return, he travels around Germany, making many valuable literary and political acquaintances.
- 1828 Heine visits Italy. In December, his father, Samson Heine, dies. Heine returns to Hamburg, where Salomon Heine had long since moved his father and mother during his father's long illness.
- 1829 Heine moves to Berlin and shortly thereafter takes up residence in Potsdam (just outside of Berlin).
- 1830 Part three of *Travel Sketches* appears.
- 1831 Discouraged by the lack of employment opportunities in Germany (a problem Heine thought he had solved by his conversion to Protestant Christianity), he moves to Paris, arriving there in May. Heine becomes the Paris correspondent for various German newspapers and magazines. Heine makes the acquaintance of many of the leading artists and intellectuals living in Paris at the time (among them Balzac, Berlioz, Chopin, Dumas, Victor Hugo, Liszt, and George Sand).
- 1832 Heine publishes *Conditions in France* (*Französische Zustände*) in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* in Hamburg. Metternich in Austria intervenes to stop publication. The book version appears in Prussia but is quickly forbidden by the authorities there.
- 1832 Heine publishes "État actuel de la littérature en Allemagne. De l'Allemagne depuis Madame de Staël" in the Paris journal, *L'Europe littéraire*. This is the first version of his acclaimed *The Romantic School*. Other poems and prose works appear to acclaim.
- 1834 Heine meets his future wife, Crescence Eugénie Mirat, whom he always calls "Mathilde."

- 1835 Heine writes and publishes *The History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, and *The Romantic School* is also published (which is given the date of 1836 as its publication date).
In December, the Prussians ban publication of all of Heine's works. The German *Bundesversammlung* follows little more than a week later with a ban on all writings from the group known as "Young Germany" (*Junge Deutschland*), which includes Heine.
- 1836 The French government officially gives Heine the status of "political emigrant" and grants him a pension. Heine contracts jaundice.
- 1837 Heine suffers from diseases of the eye, making reading difficult for him.
New prose works appear, also to acclaim.
- 1838–1840 Various prose works and new poetry appear. Heine's literary reputation grows.
- 1841 Heine meets Richard Wagner, who later borrows several ideas from Heine for works of his own, which lead to Wagner's operas, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Götterdämmerung*. Heine marries "Mathilde."
On the basis of his controversial article on the liberal Jewish intellectual Ludwig Börne, Heine engages in a duel with a Frankfurt businessman (Solomon Strauß) and is wounded in the hip.
- 1843 Heine's long satirical poem, "Atta Troll," appears. (The book form of "Atta Troll" appears in 1847.)
Heine makes the acquaintance of Karl Marx in Paris.
- 1844 Heine publishes "Germany: A Winter's Tale," his satirical poem about Germany. A new volume of poetry appears, *Neue Gedichte* (*New Poems*).
Heine is a co-worker with Karl Marx and Arnold Ruge on the *Deutsch-Französischen Jahrbüchern* (*German-French Yearbooks*).
In December, Salomon Heine dies. Heine disputes what he takes to be too small a portion of his uncle's vast fortune for himself; Salomon Heine's sons agree to give

- Heine a pension only under the condition that he never mention any family members in his works.
- 1845 Heine's health increasingly worsens.
- 1846 Friedrich Engels visits Heine in Paris.
- 1847 "Atta Troll: A Midsummer Night's Dream" appears in book form.
- 1848 While visiting the Louvre, Heine collapses.
Unable to move, Heine is confined thereafter to his bed, which he takes to referring to as his "mattress crypt."
- 1850 Heine writes his *Memoirs*.
- 1851 What Heine calls the third portion of his claim to poetic fame, *Romanzero*, appears.
- 1854 *Selected Writings* (*Vermischte Schriften*) appears.
- 1855 Elise Krinitz (whom Heine calls the "Mouche") makes his acquaintance and becomes his helper, reading aloud to him. (Heine's wife, "Mathilde," never learned to speak German.)
- 1856 Heine dies in Paris on February 17 and is buried in the Montmartre cemetery.

Further reading

For those wishing to read Heine's poetry in English, the best collection, currently out of print but still available widely on the used-book market, is *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine: A Modern English Version*, trans. Hal Draper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). A shorter, more easily available selection is that by David Cram and T. J. Reed, *Heinrich Heine* (London: J. M. Dent, 1997). A good selection of Heine's prose works is to be found in *Heinrich Heine: Selected Prose*, trans. and ed. Ritchie Robertson (London: Penguin, 1993). Ritchie Robertson has also translated a selection of Heine's poetry as *Heinrich Heine: Poems* (London: Duckworth, 1993). T. J. Reed has done a masterly job of rendering Heine's great long poem, *Deutschland: A Winter's Tale* (with facing German text) (London: Angel Books, 1997).

The best biography in English is still Jeffery L. Sammons, *Heinrich Heine: A Modern Biography* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1979).

The great scholar in English of Heine's works is Siegbert Prawer. All of the following three works by him are illuminating and in addition are very good reading: *The Tragic Satirist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961); *Heine's Jewish Comedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); and *Frankenstein's Island: England and the English in the Writings of Heinrich Heine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Nigel Reeves, *Heinrich Heine: Poetry and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974) remains the classic study of the relation between Heine's politics and his poetry.

Two recent collections of essays also bring Heine studies in English up to date: Jost Hermand and Robert C. Holub (eds.), *Heinrich Heine's Contested Identities: Politics, Religion, and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); and Roger F. Cook (ed.), *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich Heine* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002).

Anthony Phelan, *Reading Heinrich Heine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) is the most comprehensive study of Heine's life and work to appear in many years.

Translator's note

In the discussion of Martin Luther in the first chapter of *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, Heine writes: "The divine author of the Bible seems to know, indeed, as much as we others do, that it is by no means a matter of indifference by whom one is translated." For a translator, this passage implies both satisfaction and responsibility, satisfaction that one's task, which, after all, is to be transparent for the most part, cannot be done equally well by everyone, but also responsibility, because, well, this task cannot be done equally well by everyone. Heine, during his lifetime, had much experience with translators, and every translator of Heine is haunted by the question of what sort of translation he would have wanted.

As I was working with Heine's texts here in Germany, there were commemorations of the 150th anniversary of his death. It is clear that he remains both relevant and controversial in German culture. My translation intends to present him in this spirit. Keeping as close as possible to the literal meaning in light of the historical and cultural contexts in which he wrote, I try at the same time to convey the freshness and polemical sharpness of his style, which transcend his historical context, as well as his virtuosic humor (yes, Heine is a Paganini).

A word or two of warning. In part, Heine's stylistic accomplishments are hidden from the English reader, since his German is closer to contemporary American prose style than many other German authors of the time. I have also not tried to duplicate all of Heine's linguistic accomplishments which must remain the unique possessions of German readers, since I found it gratuitous (as well as hopeless) to compete with cleverness in

English against Heine in German (this remark applies particularly to the rhymes in the German poems).

The texts I have translated follow the Düsseldorf historical-critical edition (published 1973–1997 by Hoffmann & Campe in Hamburg under the editorship of Manfred Windfuhr) with the exception of the few letter excerpts which are taken from the Weimar edition (the *Heinrich Heine Säkularausgabe*, published in Weimar, 1970–1984). Both of these sources are now available online at the Heinrich-Heine-Portal.

In the course of my work, I consulted previous translations of the texts, particularly those by Helen Mustard. The translator's notes to the text owe a considerable debt to the notes in the Düsseldorf edition and to comments by Karl Ameriks and Terry Pinkard. To these two I also owe a debt of gratitude for their helpful comments on the translation.

*On the history of religion and philosophy
in Germany*

Preface to the first edition

I should note especially for the German reader that these pages were originally written for a French periodical, the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, in order to accomplish a specific purpose at the time. In particular, they belong to a survey of German cultural events, several parts of which I had earlier presented to the French public and which have also appeared in the German language as the series of articles “On the History of More Recent Fine Literature in Germany.” The demands of the periodical press, its fiscal problems, the lack of research resources, French inadequacies, a newly promulgated law in Germany about foreign printing which was applied only to me, and other such difficulties did not allow me to publish the various parts of that survey in chronological order and under a single collective title.¹ The present book, despite its internal unity and its external finish, is thus only a fragment of a greater whole.

I send the friendliest greetings to my homeland –

Written in Paris in December 1834.

Heinrich Heine

¹ Heine was a life-long victim of government censorship. Its height was reached in 1835 with a total ban on the publication or distribution of his past and future writings as well as those of the fellow members of the “Young Germany” literary movement.

Preface to the second edition

When the first edition of this book left the presses and I picked up a copy of it I was much startled by the mutilations whose traces were everywhere.¹ Here there was an adjective missing, there a clause, whole passages were left out with no consideration paid to transitions so that not only the meaning but also sometimes the underlying point of view had vanished. It was more the fear of Caesar than the fear of God which guided the hand in these mutilations, and while it nervously eradicated everything which was politically suspect, it preserved even the most disturbing passages which made reference to religion. In this way, the original patriotic-democratic orientation of the book was lost; from its pages stared at me uncannily a completely foreign spirit which reminded me of scholastic-theological polemics and was deeply repugnant to my humanistic-tolerant temperament.

At first, I entertained the hope that with a second printing I could again fill in all the lacunae of this book; but no such restoration of the kind is possible now since the original manuscript was lost in the house of my publisher during the great fire in Hamburg. My memory is too weak to be of much use, and, in addition, a thorough examination of the book is impossible because of the condition of my eyes. I will make do with taking a few of the larger omitted passages from the French version, which was published earlier than the German one, and intercalating them. One of these passages, which has been reprinted and discussed in innumerable French papers, and which has even been taken up by one of the greatest French statesmen, Count Molé, can be found at the end of this new edition.

¹ I.e., censored passages.

It might show the truth about the supposed belittling and disparagement of Germany abroad, of which, as certain honest people assure, I am guilty.² If, in my annoyance, I set forth my views about old, official Germany, that moldy land of philistines – which however has not brought forth a Goliath or any single great man –, what I said was made to appear as if I were speaking of the true Germany, that great, mysterious, as it were anonymous Germany of the German people and of the sleeping sovereign, with whose scepter and crown the meercats are playing.³ It was even easier for these honorable people to make these insinuations given that any expression of my true beliefs was completely impossible for a long period, especially at the time when the decrees of the Federal Parliament against “Young Germany” appeared, which were principally aimed at me and brought me into an exceptionally restrained position, without parallel in the history of press subservience. When later I could somewhat loosen the muzzle, the thoughts still remained gagged.

The following book is a fragment and should remain so. Honestly, I would have liked to have left it completely unpublished. Since the time of its publication, my views on several things, especially divine things, have changed considerably, and some of what I then claimed now contradicts my better convictions. But, as soon as it leaves the bowstring, the arrow no longer belongs to the archer, and the word no longer belongs to the speaker as soon as it has left his lips, especially when reproduced by the press. In addition, compelling objections based on other considerations would be raised against me if I left this book unpublished and removed it from my complete works. I could, as some writers do in these cases, take refuge in a moderation of expression, in disguise through euphemism; but I hate ambiguous words, those hypocritical flowers and cowardly fig-leaves, from the bottom of my soul. An honest man, however, retains under all circumstances the inalienable right to admit his error openly, and I do it here without hesitation. I therefore frankly confess that everything in this book which has to do with the great question of God is as wrong, as it is ill-considered. Equally ill-considered and false is the claim, which I took from the School,⁴ that deism has been destroyed in theory and leads a wretched existence only in the world of appearance. No, it is not true that God’s existence itself has been ended by the critique of reason

² Louis-Matieu, Comte Molé (1781–1855).

³ A reference to the witches’ kitchen scene in Goethe’s *Faust*. ⁴ I.e., the Hegelians.

which destroyed all of the arguments for it which have been known since Anselm of Canterbury. Deism lives, it is most alive, it is not dead, and was hardly likely to be killed by the new German philosophy. No dog would even sniff at the spider web of Berlin dialectics, no cat could be harmed by it, how could it kill a God? I myself have personal experience of how little fear is due its attempts to kill. It kills again and again, and its victims remain alive. The porter of the Hegelian school, the grim Ruge, once swore roundly or, rather, roared soundly, that he had killed me with his porter's cane in the *Halle Yearbooks*; yet, at the very same time, I was walking around the boulevards of Paris, fresh, healthy, and more immortal than ever.⁵ Alas, poor, honest Ruge! Later, he could not keep back honest laughter when I confessed to him here in Paris that I never even saw those terrible death-dealing pages, those *Halle Yearbooks*; and both my full red cheeks and my hearty appetite for oysters convinced him that I little deserved to be called a corpse. Indeed, at the time, I was healthy and fat; I was at the zenith of my weight and was as overconfident as King Nebuchadnezzar before his fall.

Alas! A few years later, I have undergone changes in body and in spirit. How often I have thought since then of the story of this Babylonian king, who considered himself to be God in heaven, but fell wretchedly from the heights of his pride, crawled like an animal on the ground and ate grass – (although it was probably lettuce). This legend is in the splendidly grandiose book of Daniel, which I recommend for edification not only to the good Ruge, but also to my even more stubborn friend Marx, indeed even the Messieurs Feuerbach, Daumer, Bruno Bauer, Hengstenberg and whatever else their names are, these godless self-worshippers.⁶ There are, by the way, many more beautiful and remarkable stories in the Bible which are worthy of their notice; for example, right in the beginning, the story of the forbidden tree in paradise and the snake, that small university lecturer, who, six thousand years before his birth, presented Hegel's entire philosophy. This legless bluestocking shows, quite astutely, how the absolute consists of the identity of being and knowledge, how man can become god through knowledge or, what is the same, how God in man

⁵ Arnold Ruge (1803–1880), Young Hegelian.

⁶ The figures mentioned are: Karl Marx (1818–1883); Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), philosopher, explained theism as an illusory human projection; Georg Friedrich Daumer (1800–1875), critic of Christianity; Bruno Bauer (1809–1882), prominent atheist; Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg (1802–1869), mentioned ironically, editor of the official newspaper of the Protestant Church.

achieves consciousness of himself. – This phrase is not quite as clear as the original words, “If you eat from the tree of knowledge, you shall be as Gods!” Eve understood only one part of the entire demonstration, that the fruit was forbidden; and because it was forbidden she ate it, the good woman. But hardly had she eaten the tempting apple when she lost her innocence, her naïve immediacy. She found that she was far too naked for a person of her class, the ancestral mother of so many future emperors and kings, and she demanded a dress. To be sure, it was only a dress made of fig-leaves, because at the time no Lyonnaise silk-factory owners had been born yet, and because in paradise there were no fashion designers and sellers.⁷ – Oh, paradise! Strange, as soon as woman arrives at a level of thinking self-consciousness, her first thought is of a new dress! This biblical story, too, stays in my mind, especially the speech of the snake, and I would like to set it as the motto of this book in the same way as you often see a sign in front of princely gardens with the warning: Beware of animal traps and automatic firing devices!

I have already discussed the changes which have occurred in my opinion of divine matters in my latest book, *Romanzero*.⁸ Many requests have reached me in the meantime with Christian importunity to explain how this great illumination came over me. Pious souls seem to thirst for a story of some sort of miracle, and they would really like to know if, like Saul, I did not happen to see a light on the way to Damascus, or if, like Balaam, the son of Beor, I rode a stubborn ass who suddenly opened his mouth and began to speak like a person. No, you faithful souls, I never went to Damascus. I know nothing of Damascus other than the fact that the Jews there were recently accused of having eaten old Capuchins,⁹ and the name of the city would be completely unknown to me if I had never read the “Song of Songs,” in which King Solomon compares the nose of his lover with a tower which faces towards Damascus. I have also never seen an ass, at least a four-footed one, who spoke like a man, although I have seen enough people who spoke like asses whenever they opened their mouths. Indeed, neither a vision nor a seraphic rapture nor a voice from heaven nor a remarkable dream or other such wondrous manifestation brought me to the path of salvation. I owe my enlightenment simply to reading a book. – A book? Yes, and it is an old, simple book, modest like

⁷ Lyon, a French city prominent in the silk trade. ⁸ See below the selection from the Afterword.

⁹ In 1840, after the disappearance of an Italian monk, the Jews of Damascus were accused of ritual murder.

nature, also just as natural; a book that looks everyday and unpretentious, like the sun which warms us and the bread which nourishes us; a book, which looks at us with a kindness so intimate and blessed, like an old grandmother who also reads daily in the book with her dear trembling lips and with her spectacles on her nose – and this book is called quite simply “The Book,” the Bible. One rightly calls it also the Holy Scripture; whoever has lost his God can find him again in this book, and whoever never knew him finds here the breath of the divine Word gently blowing over him. The Jews, who know a thing or two about valuable things, knew very well what they were doing when, during the burning of the Second Temple, they left the gold and silver sacrificial vessels, the lamps and the candelabras, even the breastplate of the High Priest with its large gems, and saved only the Bible. This was the real treasure of the temple, and it was, God be praised, not a victim of the flames or of Titus Vespasianus, the evildoer, who came to an awful end, as the rabbis relate.¹⁰ A Jewish priest, who lived in Jerusalem two hundred years before the destruction of the Second Temple during the Golden Age of Ptolemy Philadelphus, named Yeshua ben Sira ben Eleazar, expressed in his collection of gnomic sayings, *Meshalim*, the thought of his time and I will quote his beautiful words here. They are priestly and ceremonial, yet at the same time as exhilaratingly fresh as if they welled forth yesterday from a living human breast, and they are as follows:¹¹

This all is simply the Book of the Covenant made with the highest God, that is, the Law which Moses entrusted, as a treasure, to the house of Jacob. Wisdom has flowed from it like the waters of the Pison when it is large, and like the waters of the Tigris when it floods in spring. Understanding has flowed from it, like the Euphrates when it is large, and like the Jordan during harvest time. From the same source, virtue has poured like light, and like the waters of the Nile in the fall. No one has ever learned all there is to learn from it; and no one will ever fully sound its depths. For its meaning is richer than any ocean, and its word deeper than any abyss.

Written in Paris in May 1852.

Heinrich Heine

¹⁰ The Roman Emperor Titus Flavius Vespasianus destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70.

¹¹ Yeshua ben Sira ben Eleazar wrote the *Meshalim* around the year 190 BC, otherwise known as the *Book of Sirach* or *Ecclesiasticus*. Some faiths consider this book apocryphal. The quotation is taken from 24:32–39.

Book One

The French have believed of late that they could come to understand Germany by acquainting themselves with our literary productions.¹² But in this they have merely elevated themselves from a state of complete ignorance to one of superficial knowledge. Indeed, as long as they do not know the meaning of religion and philosophy in Germany, these literary productions will be flowers which remain silent to them, and the entirety of German thought will remain to them a barren mystery.

Thus, I consider myself to be performing a useful service by providing some explanatory information about these two topics. This is no easy task for me. To start, I have to avoid using scholastic expressions which are fully unknown to the French. On the other hand, I have fathomed neither the subtleties of theology nor those of metaphysics to sufficient depth to be able to formulate them simply and shortly enough to meet the needs of a French audience. For these reasons, I will consider only the larger questions which have been discussed in German theology and philosophy, and I will illustrate only their social importance, always keeping in mind the limitations of my own means of clarification and the capacity of the French reader to understand.

If any great German philosophers happen to cast a glance at these pages, they will shrug their noble shoulders at the meager scale of everything I present here. But I hope they may bear in mind that the little I say here is expressed quite clearly and distinctly, while their own works – while very thorough, immeasurably thorough, very profound, stupendously profound – are to the same extent incomprehensible. What use to the people are these locked-up granaries, if they have no keys? The people are hungry for knowledge and will thank me for the crumbs of philosophical bread which I honestly share with them.

It is not a lack of talent, I believe, which keeps most German scholars from expressing themselves about religion and philosophy in a popularly understandable manner. Rather, I think that they fear the results of their own thinking, which they thus do not dare to communicate to the people. I myself do not have this fear, for I am no scholar myself but one of the people. Yes, I am no scholar; I am not one of the seven hundred wise men of Germany. I wait with the great crowd in front of the gates of

¹² A reference to the work *De L'Allemagne* (*About Germany*, 1813), in which Germaine de Staël (1766–1817) introduced France to contemporary German culture.

their wisdom. If some truth or other happens to slip out, and if this truth manages to get to me, it has gotten far enough: I write it down on paper in neat letters and give it to the type-setter; he sets it in lead and gives it to the printer; the printer prints it, and then it belongs to the whole world.

The religion which we enjoy in Germany is Christianity. I will thus have to explain what Christianity is, how it became Roman Catholicism, how from that Protestantism emerged, and, from Protestantism, German philosophy.

Though I begin with a discussion of religion, I beg in advance of all pious souls not to be anxious on any account. Fear nothing, pious souls! No blasphemous jests will disturb your ears. Such jests are, in any case, still useful in Germany, where it is important for the moment to neutralize the power of religion. For we in Germany are in the same position as you before the Revolution, when Christianity stood in an inseparable alliance with the old regime, which itself could not be destroyed as long as Christianity still maintained its influence over the multitude. Voltaire had to bring forth his sharp laughter before Sanson could let his guillotine blade fall.¹³ Of course, neither the laughter nor the guillotine really proved anything, although they both had consequences. Voltaire was only able to harm the body of Christianity. All of his jokes drawn from church history, all of his jokes about dogma and cult, about the Bible, this holiest book of humanity, about the Virgin Mary, this most beautiful flower of poetry, the great dictionary of philosophical arrows he shot loose against clerics and priests – all these wounded only the mortal body of Christianity, not its inner essence, not its deeper spirit, not its eternal soul.

For Christianity is an idea and, as such, is indestructible and immortal like any idea. What is this idea, though?

Since this idea has never been clearly understood, and superficial points have always been mistaken for its essence, a true history of Christianity does not yet exist. Two opposing factions write church history and continually contradict each other; but neither the one nor the other ever definitively states the idea which lies at the center of Christianity, which

¹³ Voltaire, the pen-name of François-Marie Arouet (1694–1778), was one of the foremost proponents of the Enlightenment in France. He excelled in sarcastic criticism, especially of the traditional Church, and advocated a form of deism. Among his works is the *Dictionnaire philosophique* (*Philosophical Dictionary*, 1764). Charles-Henri Sanson (1740–1793) was the executioner of Paris. In 1793, he beheaded King Louis XVI.

strives to reveal itself in its symbolism, its dogma, its cult, and in its entire history, and which has manifested itself in the real life of Christian peoples! Neither Baronius, the Catholic cardinal, nor the Protestant Privy Counselor Schröckh has revealed to us what that idea actually was. And even if you read through all the folios of Mansi's *Councils*, Assemani's *Codex* of liturgies, and the entire *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Saccharelli, you still would not understand what the idea of Christianity actually was.¹⁴ What do you see in the histories of the Eastern and Western Churches? In the former, the history of the Eastern Church, you see nothing but dogmatic hair-splitting, a renewal of ancient Greek Sophism; in the latter, the history of the Occidental Church, you see nothing but disciplinary arguments which affect church interests, in which ancient Roman legal casuistry and art of government reappear in new formulations and with new means of coercion. In fact, just as one argued in Constantinople about the *logos*, so one argued in Rome about the relationship between secular and spiritual power; in one an argument about the *homousios*,¹⁵ in the other about investiture. As for the Byzantine questions – Is the *Logos homousios* with the Father? Should Mary be called mother of God or mother of man? Did Christ hunger of necessity in the absence of food, or did he only hunger because he chose to? – Behind all of these questions are court intrigues, and their answers depend upon the rumors and gossip in the chambers of the *Sacri Palatii*, whether for example Eudocia falls or Pulcheria; for the latter hates Nestorius, the betrayer of her love-affairs, and the former hates Cyril, who protects Pulcheria.¹⁶ In the final analysis, everything was really about women and eunuchs, and dogma served only to persecute or promote a man, and in the man, a faction. It was the same in the West. Rome wanted to rule; “As its legions fell, it sent dogmas to the provinces.”¹⁷ All strife over belief was founded on Roman usurpations.

¹⁴ Caesar Baronius (1538–1607), Johann Matthias Schröckh (1733–1808), Giovanni Domenico Mansi (1692–1769), Josephus Aloysius Assemani (1710–1782), Gaspard Saccarelli (1723–1803) were all authors, from different perspectives, of church histories.

¹⁵ Greek: The sameness of essence; having one essence with.

¹⁶ The Sacred Palace was the dwelling place of the Eastern Roman Emperor in Constantinople. Heine refers to the conflict over the Nestorian heresy involving Eudocia (died 460), the wife of Emperor Theodosius II, and Pulcheria (399–453), his older sister. Nestorius (381–c. 451) and Cyril (c. 375–444) gave different answers to the above “Byzantine questions.” For example, Nestorius declared, in opposition to Cyril, that Mary cannot be regarded as the “mother of God,” because the human and divine natures in Christ were distinct. Nestorius was declared a heretic in 431 at the Council of Ephesus.

¹⁷ This passage is taken from Heine's travel journal *The North Sea (Part III)*.

The goal was to consolidate the supreme power of the Roman Bishop. This power was always quite lenient about true points of belief, but it spat fire and flame as soon as the rights of the Church were under attack. The pope did not argue very much about the persons in Christ, but rather about the consequences of the Isidorian Decretals.¹⁸ He centralized his power through canonical law, appointment of bishops, disparagement of princely power, monastic orders, celibacy, etc. But was this Christianity? Is the idea of Christianity revealed in the reading of these stories? What is this idea?

The historical manifestation and development of this idea in the real world can already be seen in the first centuries after the birth of Christ, especially through an impartial investigation of the history of the Manicheans and the Gnostics.¹⁹ Although the former were declared heretical, and the latter denounced and damned by the Church, they still retained their influence on dogma. Catholic art evolved from their symbolism, and their way of thought pervaded the entire life of the Christian peoples. At base, the Manicheans are not very different from the Gnostics. A characteristic of both is the doctrine of the two principles, good and evil, which battle each other. The former group, the Manicheans, took this doctrine from the ancient Persian religion, where Ormuz, light, is the enemy of Ahriman, darkness. The latter group, the true Gnostics, believed also in the pre-existence of the good principle, and they explained the origin of the evil principle by means of emanation, through the generation of eons which, as they got farther and farther from their origin, deteriorated into ever greater darkness. According to Cerinthus, the creator of our world was by no means the highest God but only an emanation of him, one of the eons. This, the actual demiurge, has gradually degenerated and, now, as the evil principle, stands in hostile opposition to the *logos* which originated immediately from the highest God, the good principle. This Gnostic worldview was authentically Indian. It included the doctrines of divine incarnation, of the mortification of the flesh, of spiritual introversion, and it gave rise to the ascetic contemplative monastic life, which is the purest outgrowth of the Christian idea. This idea was expressed

¹⁸ A collection of canon law, produced in the ninth century, falsely attributed to Saint Isidor of Sevilla (560–636), and supporting the position of the pope.

¹⁹ Manichaeism was a religion founded in Persia by Mani (AD 216–276), emphasizing a strong dualism between good and evil. The term Gnosticism refers to a variety of religious system of late antiquity (second to third centuries AD), which stressed the importance of esoteric knowledge and viewed the world of matter as fallen and evil. Cerinthus was one of the first Christian Gnostics.

only in a very confused way in dogma and only very dimly in the cult. But everywhere we see the doctrine of the two principles in evidence: opposed to the good Christ stands the evil Satan; the world of spirit is represented by Christ, the world of matter by Satan; our soul belongs to the former, our body to the latter; and the whole world of appearance, nature, is thus originally evil; Satan, the Prince of Darkness, will thereby lure us to perdition; and it is essential to renounce all the sensual joys of life, to torment our body, Satan's fief, so that the soul can rise aloft, all the more nobly, into the lucid sky, into the bright kingdom of Christ.

This view of the world, the real idea of Christianity, spread with unbelievable speed through the entire Roman Empire like an infectious illness; the symptoms lasted throughout the Middle Ages, now a raging fever, now fatigue, and we Moderns still feel cramps and weakness in our limbs. Even if many a one of us has already convalesced, he still cannot escape the general atmosphere of the sick-room, and he feels himself unhappily to be the only healthy one among the infirm. One day, when humanity has again attained its complete health, when peace has again been established between soul and body, and soul and body again mingle in their original harmony – on that day it will hardly be possible to understand the artificial discord which Christianity sowed between the two. These happier and more beautiful generations, the products of free love, flourishing in a religion of joy, will smile sadly at their poor ancestors, who gloomily abstained from all the enjoyments of this beautiful earth and, through their mortification of warm colorful sensuality, almost faded into cold and pale ghosts. Yes, I say it definitely, our descendants will be happier and more beautiful than we are. For I believe in progress. I believe that humanity is destined for happiness, and thus I hold a higher opinion of the divinity than those pious people who think that he made man only to suffer. Right here on earth, through the blessings of free political and industrial institutions, I would like to establish this state of bliss, which, in the opinion of the pious, will only occur at the Last Judgment, in Heaven. But perhaps my hope, like theirs, is foolish, and there is no resurrection of humanity, neither a political-moral nor an apostolic-catholic one.

Perhaps humanity is destined to eternal misery, perhaps peoples are eternally damned to be crushed by despots, exploited by their accomplices, and mocked by their lackeys.

Alas, in this case one would have to try to preserve Christianity, even if one thought it a mistake; one would have to wander through Europe

barefoot in monk's robes, preaching renunciation and the vanity of all earthly goods, offering the consolations of the cross to the scourged and debased, and promising them all seven heavens up above after death.

Perhaps it is because the greatest of this earth are certain of their ruling power and because they have decided in their hearts to misuse it eternally, to our misfortune, that they are persuaded of the necessity of Christianity for their peoples, and it is fundamentally out of a tender feeling of humanity that they take such great pains for the preservation of this religion!

The ultimate fate of Christianity thus depends on whether we still need it. This religion was a blessing for suffering humanity during eighteen centuries. It was providential, divine, holy. Every way in which it was helpful to civilization – taming the strong, strengthening the tame, connecting peoples through a common feeling and a common language, and whatever else its apologists have thought of praising it for – all this even is negligible in comparison to that great consolation which it has provided to humanity. Eternal glory is due to the symbol of that suffering God, the savior with the crown of thorns, Christ crucified, whose blood was, as it were, the balsam of relief which poured into the wounds of humanity. The poet especially will acknowledge with awe the terrible sublimity of this symbol. Indeed, the entire system of symbols expressed in the art and life of the Middle Ages will forever arouse the admiration of poets. In point of fact, what colossal consistency in Christian art, especially in architecture! These gothic cathedrals: how perfectly they harmonize with the cult and how the idea of the Church itself reveals itself in them! Everything strives upward here, everything transubstantiates itself: the stone sprouts into branches and foliage and becomes tree; the fruit of the grapevine and wheat becomes blood and flesh; man becomes God; God becomes pure spirit! Christian life in the Middle Ages is a fertile, inexhaustibly precious material for poets. Only Christianity could have produced such bold contrasts on earth, such bright-colored pains, and such bizarre beauties, that one might well think they could never have existed in reality and that all of it is just a colossal fever dream, indeed, the fever dream of an insane God. Even nature, at that time, seemed to disguise herself fantastically. Yet however much humanity, caught up in abstract brooding, turned away from her morosely, she would sometimes waken it with a voice so terribly sweet, so dreadfully affectionate, so magically powerful, that it listened involuntarily and smiled, was horrified, and even sickened to death. The

story of the nightingale of Basel occurs to me here, and since you probably do not know it, I will tell it to you.

In May 1433, at the time of the Church Council, a group of clergymen went for a walk in a copse near Basel – prelates and doctors, monks of all colors. They disputed over tricky theological questions, made distinctions and argued; or perhaps they quarreled about annates, expectatives, and reservations; or tried to figure out, I don't know, whether Thomas Aquinas was a better philosopher than St. Bonaventure!²⁰ But suddenly, in the middle of their dogmatic and abstract discussions, they paused and stood quiet, rooted to the spot in front of a blooming linden tree where a nightingale sat, rejoicing and sobbing in the softest and most tender melodies. Those educated gentlemen were put into a marvelous mood, the warm spring tones penetrated into their scholastically cloistered hearts, their feelings awoke from their dull hibernation, and they looked at each other with amazed delight. Finally, though, one of them remarked astutely that something was fishy, that this nightingale could likely be a devil, and that this devil intended with its lovely tones to take them away from their Christian discussions and to tempt them to sensuality and other sweet sins. He began his exorcism, probably with the usual phrase of the time: “Adjuro te per eum, qui ventures est, judicare vivos et mortuos”²¹ etc. etc. The story goes that during this invocation the bird answered, “Yes, I am an evil spirit!” and flew away laughing. Those who heard his song, however, became ill that very day and died shortly thereafter.

This story probably needs no commentary. It fully demonstrates the horrifying character of an era which denounced everything sweet and charming as devilry. Even the nightingale was slandered, and one crossed oneself when it sang. The true Christian wandered through blooming nature like an abstract specter, with his senses anxiously closed off. Perhaps in a later book, I will present in greater length the relationship of the Christian to nature, when I have to discuss German folk belief in more detail as an aid to understanding neo-romantic literature.²² For the moment, I can remark only that French authors, misled by German

²⁰ Annates were payments made to the pope upon being given a church office; expectatives were promises of an office when it became vacant; reservations were privileges reserved for higher-ranking church officials. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and St. Bonaventure (1221–1274) were among the leading Scholastic theologians.

²¹ Latin: “I invoke you in the name of him who will come to judge the living and the dead.”

²² A reference to Heine's work *Elementargeister* (*Elemental Spirits*), 1837.

authorities, grievously err when they assume that folk belief was the same all over Europe in the Middle Ages. Only in the case of the good principle, the realm of Christ, did the same views hold in all of Europe; the Roman Church made sure of that and whoever deviated from the prescribed opinion here was a heretic. As for the evil principle, the realm of Satan, different views held in different countries, and in the Germanic north people had quite different ideas from those of the Romanic south. This came about because the Christian clergy did not simply dismiss the pre-existent national gods as empty products of the imagination, but rather conceded them an actual existence. They maintained, though, that all of these gods were nothing but male and female devils, who had lost their power over people with the victory of Christ and wanted now to tempt them to sin through desire and deception. The Olympic pantheon thus became an airy hell, and even when a poet of the Middle Ages celebrated the stories of the Greek gods in beautiful song, the pious Christian saw only ghosts and devils. The monks' somber mania had the most dire effect on poor Venus. Oddly enough, she was taken to be a daughter of Beelzebub, and the good knight Tannhäuser says to her very face:

Oh, Venus, my beautiful woman,
You are a she-devil.²³

She had earlier tempted Tannhäuser into that marvelous cave called the Venusberg, where, as the legend went, the beautiful goddess led the most dissolute life of game and dance with her lovers and ladies. Even poor Diana, despite her chastity, was not safe from a similar fate. She was said to wander through the forests at night with her nymphs; hence, the legend of the furious host, the wild hunt. Here again we see clearly the Gnostic view of the deterioration of the once godly, and, in this transformation of the earlier national belief, the idea of Christianity is manifested in deepest form.

National folk belief in Europe, in the north much more so than the south, was pantheistic. Its mysteries and symbols were related to the worship of nature. In every element, marvelous beings were honored;

²³ Tannhäuser (Heine writes Tannhüser, according to the Middle High German spelling) was a German poet (c. 1205–c. 1267) and subject of a c. fifteenth-century ballad which appeared in the famous 1806 collection of German folk material *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. Richard Wagner used this legend (and the poem written about it by Heine) as the basis for his opera *Tannhäuser* (first produced in 1845).

a divinity breathed in every tree. The entire world of appearance was divinized through and through. Christianity inverted this view, and divinized nature turned into demonized nature. It was far more difficult to turn the cheerful, artistically shaped figures of Greek mythology, which ruled alongside Roman civilization in the south, into ugly, terrible masks of Satan than the Germanic divine figures – to be sure not modeled by any particular artistic sense – which were already so gloomy and sullen, like the north itself. For this reason, in your land, France, it was not possible to produce a population of devils as dark and terrible as in our land, and even the French spirits and magical beings received a cheerful form. How beautiful, colorful, and clear your folk legends are in comparison with ours, those monstrosities which consist of blood and fog, and which grin at us so grey and dreadful. Our medieval poets, although they mostly chose material which you had invented, or at first treated, in Brittany and Normandy, gave to their works, perhaps intentionally, as much as possible of that cheery old-French spirit. But, in our national epics and in our oral legends, that dark Nordic spirit remained of which you hardly have any notion. You have, just like us, various kinds of elemental spirits, but ours are as different as yours as a German is from a Frenchman. The demons in your *fabliaux*²⁴ and magic tales – how bright and, particularly, how clean they are in comparison with our grey, and very often obscene, rabble of spirits. Your fairies and elemental spirits, wherever you got them from, from Cornwall or Arabia, are fully naturalized; and a French spirit is as different from a German as, say, a dandy who strolls on the Boulevard Coblenz with yellow kid gloves is different from a weighty German porter. Your mermaids, for example, Melusine, are just as different from ours as a princess from a laundrywoman. The fairy Morgana – how she would be terrified if she were to encounter, say, a German witch, naked, smeared with ointment, riding to the Brocken on a broomstick. This mountain is no cheery Avalon, but rather a rendezvous for everything foul and ugly.²⁵ Satan sits at the mountaintop in the form of a black billy-goat. Each witch approaches him with a candle in hand and kisses him behind, just below his back. Afterwards, this seedy sorority dances around him singing “Donderemus, Donderemus!” The goat bleats and the infernal cancan shrieks with joy. It is an evil omen for the

²⁴ Short French burlesque stories in verse, mainly from the thirteenth century.

²⁵ The *Brocken* is a mountain in the *Harz* region of central Germany where, according to legend, witches gather on Walpurgis night. It is the location of a famous scene from Goethe's *Faust*.

witch if she loses a shoe in this dance; that means that she will be burned in the coming year. But the insane Sabbath music, true Berlioz,²⁶ drowns out all conscious anxiety; – and when the poor witch wakes up out of her intoxication the next morning, she lies naked and exhausted in the ashes next to the dying hearth fire.

One finds the best information about these witches in the “Demonology” of the honorable and learned Doctor Nicolas Remigius, the Criminal Judge of His Most Serene Highness, the Duke of Lorraine.²⁷ This astute man had, to be sure, the best opportunity to become acquainted with the practices of the witches, since he conducted their trials; and alone in his time eight hundred women were burned at the stake in Lorraine after being convicted of witchcraft. The presentation of evidence usually consisted of the following procedure: one bound their hands and feet together and threw them into the water. If they sank and drowned, they were innocent, if they remained swimming on the surface of the water, they were seen to be guilty and they were burned. That was the logic of those times.

The basic character feature of the German demons is the stripping away of everything idealistic, so that the coarse and the horrible are mixed in them. The more crudely familiar they seem to us, the more horrifying their effect. Nothing is more uncanny than our poltergeists, kobolds, and goblins. There is a passage in Praetorius’ “Anthropodemus” on this point which I here cite from Dobeneck:²⁸

The ancients were unable to think of poltergeists except as real people shaped like small children with a colorful frock or robe. Occasionally, they added that some of them have knives stuck in their backs; others are shaped differently in truly awful ways, according to the manner and the instrument by which they had before been killed. For the superstitious believe that they are the souls of people murdered long ago in the same house. And they tell many stories about them. For

²⁶ A reference to the “Witches’ Sabbath” movement of the *Symphonie fantastique* (1830) of Hector Berlioz (1803–1869). Heine heard this work performed in Paris.

²⁷ Nicolas Remigius (or Remy; 1530–1612). The work referred to, *Daemonolatria libri tres*, was written in 1595.

²⁸ The full name of the book by Johannes Praetorius (Hans Schultze; 1630–1680) is: *Anthropodemus Plutonicus, das ist, Eine neue Weltbeschreibung von allerley wunderbahren Menschen* (*A New Description of All Sorts of Wondrous People of the World*). Heine refers here also to a source of many of the stories in this section: *Des deutschen Mittelalters Volksglauben und Heroensagen* (*Folk-beliefs and Heroic Tales from the German Middle Ages*; 1815) by Friedrich Ludwig Ferdinand Dobeneck (1771–1810).

example, when the kobolds have done good service for the maids and cooks in their house for a time and have made themselves well liked, some of the servants developed such affection for them that they ardently desired to see their helpers. However, the poltergeists never liked to give in to these requests, with the excuse that their appearance will cause horror. But when the naughty maids refused to give up, the kobolds named a place in the house where they were to present themselves bodily. At the same time, the maids were required to bring a pail of cold water with them. Then a kobold might have appeared, lying naked on a cushion on the floor with a large butcher's knife sticking out of his back. The maid would be so startled by this sight that she would faint. Then the creature would jump up right away, take the water, and pour it over the woman until she came to herself again. After that, the maids would lose their desire to ever again see dear little Chim.²⁹ For the kobolds each have their own particular names but in total are called Chim. Thus they are said to do all the work for the servants and maids to whom they pledge themselves, so to speak: they groom and feed the horses, clean out the stalls, scour everything, keep the kitchen clean, and take care of everything else that needs to be done in the house. Cattle are also said to increase and thrive by their influence. In exchange, the kobolds need to be well tended by the servants, so that the servants do not harm them in the slightest, either by making fun of them or by neglected anything in their feeding. If a cook has taken on such a creature as a secret helper, she has to set out a bowl full of good food every day at a particular time and in a particular place and then go on her way. Afterwards, she can loaf around, go to sleep early in the evening, and she will nevertheless find her work done the following morning. If, however, she forgets her duties a single time, say by neglecting the food, then she has to do her work all by herself again and has all kinds of misfortune: she burns herself in hot water, the pots or dishes break, food gets spilled or falls, etc. so that she is scolded by the master or mistress as punishment, whereby one often hears the kobold chuckling or laughing. And such a kobold is said to stay always in his own house, even if the serving staff changes. Indeed, a departing maid had to heartily recommend to her successor the kobold, so that she in turn would tend to him. If she did not want to, then she would have continuing bad luck and would have to leave the house soon enough.

²⁹ In German, "Chimgen," a diminutive form of the name Joachim.

Perhaps the following story is among the most horrifying:

A maid had for many years an invisible house spirit who sat next to her at the hearth, where she had given him his own place and where she conversed with him through the long winter evenings. One day, the maid asked Little Heinz, that was what she called the spirit, if he could show himself in his natural form. Little Heinz at first refused. Finally, he agreed and said she could go into the cellar and see him there. The maid took a light, climbed down into the cellar, and there in an open barrel she saw a dead child swimming in its own blood. Many years earlier the maid had given birth to an illegitimate child, killed it secretly, and put it into a barrel.

But often, given how the Germans are, they find in horror their greatest amusement, and the folk legends of the kobolds are sometimes full of delightful features. Particularly amusing are the stories of Hüdeken, a kobold abroad in the twelfth century in Hildesheim, who is much talked about in our spinning rooms and ghost stories. A passage from an old chronicle, which has often been reprinted, relates the following about him:³⁰

Around the year 1132, an evil spirit in the form of a peasant with a hat on his head appeared to many people over a long period of time in the diocese of Hildesheim. Because of the hat, the peasants called him Hüdeken³¹ in Saxon. This spirit enjoyed conversing with people, revealing his presence sometimes visibly, sometimes invisibly, posing and answering questions. He never insulted anyone without cause. If, however, he was ridiculed or abused, he repaid the perceived injustice fully. When Count Burchard de Luka was killed by Count Hermann of Wiesenburg and the latter's land was in danger of being looted in revenge, Hüdeken woke up Bishop Bernhard of Hildesheim with the following words: "Get up, baldy! Count Wiesenburg's lands have been abandoned and lost because of murder, and thus can be easily occupied by you." The bishop quickly gathered his warriors, went into the lands of the guilty count and joined them with his own, with the approval of the emperor. The spirit frequently warned the above-named bishop unbidden of approaching dangers and appeared quite often in the court kitchen, where he spoke to the cooks and did all

³⁰ The "old chronicle" is the *Chronik des Klosters Hirschau* [*Chronicles of the Hirschau Monastery*], ed. Johannes Tritheim (1462–1516).

³¹ I.e., little hat.

sorts of tasks for them. Since, over time, people became accustomed to Hüdeken, a kitchen servant once dared to tease him whenever he appeared and even poured unclean water on him. The spirit asked the main cook or the kitchen master if he could prohibit such mischief from the misbehaving servant. The chef replied: "You, a spirit, and afraid of a boy?" to which Hüdeken replied ominously: "Since you won't punish the boy, I'll show you in a few days just how afraid I am of him." Soon afterward, the boy who had insulted the spirit sat sleeping, alone in the kitchen. The spirit attacked him in this state, strangled him, ripped him in pieces, and put them in pots on the stove. When the cook discovered this misdeed, he cursed the spirit, and, on the following day, Hüdeken ruined all the roasts on the spit by pouring toad blood and venom on them. This act of revenge induced the cook to curse him even more, after which the spirit, by means of a conjured-up bridge, made him fall into a deep pit. At the same time, he went around the walls and towers of the city the whole night long and forced the guards into a constant state of alert. A man with an unfaithful wife once said in jest to Hüdeken when he was going on a trip, "Good friend, I'm entrusting my wife to you. Keep watch over her carefully." As soon as the man left, one lover after another came to the adulterous woman. But Hüdeken did not allow any of them to get to her and threw them all out of bed onto the floor. When the man returned from his trip, the spirit came a long way to meet him and said: "I am very happy that you have returned, so that I can finally be free of the hard service you have imposed upon me. With unspeakable effort, I have guarded your wife against actual unfaithfulness. But please never entrust her to me again. I would rather watch over all the pigs in the entirety of Saxony than over a woman who tries all sorts of schemes to get into the arms of her lovers."

In the interest of accuracy, I should remark that Hüdeken's head-covering was different from the conventional costume of the kobolds. These are mainly dressed in grey and wear a red cap. At least that is how you most often see them in Denmark, where they are said to be most numerous today. I was formerly of the belief that kobolds like to live in Denmark so much because they like to eat red fruit pudding best. But a young Danish writer, Mr. Andersen, whom I had the pleasure to see this summer here in Paris, told me quite definitively that the "Nissen" as they are called in Danish, like oatmeal with butter the

best.³² When these kobolds have really made themselves at home somewhere, they are not inclined to leave very soon. On the other hand, they never arrive unannounced, and when they want to live somewhere, they demonstrate that to the head of the household in the following manner: during the night, they carry all kinds of wood shavings into the house, and they sprinkle cattle dung into the milk jars. If the head of the household does not throw these wood shavings away or if he drinks some of the dirty milk with his family, the kobolds will stay with him forever. Sometimes it becomes rather uncomfortable. A poor Jutlander wound up being so bothered by the companionship of such a kobold that he decided to abandon his house, and he loaded his belongings onto a cart and drove to the next town to settle there. On the way, though, he turned around once and saw the red-capped head of the kobold peeking out of one of the empty tubs, calling to him in a friendly way: “Wi flütten” (“We’re moving!”).

Perhaps I have spent too much time with these little demons. Now it is time to return to the big ones. But all of these stories illustrate the beliefs and the character of the German people. In earlier centuries, these beliefs were just as powerful as the beliefs of the Church. When the scholarly Doctor Remigius finished his large volume about witchery, he thought that he was so knowledgeable about his topic that he imagined that he himself could perform witchcraft. And, as conscientious as he was, he did not neglect to report himself to the courts, and, as a consequence, he was burned as a sorcerer.

These atrocities were not a direct consequence of the Christian Church, but rather an indirect one; the Church had inverted the German national religion in such a crafty manner that the pantheistic worldview of the Germans was reshaped into a pandemonic one, so that the earlier sacred objects of the people had been transformed into ugly devilry. However, people do not easily give up what they and their ancestors have found dear and loved; they secretly attach their feelings to it, even when it has been distorted and corrupted. For this reason, the inverted folk beliefs might last longer in Germany than Christianity which, unlike the other, is not rooted in the German nationality. At the time of the Reformation, the belief in Catholic legends vanished very quickly, quite unlike the belief in magic and witchcraft.

³² The reference is to Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875).

Luther no longer believes in Catholic miracles but he still believes in the devil.³³ His *Table Talk* is full of curious stories of the satanic arts, kobolds, and witches. When he had his difficulties, he often believed himself to be fighting against the Evil One in person. On the Wartburg, where he translated the New Testament, he was so bothered by the devil that he threw his ink well at his head.³⁴ Since then, the devil has a great fear of ink – and an even greater one of printer’s ink. The above-mentioned *Table Talk* contains many enjoyable stories about the devil’s cunning, and I cannot resist sharing one:

Doctor Martin Luther once told a story of some good friends who were drinking together. One of them was a wild and dissolute youth who had said that if someone would buy him a good amount of wine, he would sell his soul in exchange.

Not long afterwards, a man came into the room, sat down with him, drank with him, and spoke to all of them including the one who had just been so presumptuous:

“Listen, you just said that if someone would pay for your wine, you would sell him your soul?”

He spoke again: “Yes, I want to do it; today I will really eat, drink, and be merry.”

The man, who was the devil, agreed and soon after sneaked away from him. After the youth had enjoyed the whole day and at last was drunk, the man, the devil, came back and sat down again and asked his fellow drinkers, “Dear Sirs, what do you think? If someone buys a horse, are not the saddle and bridle also included?”

They were all equally frightened. Finally, the man said: “Well, answer!”

Then they admitted it and said, “Yes, the saddle and bridle also belong to him.” Thereupon the devil took that wild and dissolute fellow and led him up through the ceiling, and no one knew where he went.

Although I feel the greatest respect for our great master Martin Luther, it seems to me that he completely misunderstood the character of Satan. Satan does not at all have the contempt for the body which is implied

³³ Martin Luther (1483–1546), the subject of the rest of the first book, was the leader of the Reformation. Among his works is a collection of his observations and discourses, *Tischreden* (*Table Talk*, 1566).

³⁴ The Wartburg is a castle near Eisenach, where Luther began to translate the Bible into German (the New Testament translation was completed in 1522).

here. Whatever evils the devil can be accused of having, no one has ever been able to call him a spiritualist.

As wrong as he was about the devil's beliefs, Martin Luther misunderstood those of the pope and the Catholic Church even more. Given my strict neutrality, I must defend both of them – just as I have the devil – against this all-too-zealous man's attacks. Yes, if I was asked to answer according to my conscience, I would have to reply that Pope Leo X was actually much more reasonable than Luther, and that the latter did not understand at all the true basis of the Catholic Church. For Luther had never understood that the idea of Christianity, the annihilation of sensuality, was so much in contradiction with human nature that it could never be fully implemented in life. He did not understand that Catholicism was a sort of Concordat between God and the Devil, that is, between spirit and matter, in which the full sovereignty of the spirit was proclaimed in theory, but that, in practice, matter was put in the position of being able to exercise all of its annulled rights. Thus, there arose a shrewd system of concessions to sensuality made by the Church, but granted always in such a way that each act of sensuality was denounced, and the spirit was secured against any scornful usurpations. You may listen to the tender inclinations of the heart and embrace a beautiful girl, but you have to admit that it was a disgraceful sin, and for this sin you have to do penance. That this penance could occur in the form of money was just as charitable for humanity as it was useful for the Church. The Church allowed blood money, as it were, to be paid for every enjoyment of the flesh. A tax thus arose for each sort of sin, and there were holy traveling agents who, in the name of the Roman Church, offered indulgences for every assessed sin in the land. Such an agent was that Tetzl against whom Luther first spoke.³⁵ Our historians claim that this protest against the selling of indulgences was only a minor event, and it was only because of Roman obstinacy that Luther, who at first only agitated against a misuse of the Church, was forced to attack the whole authority of the Church in its highest point. But this is a mistake; the trade in indulgences was not a misuse, it was a consequence of the whole Church system, and by attacking it, Luther had attacked the Church itself, and the Church had to condemn him as a heretic. Leo X, the refined Florentine, the student of Poliziano, the friend

³⁵ As a reaction to the preaching of the indulgence seller Johannes Tetzl (1465–1519), Martin Luther posted his famous theses on the door of the Castle Church on October 31, 1517 (and not on the door of the Augustinian Church in 1516, as Heine writes below).

of Raphael, the Greek philosopher with the tiara of three crowns, which the conclave perhaps granted to him because he suffered from an illness which by no means arose from Christian abstinence and which at the time was still very dangerous . . . ,³⁶ Leo de Medici, how he must have smiled at the poor, chaste, simple monk, who imagined that the Gospel was the Charter of Christianity, and that this Charter had to be true! Perhaps he did not even notice what Luther wanted, since he was much too busy at the time with the building of St. Peter's, which was financed with those very same indulgences, so that it was actually sin which gave the money to build this church, which was as it were a monument to the pleasure of the senses, like that pyramid built by an Egyptian prostitute with the money she earned through her trade. It is thus perhaps more accurate to say that this house of God was built by the devil than the Cologne cathedral. This triumph of spiritualism, that sensualism itself had to build it its most beautiful temple – that it was precisely by means of the concessions one made to the flesh that one could acquire the means to glorify the spirit – this triumph no one in the German north could understand. For it was here, rather than under the bright sky of Italy, that one could practice a Christianity which made only the least of concessions to the senses. We northerners are colder-blooded, and we did not quite need as many indulgences for sins of the flesh as Leo sent us with paternal care. Our climate makes the practice of Christian virtues easier and on October 31, 1516, when Luther posted his theses against indulgences on the door of the Augustinian church, the city moat was perhaps already frozen and could be skated on, which is very cold fun, and hence not a sin.

I have used above, perhaps several times, the words “spiritualism” and “sensualism”; these words do not refer here, as in the French philosophers, to the two different sources of our knowledge. I use them rather, as can be seen from the sense of what I am saying, to designate those two different ways of thinking, the first of which glorifies the spirit by trying to destroy matter, while the second tries to vindicate the natural rights of matter against the usurpations of the spirit.

I must also stress in reference to the above discussion of the beginnings of the Lutheran Reformation – which already shows its whole

³⁶ Pope Leo X (1475–1521, became pope in 1513) came from the Medici family of Florence and was tutored by the Humanist Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494). He was a supporter of the arts, in particular, a great patron of the painter Raphael (1483–1520). The pope traditionally wears a tiara with three crowns.

spirit – that in France one still harbors the old misconceptions which Bossuet spread with his “Histoire des variations,” and which are still present in today’s authors.³⁷ The French have only understood the negative side of the Reformation; they have seen in it only a battle against Catholicism, and have sometimes believed that this battle was fought on the other side of the Rhine for the same reasons as on this side, in France. But the reasons there were completely different from those here and completely opposite. The battle against Catholicism in Germany was nothing but a war begun by spiritualism when it saw that it carried merely the title of ruler and ruled only *de jure*, whereas sensualism, by a time-honored deception, was the true ruler and ruled *de facto*. The indulgence sellers were chased away, the priest’s lovely concubines were replaced by cold wives, the charming images of the Madonna were smashed, and here and there a Puritanism emerged with utmost hostility towards the senses. The battle against Catholicism in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, on the other hand, was a war begun by sensualism when it saw that it ruled *de facto* and yet each of the acts of its rule was mocked as illegitimate and denounced in the harshest way by spiritualism, which claimed to rule *de jure*. As opposed to the humble seriousness with which the battle was conducted in Germany, in France one fought with lewd wit; instead of having theological disputations, one here wrote amusing satires. The object of the latter was usually to show the contradiction which arises with oneself when one claims to be entirely spirit. Here the most delightful stories flourished, about pious men who are involuntarily defeated by their animal nature, or who wish to save their aura of holiness and flee to hypocrisy. The Queen of Navarre had already depicted such situations in her novellas.³⁸ Her usual theme is the relationship of monks to women, and she wants not just to shake our diaphragm but also the institution of monasticism. The most malicious blossom of such comical polemic is indisputably *Tartuffe* by Molière, for this work is aimed not only against the Jesuitism of his time, but also against Christianity itself, indeed, against the idea of Christianity, against spiritualism.³⁹ Thus, the affected fear of Dorine’s naked bosom, the words:

³⁷ Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), a French bishop, wrote against Protestantism.

³⁸ Marguerite d’Angoulême (1492–1549) wrote a collection of novellas, *Heptaméron*, in the style of the *Decameron*.

³⁹ Molière, the pen-name of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (1622–1673), famous author of many comedies of character, wrote his most famous play, *Tartuffe*, in 1669.

Heaven forbids, it is true, certain satisfactions,
But you can make accommodations with it.

serve to satirize not only normal hypocrisy, but also the universal lie which arises necessarily from the unworkability of the Christian idea; indeed, the whole system of concessions which spiritualism has to make to sensualism is mocked. In fact, Jansenism had much more of a reason than Jesuitism to feel insulted by the performance of *Tartuffe*, and Methodists today are probably still as unhappy with Molière as the devout Catholics of his time.⁴⁰ For that reason, Molière is a great writer, since, like Aristophanes and Cervantes, he satirizes not only contemporary events but the Eternal-Ridiculous, the original weaknesses of humanity. Voltaire, who always attacked only the contemporary and the inessential, is inferior to him in this regard.

This latter persiflage, that is, Voltaire's, fully accomplished its mission in France, and whoever wanted to continue it was being as anachronistic as unwise. If the last visible remains of Catholicism were destroyed, it could well happen that the idea of Catholicism would take refuge in a new form – a new body, as it were – and in this new shape, perhaps dispensing altogether with the name of Christianity, it could weigh on us even more heavily than in its present broken, ruined, and generally discredited form. Yes, there is a good side to having spiritualism represented by a religion and a clergy – a religion which has lost its best energy and a clergy which stands in direct opposition to the great enthusiasm for freedom of our time.

But why is spiritualism so repulsive to us? Is it something so terrible? Not at all. Rose essence is a precious thing, and a flask of it is refreshing if one is forced to pine away one's days locked up in the harem rooms. But we still would not want every rose of this life to be pounded and crushed merely to extract a few drops of rose oil, no matter how comforting. We are much more like the nightingales, who enjoy the rose itself and are just as delighted by the blush of its blossoming as by its invisible perfume.

I said above that in our case it was actually spiritualism which attacked Catholicism. But this was only true of the beginning of the Reformation.

⁴⁰ Jansenism, begun by the Dutch theologian Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), was a Catholic reform movement which taught predestination and the necessity of grace for salvation. Methodism, initiated by John Wesley (1703–1791) and his brother Charles (1707–1788), began as a Pietistic movement in the Anglican Church in the eighteenth century.

As soon as spiritualism made a breach in the old church building, sensualism burst out with all of its long-contained fire, and Germany became the wildest playground in the rush of freedom and sensuality. The oppressed peasants had found spiritual weapons in the new doctrine to wage a war against the aristocracy which they had been desiring for a century and a half. In Münster, sensualism ran naked through the streets in the figure of John of Leiden and lay down with its twelve women in the large bedstead which can still be seen in city hall there.⁴¹ Everywhere, monastery and convent gates opened, and nuns and monks hurled themselves smooching into each other's arms. Yes, on the surface, the history of that time consists almost entirely of outbreaks of sensuality. But we will see later how little of this persisted as spiritualism again put down the trouble-makers and gradually consolidated its rule in the north, – until spiritualism itself was wounded to death by an enemy which it had nourished in its own bosom, namely, philosophy. This is a very complicated story, difficult to untangle. It was easy for the Catholic faction to point at will to the worst possible motives in the Reformers, and when you heard them speak, the only point of the Reformation seemed to be the legitimization of the most audacious sensuality and the plundering of church property. Of course, spiritual interests always have to form an alliance with the material interests in order to triumph. But the devil had mixed up the cards so strangely that it is no longer possible to say anything for certain about intentions.

The illustrious people who met in the imperial chambers in Worms in the year 1521 probably had all sorts of thoughts in their hearts at variance with the words of their mouths.⁴² A young emperor sat there, wrapped, with the enthusiasm of a youthful ruler, in his new crimson robe, secretly pleased that the proud Roman, who so often had maltreated his predecessors in the Empire and still not given up his presumptions, was now receiving a most effective rebuke. For his part, the representative of that Roman had the secret joy of seeing conflict arise among those Germans who, like drunken barbarians, had so often invaded and plundered beautiful Italy and still threatened it with further invasions and plundering.

⁴¹ John of Leiden (Johann Bockelson; 1509–1536), was the leader of the Anabaptists who seized power in Münster in 1534–1535. In addition to making all property communal, they practiced polygamy.

⁴² Martin Luther was summoned by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1500–1558; emperor 1519–1556) to the Imperial Diet in the city of Worms to defend himself, after the pope had condemned his teachings.

The secular princes were pleased that along with the new doctrine they could take possession of the old church properties. The high prelates were already considering whether they could marry their cooks and pass their electoral states, bishoprics, and abbeys to their male offspring. The representatives of the cities were pleased with the new expansion of their independence. Everyone had something to gain here and was thinking secretly of temporal advantages.

But one man was there, I am persuaded of this, who did not think of himself, but only of the divine interests which he was to represent. This man was Martin Luther, the poor monk, whom Providence had selected to break that Roman world-power, against which even the most powerful emperors and the boldest wise men had fought in vain. But Providence knows well on whose shoulders it lays its burdens. In this case not only a spiritual but also a physical power was necessary. It required a body steeled from youth by monastic rigor and purity to bear the arduousness of this position. Our dear master was at the time still thin and appeared very pale, so that the rosy, well-fed gentlemen of the Diet looked down almost with pity at the miserable man in the black habit. However, he was completely healthy, and his nerves were so solid that the brilliant tumult did not intimidate him in the least. Even his lungs must have been strong, for, after he presented his long defense, he had to repeat it in Latin, since the emperor did not understand High German. It bothers me every time I think about this, for our dear master stood next to an open window, exposed to draughts while the sweat dripped from his brow. He was likely very tired because of his long speech, and his throat had likely become somewhat dried out. "He must be really thirsty now," the Duke of Brunswick surely thought. At any rate, we read that he sent three jugs of the best Eimbecker beer to Martin Luther in his inn. I will never forget this noble deed of the House of Brunswick.

The French have many incorrect ideas not only about the Reformation itself but also about its heroes. This misunderstanding is likely caused by the fact that Luther is not only the greatest, but also the most German man of our history. In his character, all the virtues and faults of the Germans are unified in the most magnificent way, and he represents in person the wonder of Germany. He also had characteristics which we seldom find together, and which we normally think of as the most extreme opposites. He was at the same time a dreamy mystic and a practical man of deeds. His thoughts not only had wings, but also hands; he spoke and acted. He

was not only the tongue but also the sword of his time. He was also both a cold scholastic quibbler and an inspired, divinely euphoric prophet. Days, he spent laboriously working out his dogmatic distinctions, while in the evening he reached for his flute, observed the stars, and melted away into melody and devotion. The same man who cursed like a fishwife could also be as soft as a tender virgin. He was sometimes as wild as a storm uprooting an oak, and then again he was as soft as a zephyr caressing violets. He was full of the most tremulous fear of God, full of sacrifice to honor the Holy Spirit, and he could sink himself into pure spirituality; and yet he knew well the splendors of this earth and treasured them, and from his mouth came the splendid motto: "Who loves not wine, women, and song, remains a fool his whole life long." He was a complete person, I would even say, an absolute person in whom spirit and matter are undivided. To call him a spiritualist would be just as wrong as to call him a sensualist. How should I say it, he had something elemental, incomprehensible, and miraculous, as we find in all men of Providence, something frightfully naïve, awkwardly wise, sublimely narrow minded, and unconquerably demonic.

Luther's father was a miner in Mansfeld, and the boy was often with him in his underground workplace, where the powerful metals grow and the strong springs trickle. His young heart sucked up, perhaps unconsciously, the most secret forces of nature, or perhaps it was even charmed by mountain spirits. Maybe, for that reason, so much of the earthy, so much of the dross of passion remained stuck to him, for which he has been sufficiently criticized. But this is unfair; without that earthy admixture he could not have been a man of deeds. Pure spirits cannot act. For, as we learn from Jung-Stilling's theory of spirits, although ghosts can make themselves clearly visible in color, and know how to walk, run, dance, and make all the same gestures as living people, they cannot move anything material, not the smallest night table, from its spot.⁴³

All praise to Luther! Eternal fame to the dear man to whom we owe the salvation of our most noble goods, and from whose great deeds we still live today! It is improper for us to complain about the limitations of his viewpoint. The dwarf standing on the giant's shoulders can certainly see farther than the giant himself – especially if he wears glasses; but this elevated view is lacking in high feeling, the giant's heart, which we cannot

⁴³ Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740–1817), most famous as the author of a Pietistic autobiography.

appropriate for ourselves. It is even less proper to let fall a harsh judgment on his faults; these faults have been more useful to us than the virtues of a thousand others. The refinement of Erasmus and the mildness of Melanchthon could never have brought us as far as the divine brutality of Brother Martin sometimes did.⁴⁴ Indeed, the mistake he made at the very beginning, which I mentioned above, yielded the most precious fruit, fruit which quickens all of humanity. A new epoch begins in Germany at the Diet where Luther denies the authority of the pope and openly declares: "My doctrine can only be refuted by means of pronouncements from the Bible or on rational grounds!" The chain with which St. Boniface bound the German Church to Rome is cut in two.⁴⁵ This Church, earlier an integral part of the great hierarchy, disintegrates into religious democracies. The religion itself becomes a different one; the Indian-Gnostic element vanishes and we see the Jewish-Deistic element again on the rise. Evangelical Christianity emerges. Religion again becomes a truth, since it not only takes into consideration the necessary demands of matter, but also legitimizes them. The priest becomes man, takes a wife, and fathers children, as God demands. On the other hand, God becomes again a heavenly bachelor without family; the legitimacy of his son is disputed; the saints are retired, the wings are cut off of the angels, the mother of God loses all of her claims to a heavenly crown, and she is forbidden to perform miracles. In fact, from now on, miracles stop entirely, especially since the natural sciences have made such great progress. Whether it annoys God Almighty that the mistrustful physicists keep such a sharp eye on him, or simply so as not to have to compete with Bosco,⁴⁶ he has disdained to support the cause of religion through any spectacular miracle, even in the most recent times where it is so endangered. Perhaps, from now on, he will allow no more holy tricks in whatever new religion he introduces on this earth, and he will always demonstrate the truth of the new doctrines through reason. This is surely the most reasonable course of action, anyway. At least in the case of St. Simonism, the newest religion, no miracles have yet happened, except perhaps for the fact that an old tailor's bill, which St. Simon left behind on earth, was paid by his students in cash

⁴⁴ Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536) was a leading representative of the Humanist movement, who debated the existence of human free will with Luther; Melanchthon (Philipp Schwarzert; 1497–1560), professor of Greek at Wittenberg, was a friend and defender of Martin Luther.

⁴⁵ St. Boniface (c. 673–754) was a legendary English missionary who helped to Christianize Germany.

⁴⁶ Bartolommeo Bosco (1793–1863), Italian magician.

ten years after his death.⁴⁷ I can still picture the excellent Père Olinde standing up in the Salle-Taibout, full of inspiration, and holding the paid bill in front of the astonished congregation. The young grocers were suspicious of such evidence of the supernatural. The tailors, however, began right there to believe!

If, because of Protestantism, we in Germany lost much poetry in addition to the old miracles, we have still gained much in return. People became more virtuous and more noble. Protestantism had the most beneficial influence on what we normally call morality, purity of manners, and rigor in the practice of duties. Indeed, Protestantism in some congregations moved towards being reduced, in the end, to a code of morality, and the gospel had only the authority of a beautiful parable. We see now especially a welcome change in the life of the clergy. Along with celibacy, pious lewdness and the vices of monks disappeared. Among the Protestant clergy we often find the most virtuous people, people whom even the ancient Stoics would have respected. You have to travel through north Germany on foot as a poor student in order to see how much virtue, or, with the proper adjective, how much evangelical virtue can be found in a modest parsonage, on occasion. How often I found a hospitable reception there, on a winter evening, myself, a foreigner, who had no other introduction than hunger and tiredness. Then, after I had eaten and slept well, the old pastor would come around in his sleeping gown and give me in addition a blessing for my way, which never brought me ill. His good-natured, talkative wife would stick some sandwiches in my bag, which were equally fortifying. And in the silent distance would stand the preacher's beautiful daughters, with their blushing cheeks and eyes like violets, whose shy fire, even in memory, could warm my heart for the whole winter's day.

In saying that his teachings could be contradicted only by the Bible itself or by means of rational argument, Luther granted human reason the right to explain the Bible, and Reason was thus acknowledged as the highest judge in all religious controversies. Thus arose in Germany what is called freedom of the spirit or, by another name, freedom of thought. Thinking became a right, and the authority of reason became legitimate. Of course, for a number of centuries one had been able to think and speak

⁴⁷ Count Claude Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825) preached a version of socialism based on technical progress and communal ownership. His teachings sparked an influential, quasi-religious movement, one of whose major representatives was Olinde Rodrigues (1794–1851).

relatively freely, and the scholastics argued about things which we can hardly believe they were allowed to express in the Middle Ages. But all of this happened according to the distinction which was made between theological and philosophical truth, a distinction by means of which one explicitly secured oneself against heresy. And all of this occurred only inside the auditoriums of universities, and in a gothically abstruse Latin of which the common people understood nothing, so that little damage for the church was to be feared. Nevertheless, the church never actually permitted such proceedings; and now and then it actually burned to death a poor scholastic. But, since Luther, one no longer distinguished between theological and philosophical truth, and one debated openly and without fear in vernacular German and in the public market. The princes who accepted the Reformation legitimized this freedom of thought; and one important fruit of it – important for the whole world – is German philosophy.

In fact, not even in Greece was the human spirit able to express itself as freely as in Germany from the middle of the previous century until the French invasion.⁴⁸ A limitless freedom of thought held sway, especially in Prussia. The Marquis of Brandenburg had understood that his legitimacy as King of Prussia depended on the Protestant principle, and thus he had to maintain the Protestant freedom of thought.⁴⁹

To be sure, things have changed since then, and the natural protector of our Protestant freedom of thought has instead come to terms with the ultramontane party in order to suppress it. He often uses for this purpose the weapon which was invented, and first used, by the pope in opposition to us: censorship.⁵⁰

Incredible! We Germans are the strongest and cleverest people. Our royal houses sit atop all the thrones of Europe, our Rothschilds dominate every stock market in the world, our scholars rule over all the sciences, we invented gunpowder and printing: – and yet, if one of us lets loose a pistol shot, he has to pay just three *Talers* as punishment, whereas if you want to

⁴⁸ I.e., the occupation of Germany by Napoleon's forces, beginning in 1806.

⁴⁹ Heine is referring here to Frederick the Great (1712–1786; ruled as King of Prussia 1740–1786), who was widely known as an enthusiast of the French Enlightenment and a sometime friend of Voltaire. His grandfather, Frederick I (1657–1713), had, as Elector of Brandenburg, obtained the title of King in Prussia (1701).

⁵⁰ The successor of Frederick the Great, Frederick Wilhelm II (1744–1797; reigned 1786–1797) sharpened censorship in 1788, a policy continued by Frederick Wilhelm III (1770–1840; reigned 1797–1840), especially after the defeat of Napoleon. Heine's works were repeatedly subject to censorship (see the Second Preface, above).

print in the *Hamburger Korrespondent*: “My dear wife has just given birth to a daughter, as beautiful as freedom!” Dr. Hoffmann grabs his red pen and crosses out the word “freedom.”⁵¹

How long can this go on? I do not know. But I do know that the question of the freedom of the press which is now so fiercely discussed in Germany is connected to the above observations, and I think its solution is not difficult if you consider that the freedom of the press is nothing but the consequence of the freedom of thought, and hence a Protestant right. For such rights, the Germans have already sacrificed their best blood, and I imagine it will probably come to the point where they will be forced again to enter the lists.

The same can be said of the question of academic freedom, which now so passionately stirs feelings in Germany. Ever since one has supposedly discovered that political agitation (read: love of freedom) is to be found mostly at universities, sovereigns have been advised, from all sides, to suppress these institutes or at least to change them into conventional teaching institutions.⁵² Plans are being devised, and the pros and cons discussed. The public opponents of the universities appear to understand the fundamental issues as little as their public defenders. The former do not realize that youth everywhere and among all disciplines will always be enthusiastic about the cause of freedom, and that suppressing the universities will lead that inspired youth to express itself all the more powerfully in other places, perhaps in concert with the youth of the trade and merchant classes. The defenders seek only to prove that German scholarship, now flourishing, will vanish along with the universities; that academic freedom is particularly useful to such research; that youth finds in it such wonderful opportunity to have a broad education, etc. As if it were here an issue of a few Greek words, or a lesser or greater degree of uncouthness!

And what would all science, research, or education matter to the princes, if the holy security of their thrones were in danger! They were heroic enough to sacrifice all of these relative goods for the only absolute

⁵¹ The *Hamburger Korrespondent* was a newspaper in Hamburg. Friedrich Lorenz Hoffmann (1790–1871) was the censor in Hamburg (1822–1848).

⁵² At the time of the Napoleonic invasion, many had urged the abolition of medieval universities in Germany in favor of technical institutes which would serve to train people for employment in the learned professions. The University in Berlin, which was established in 1809 as part of the reform movement in Prussia, in contrast, had the freedom of teaching and learning written into its charter.

one, namely their absolute sovereignty. For the latter is entrusted to them by God and, where heaven commands, all earthly considerations must give way.

There is just as much misunderstanding on the side of the poor professors, who represent the universities, as on the side of the government officials, who publicly oppose them. Only the Catholic propaganda in Germany grasps the meaning of the universities. These pious obscurantists are the most dangerous opponents of our university system. They operate treacherously against the universities, and even when one of them wants to give the welcome impression that he speaks on behalf of them, like the magnificent scoundrel recently in the university auditorium in Munich, Jesuit intrigue shows itself. These cowardly hypocrites know well what is at stake here. Along with the universities, the Protestant Church will fall, since the latter, from the Reformation on, is rooted solely in them, so that the entire church history of Protestantism in the last centuries is almost entirely comprised of the theological disputes between scholars from Wittenberg, Leipzig, Tübingen, and Halle. The consistories are only the pale shadow of the theological faculties. Losing them, they would lose all support and character and would sink into dreary dependency on the ministries or even the police.

But let us not give so much space to such melancholy observations, all the more so, since we still have more to say about the providential man through whom so much greatness has come to the German people. I showed above how we attained the greatest freedom of thought through him. But this Martin Luther gave us not only the freedom of movement, but also the means of movement; that is, he gave the spirit a body; the thought, the word. He created the German language.

He did this by means of his Bible translation.

The divine author of the Bible seems to know, indeed, as much as we others do, that it is by no means a matter of indifference by whom one is translated. He chose his translator himself and gave him the wondrous power to translate from a dead language, which was, as it were, already buried, into a not-yet-living language.

Of course, one had the Vulgate which one understood, as well as the Septuagint, which one could already understand. But the knowledge of Hebrew had completely died out in the Christian world. Only the Jews, who kept hidden here and there in a corner of this world, still preserved the traditions of this language. Like a ghost which watches over a treasure

which was once entrusted to it when it was alive, so this murdered people, this ghost of a people, sat in its dark ghettos and there preserved the Hebrew Bible. German scholars were seen secretly climbing down into these disreputable hiding-places in order to unearth the treasure, in order to gain knowledge of the Hebrew language. When the Catholic clergy noticed that there was danger from this direction, that the people might attain to the actual word of God on this side-road and thus uncover the Roman adulterations, they wanted to suppress the Jewish tradition, and they thought of destroying all Hebrew books. On the Rhine, the persecution of books began, fought so gloriously by our excellent Doctor Reuchlin.⁵³ The theologians in Cologne who took action at the time, especially Hochstraeten, were by no means as intellectually limited as Reuchlin's brave comrade-in-arms, the knight Ulrich von Hutten, portrayed them in his *Litteris obscurorum virorum*. Their goal was to suppress the Hebrew language. When Reuchlin was victorious, Luther was able to begin his work. In a letter which he wrote at the time to Reuchlin, he already seemed to feel the importance of Reuchlin's victory, achieved from a difficult position of dependence, while he, the Augustinian monk, was completely independent. He says very naïvely in this letter: "Ego nihil timeo, quia nihil habeo."⁵⁴

As for the language into which he translated his Bible – I am still unable to comprehend how Luther arrived at it.⁵⁵ The old Swabian dialect was fully lost along with the knightly poetry of the Hohenstaufen period. The old Saxon dialect, so-called Low German, was dominant only in a section of northern Germany and, despite all attempts, had never been adapted to literary purposes. If Luther had used the language which was spoken in what is today Saxony for his Bible translation, Adelung would have been

⁵³ Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522), professor of Greek and Hebrew, and well-known leader in the Humanist movement, was asked by the emperor to give his opinion on whether all non-biblical Jewish writings should be destroyed (the issue arose due to anti-Semitic claims made by the converted Jew Johannes Pfefferkorn). Reuchlin argued that they should be preserved. Jakob von Hoogstraeten (1454–1527), an opponent of Humanism, opposed Reuchlin's opinion. Ulrich von Hutten (1488–1523) co-authored the text mentioned by Heine, the *Letters of Obscurantists*, in which he made light of Reuchlin's opponents.

⁵⁴ Latin: I fear nothing because I have nothing.

⁵⁵ The understanding of Luther and the German language has changed since Heine's time. In current terms, what he calls the "old Swabian dialect" is the language of Middle High German. The major advance has been the recognition of a separate phase in the development of German, Early New High German. Although Heine somewhat overstates its influence, Luther's Bible translation is still regarded as of fundamental importance in the formation of standard written German.

right to claim that the Saxon, namely the dialect of the city Meißen is our true High German, that is, our written language. But this claim has long been refuted, and I have to emphasize it all the more here, because this error is commonplace in France. What is called Saxon today was never a dialect of the German people, just as little as Silesian, for example. For the former, like the latter, arose through mixture with Slavic elements. I thus candidly confess that I do not know the origin of the language which we find in Luther's Bible. But I do know that because of this Bible, which the newly invented press – the Black Art – flung at the people in thousands of copies, Luther's language was spread in a few years over all of Germany and became the universal written language. This written language is still dominant in Germany and gives a literary unity to this land, otherwise fragmented politically and religiously. Such invaluable service can perhaps compensate us for the fact that this language in its present form lacks some of that depth of feeling usually found in languages which have emerged from a single dialect. The language in Luther's Bible, however, does possess such a depth of feeling, and this old book is an eternal source of rejuvenation for our language. All the expressions and turns of phrase in Luther's Bible are German, and any writer can still use them without hesitation. And since this book is in the hands of the poorest people, they do not need any particular academic instruction to express themselves in a literary manner.

This circumstance will have remarkable consequences when our political revolution occurs. Freedom will be able to speak everywhere, and its language will be biblical.

Luther's original writings have similarly contributed to the standardization of the German language. Because of their polemical fervor, they made their way deep into the heart of his time. Their tone is not always faultless. But neither can you make a religious revolution with orange blossoms. Sometimes, coarseness can only be answered with coarseness. In the Bible, Luther's speech is always held to a certain degree of dignity by his reverence for the ever-present Spirit of God. In his polemics, on the other hand, he abandons himself to a plebian crudity, which is often as repulsive as it is grandiose. His expressions and images are like those giant stone figures found in Indian or Egyptian temple grottoes, whose garish hues and bizarre ugliness attracts and repels us at the same time. Because of this baroque rock-like style, the impudent monk appears

to us sometimes like a religious Danton, a preacher of the mountain, who tosses down boulders of colorful language onto the heads of his opponents.⁵⁶

More striking and more important than these prose writings are Luther's poems, the songs which sprang from his soul in conflict and desperation. They are sometimes like flowers growing on a barren cliff, sometimes like moonbeams shimmering on a turbulent sea. Luther loved music; he even wrote a treatise about this art form. His songs are thus extraordinarily melodic. In this respect too he deserves the name: the Swan of Eisleben.⁵⁷ In some songs, though, he was anything but a genteel swan, songs where he spurs on the courage of his followers and inspires himself to the wildest fighting spirit. The defiant words with which he and his companions arrived in Worms were a battle song. The old cathedral shook at these new sounds, and the ravens took fright in their hidden tower nests. That song, the Marseillaise of the Reformation, has retained its inspirational power into our day:⁵⁸

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper he, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great;
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing, –
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he,
Lord Sabaoth his name,

⁵⁶ Georges-Jacques Danton (1759–94) was one of the leading members of the radical “Mountain” faction in the National Convention during the French Revolution. This passage, in German, also strongly suggests the Sermon on the Mount.

⁵⁷ Luther's self-designation as a “swan” refers to a legendary saying by the Czech reformer Jan Hus (1370–1415) shortly before being burnt at the stake, who described himself as a goose to be roasted (a pun on his name, in Czech), but prophesied the coming of a swan who could not be silenced.

⁵⁸ Here, in the traditional translation by Frederic Hedge.

From age to age the same,
And he must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us;
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim, –
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure, –
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers –
No thanks to them – abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

I have shown how we owe our freedom of thought, which modern literature needed for its development, to our dear Doctor Martin Luther. I have shown how he also created the Word for us, the language, in which this new literature was able to express itself. Here, I need only add that he himself was the first to produce this new literature; that German literature both in the broad sense of the word and especially in the narrow sense begins with him; that his sacred songs are the first important appearance of it and already reveal its particular character. If one wants to speak about modern German literature, one must begin with Luther and not, for example, with a philistine from Nuremberg named Hans Sachs, as some dishonest romantic *littérateurs* have done, with ill intentions.⁵⁹ Hans Sachs, this troubadour of the respectable shoe-makers guild, whose *Meistergesang* is but a silly parody of the earlier Minnesongs, whose drama is but a clumsy travesty of the older mystery plays, this pedantic clown who anxiously mimics the free naïveté of the Middle Ages should perhaps be viewed

⁵⁹ Hans Sachs (1494–1576) was a shoe-maker and poet in Nuremberg, known for his over 4,000 “master-songs” and Carnival plays. He was virtually rediscovered by Goethe and the romantics, and he is also a main character in Richard Wagner’s opera *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868).

as the last poet of the Middle Ages, but not the first of modern times. The only proof needed here is a statement in clear terms of the difference between our modern literature and the older one.

If we consider the German literature which flourished before Luther, we find:

(1) Its content, its subject matter is, like the life of the Middle Ages, a mixture of two heterogeneous elements, which were engaged in such a long and violent struggle that in the end they merged into each other, namely: Germanic nationality and the Indian-Gnostic, so-called Catholic Christianity.

(2) The treatment or, rather, the spirit of treatment in this older literature is romantic.⁶⁰ Using the term improperly, one can also say the same of the content of that literature, of all phenomena of the Middle Ages, which arose through the fusion of the two aforementioned elements, Germanic nationality and Catholic Christianity. This usage is improper, for just as some poets of the Middle Ages treated Greek history and mythology in entirely romantic form, so one can also present the customs and legends of the Middle Ages in classical form. The expressions “classical” and “romantic” thus refer only to the spirit of the treatment. The treatment is classical if the form of what is represented is completely identical with the idea of what is to be represented, as is the case in the works of art of the Greeks where, because of this identity, the greatest harmony between form and idea is to be found. The treatment is romantic if the form does not reveal the idea through identity, but allows this idea to be deduced parabolically. Here, I prefer to use the term “parabolically” rather than “symbolically.” Greek mythology had a series of divine figures, each of which, despite the identity of form and idea, could still receive a symbolic meaning. But in the Greek religion, it was solely the figure of the gods which was determined; everything else, their life and actions were left to the choice of the poet to treat as he or she pleased. In the Christian religion, on the other hand, there are no such definite figures, but rather definite facts, definite holy events and deeds, in which the poetic human soul can place a parabolic meaning. One says that Homer invented the Greek gods. That is not true; they existed already in definite outline, but

⁶⁰ The following discussion of the classical and the romantic is an abbreviated form of what appears in the first book of *The Romantic School*, translated below. Heine’s discussion follows in part G. W. F. Hegel’s (1770–1831) distinctions between the “symbolic,” “classical,” and “romantic” forms of art in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*.

he invented their stories. The artists of the Middle Ages, on the other hand, never dared to invent the slightest in the historical part of their religion; the Fall, the Incarnation, the Baptism, the Crucifixion, and such were inviolable facts, which could not be modified in any way, but into which the poetic human soul could place a parabolic meaning. All the art forms of the Middle Ages were treated in this parabolic spirit, and this treatment is romantic. Thus, one finds in the poetry of the Middle Ages a certain mystical universality; the figures are so shadowy, what they do is so indefinite, everything is so half-lit in it as if illuminated by variable moonlight. The idea is present in the form only as a riddle, and we see here a vague form perfectly suited to a spiritualistic literature. Here, there is no crystal-clear harmony between form and idea as in the Greeks. Sometimes the idea surpasses the given form, and the form strives desperately to arrive at it. We then see bizarre, fantastic sublimity. Sometimes the idea is simply not up to the form, and a foolishly trifling thought drags itself along with a colossal form and we see a grotesque farce. We almost always see deformity.

(3) The general character of that literature was that the same firm and secure belief which at the time ruled in all secular and sacred things was proclaimed in all of its products. All views of the time were based on authorities. The poet walked with the certainty of a mule beside the abysses of doubt, and in his works a bold calm and a blessed confidence prevailed, of a kind which later became impossible when the highest of those authorities, namely the authority of the pope, was broken, and all the others followed. The poems of the Middle Ages thus all have the same character; it is as if the whole nation wrote each, not a single person. They are objective, epic, and naïve.

In the literature which came to flourish after Luther, we find the complete opposite:

(1) Its content, the subject matter it treats, is the struggle of the views and interests of the Reformation with the old order of things. The mixed belief which arose from the two elements mentioned above, Germanic nationality and Indian-Gnostic Christianity, is completely repugnant to the spirit of the new times. It finds the latter elements to be heathen idol-worship, in whose place the true religion of the Jewish-Deistic gospel should enter. A new order of things forms; the spirit makes inventions which promote the well-being of matter. Spiritualism becomes discredited in public opinion because of thriving industry as well as philosophy. The

third estate rises; revolution begins to rumble in hearts and heads. What the times feel, and think, and need, and want is expressed, and that is the content of modern literature.

(2) The spirit of treatment is no longer romantic, but classical. Because of the revival of ancient literature, a joyful enthusiasm for Greek and Roman writers spreads throughout Europe, and the scholars, the only ones who wrote at the time, sought to acquire for themselves the spirit of classical antiquity or at least to imitate classical art forms in their writings. Even if they were unable to arrive at a harmony between form and idea like the Greeks, they remained all the more faithful to the external features of the Greek treatment; they divided the genres according to the Greek system, refrained from every romantic extravagance, and in this respect we call them classical.

(3) The general character of modern literature consists of the fact that now individuality and skepticism predominate. The authorities have collapsed; reason remains the one lamp of humanity, and one's conscience is the only staff in the dark labyrinth of this life. One stands alone before one's creator and sings him one's song. Thus, this literature begins with sacred songs. But even later, when it has become secular, the most inner self-consciousness, the feeling of one's personality still prevails. Poetry is now no longer objective, epic, and naïve, but subjective, lyric, and reflective.

Book Two

In the previous book, we discussed the great religious revolution in Germany represented by Martin Luther. Now, we turn to the philosophical revolution which emerged from the religious one, and which, indeed, is nothing other than the logical conclusion of Protestantism.

Before we describe how this revolution began with Immanuel Kant, though, we must talk about its philosophical predecessors outside of Germany, the importance of Spinoza, the vicissitudes of Leibniz's philosophy, the interrelationships of this philosophy with religion, and their points of friction and dispute, etc.⁶¹ We will keep our focus on those philosophical questions which we deem to have social importance and for which philosophy competes with religion to find answers.

⁶¹ Heine discusses Spinoza and Leibniz below, in Book Two. He discusses Kant in Book Three.

In particular, we are concerned with the question of God's nature. "God is the beginning and end of all wisdom!" the faithful say in their humility, and the philosopher, however proud of his knowledge, must agree with this pious phrase.⁶²

Not Bacon, as one often hears, but rather René Descartes is the father of modern philosophy, and we will show clearly to what extent German philosophy derives from him.⁶³

René Descartes is a Frenchman, and here, too, great France deserves fame for its initiative. But this great France, this noisy, turbulent, chattering land of the French never provided suitable soil for philosophy; perhaps philosophy will never flourish there. René Descartes felt this and went to Holland, a quiet, silent land of *trekschuiten*⁶⁴ and the Dutch. There he wrote his philosophical works. Only there was he able to free his spirit from the traditional formalism and to build up an entire philosophy out of pure thoughts, taken neither from faith nor empirical fact, as has been demanded of every true philosophy since that time. Only there could he have immersed himself so deeply into the abysses of thought that he caught sight of thought itself lurking at the very base of self-consciousness, and was even able to validate self-consciousness by means of it in his world-famous thesis: "Cogito ergo sum."⁶⁵

Perhaps nowhere but Holland could Descartes have dared to proclaim a philosophy which came into the most evident conflict with all the traditions of the past. He deserves credit for having established the autonomy of philosophy; philosophy no longer needed to beg theology for permission to think, and it was now allowed to consider itself an independent science alongside of it. I purposely do not say: in opposition to it, because, at that time, the following fundamental principle was thought to be valid: the truths which we attain through philosophy are, in the end, the same which are handed down by religion. The scholastics, as I remarked above,

⁶² The quotation is a modified version of the first verse of the apocryphal "Book of Sirach" (also the source of the quotation at the end of the second preface), "All wisdom cometh from the Lord, and is with him for ever."

⁶³ Francis Bacon (1521–1626), British philosopher, is considered the founder of modern scientific method. René Descartes (1596–1650), French philosopher, is known for his starting point of methodical doubt and his foundation of knowledge in self-consciousness (see below). Heine follows Hegel in granting priority to Descartes.

⁶⁴ Dutch: tow barges.

⁶⁵ Latin: I think, therefore I am. This quotation can be found in the *Principles of Philosophy*, Part 1, Section 7. Descartes claims that he has found a truth which cannot rationally be subject to doubt, namely, that the "I" that thinks must exist.

not only granted religion supremacy over philosophy, but also considered the latter to be a trivial game, a vain hair-splitting about words as soon as it came into conflict with the dogmas of religion. The scholastics wanted only to express their thoughts and did not mind what other conditions were imposed on them. They said “one times one is one” and proved it; but they also added with a smile that this proof is another error of human reason, which always errs when it comes into conflict with the decisions of the ecumenical councils. One times one is three, and that is the Truth which has long been revealed to us: in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!⁶⁶ The scholastics were a secret philosophical opposition to the Church. But publicly they feigned the greatest obsequiousness and even fought in some cases for the Church. In processions, they paraded among the followers of the Church, something like the French opposition deputies during the ceremonies of the Restoration.⁶⁷ This comedy lasted more than six centuries and became ever more conventional. By destroying scholasticism, Descartes also destroyed the outdated opposition of the Middle Ages. The old brooms were worn out after such long sweeping, and there was just too much dust. The new times demanded new brooms. After every revolution, the previous opposition has to abdicate; otherwise great idiocies occur, as we ourselves have seen. It was less the Catholic Church than its old opponents, the rearguard of the scholastics, who rose up against the Cartesian philosophy. The pope did not ban it until 1663.

I assume among my French audience reasonable familiarity with the philosophy of Descartes, your greatest compatriot, and, thus, I do not need to demonstrate here how the most divergent schools of thought were able to borrow their necessary material from it. I am speaking here of idealism and materialism.

Since these two doctrines are often referred to as spiritualism and sensualism, especially in France, and since I use these two words in a different way, I should discuss these terms in greater detail in order to prevent a confusion of concepts.

From the oldest times, there have been two opposing views of the nature of human thought, that is, about the ultimate sources of intellectual knowledge, about the origin of ideas. The one view claims that we

⁶⁶ “One times one is three”: a reference to the Christian teaching of the Trinity.

⁶⁷ I.e., the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in 1814, after the fall of Napoleon.

acquire our ideas only from the outside; our mind is an empty container in which the intuitions swallowed by the senses are processed in about the same way as the food we have in our stomach. To use a nicer metaphor, these people consider our minds to be a tabula rasa upon which experience later writes something new every day according to fixed rules of writing.

Those holding the opposite view claim that ideas are innate to human beings, and the human mind is the original seat of the ideas. The external world, experience, and the mediatory senses lead us only to the knowledge of what was already in our mind beforehand; they only awaken the ideas which sleep there.

The first view has been called sensualism or sometimes also empiricism. The second was called spiritualism, sometimes also rationalism. But, these names could easily lead to misunderstandings, since, as I have mentioned in the previous book, they have also for some time designated the two social systems which can be seen in all of life's manifestations. Here, we will reserve the name spiritualism for that sacrilegious presumption of the spirit, which, as it strives for sole glorification, seeks to crush or at least denounce matter; and the name sensualism will be reserved for the zealous opposition to spiritualism, which aims at a rehabilitation of matter and a vindication of the rights of the senses, without denying the rights, or even the supremacy, of spirit. As for the philosophical opinions about the nature of our knowledge, I prefer to use the names idealism and materialism; and I use the first of these terms to designate the doctrine of innate ideas, ideas *a priori*, and the second to designate the doctrine of intellectual knowledge by means of experience and the senses, the doctrine of ideas *a posteriori*.⁶⁸

Significantly, the idealist side of Cartesian philosophy was never able to succeed in France. Several well-known Jansenists followed this direction for some time, but they soon became lost in Christian spiritualism. Perhaps this circumstance discredited idealism in France. Nations know instinctively what they need in order to fulfill their mission. The French were already on their way toward the political revolution which was to begin at the end of the eighteenth century. For this, they needed a guillotine – and a materialistic philosophy with the same cold sharpness. Christian

⁶⁸ Latin: *A priori* and *a posteriori* mean here, respectively, prior to, or independent of, sensory experience and following, or dependent upon, sensory experience.

spiritualism was a comrade-in-arms of the enemies of such a philosophy, and thus sensualism was the natural ally of materialism. Since the French sensualists were normally materialists, it has often been assumed that sensualism can emerge only from materialism. But sensualism can just as well come out of pantheism, and, indeed, its appearance there is beautiful and magnificent. This is not to deny any of the merits of French materialism. French materialism was an excellent antidote to the evils of the past, a desperate remedy for a desperate disease, mercury for an infected people.⁶⁹ The French philosophers chose John Locke as their master.⁷⁰ That was the savior they needed. The *Essay on Human Understanding* became their gospel; they swore by it. John Locke was schooled on Descartes and learned everything that an Englishman could learn from him: mechanics, the art of analysis, combination, construction, calculation. There was only one thing he was unable to grasp: innate ideas. He thus perfected the doctrine that we attain all our knowledge from outside, through experience. He made the human mind into a kind of calculating device, and the whole human being became an English machine. This is also true of the human being as constructed by the students of Locke, although they attempt to distinguish themselves from each other by using different names for their points of view. They are all afraid of the final consequences of their first principle, and the follower of Condillac is terrified of being put in the same class as Helvetius, or, even worse, Holbach, or, worst of all, La Mettrie.⁷¹ And yet, it has to be done, and I thus may lump all of the French philosophers of the eighteenth century together, their contemporary followers included, as materialists. *L'homme machine* is the most ruthlessly consistent book of French philosophy, and the title is already the last word on its entire view of the world.

These materialists were also supporters of deism most of the time, since a machine presupposes a mechanic, and it is among the highest

⁶⁹ Mercury was a traditional means of treating syphilis.

⁷⁰ John Locke (1632–1704), English philosopher, one of the founders of empiricism and champion of political liberalism, author of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690; the title is cited in English incorrectly by Heine).

⁷¹ The four figures mentioned represent different forms of eighteenth-century French materialism: Étienne-Bonnot de Condillac (1715–1780), Claude-Adrien Helvetius (1715–1771), Paul-Henri Dietrich von Holbach (1723–1789), and Julien-Offray de la Mettrie (1709–1751), author of *L'homme machine* (*Man, a Machine*, 1748), the most radical reduction of the human being to mechanical processes.

perfections of a machine that it can recognize and appreciate the technical skills of such an artist, in part in its own construction, in part in his other works.⁷²

Materialism accomplished its mission in France. It is perhaps now achieving the same results in England, and the revolutionary parties there, namely the Benthamists, the preachers of utility, base themselves on Locke.⁷³ These are mighty spirits who have seized the proper lever to set John Bull into motion.⁷⁴ John Bull is a born materialist and his Christian spiritualism is mostly traditional hypocrisy or even just material incapacity – his flesh gives up because the spirit does not come to its aid. However, the situation is different in Germany, and German revolutionaries err when they imagine that a materialistic philosophy is favorable to their ends. Indeed, no general revolution is possible at all in Germany unless its principles derive from a more popular, religious, and German philosophy, and prevail due to the power of such a philosophy. Which philosophy is this? We will discuss it later, without mincing words. I add this latter condition for the benefit of Germans, because I count on the fact that Germans will also read these pages.

Germany has always expressed aversion towards materialism and has thus become the true home of idealism during the last century and a half. The Germans, too, were students of Descartes, and the greatest of these students was Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.⁷⁵ Just as Locke followed the materialist direction, Leibniz followed the idealist direction of the Master. Here, we find the doctrine of innate ideas in its most resolute form. He fought Locke in his *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*. With Leibniz, a great enthusiasm for philosophical study began among the Germans. He woke their minds and led them along new paths. Even

⁷² Deism, a typical Enlightenment approach to religion, was discussed especially in England in the early eighteenth century; it posited a rational God who created a world which operates under its own rational laws without further divine intervention.

⁷³ Benthamists (who tend to base themselves on Hume rather than Locke) are the followers of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), the founder of utilitarianism, who argued famously, “It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong.”

⁷⁴ John Bull is a name for the stereotypical Englishman.

⁷⁵ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), the most prominent German philosopher before Kant. His philosophy described a universe of self-contained “monads,” linked by “pre-established harmony.” His essay, the *Theodicy*, appeared in 1710. His response to Locke, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (*New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*) first appeared posthumously in 1765.

resistant minds were somewhat reconciled with the boldness of his writings because of their inherent mildness and the religious sense which enlivened them, and their influence was enormous. The boldness of this thinker can be seen particularly in his doctrine of monads, one of the most remarkable hypotheses which has ever emerged from the head of a philosopher. It is also at the same time the best of what he had to offer, for the most important laws which our philosophy today has discovered are already present in it, in nascent form. The doctrine of monads was perhaps a clumsy formulation of the laws which have now been expressed by the *Naturphilosophen* in better formulas.⁷⁶ Here, I should actually use the word “formula” again rather than “law,” since, as Newton notes, entirely correctly, what we call laws in nature do not really exist but are only formulas which come to the aid of our powers of comprehension to explain a series of phenomena in nature.⁷⁷ In Germany, the most-discussed work by Leibniz is the *Theodicy*. But it is also his weakest work. This book, like several other writings in which Leibniz expresses his religious spirit, did some damage to his reputation and was in part poorly understood. His enemies accused him of the laziest weakness of thought; friends defended him by turning him into a clever hypocrite. For a long time, Leibniz’s character was a subject of controversy for us. Even his well-wishers were unable to clear him of the charge of ambiguity. The freethinkers and the enlighteners despised him the most. How could they excuse a philosopher who defended the Trinity, the eternity of punishments in Hell, and even the divinity of Christ! Tolerance only went so far. But Leibniz was neither a fool nor a scoundrel, and from the high perspective of his doctrine of harmony he could very easily defend the whole of Christianity. I say the whole of Christianity, meaning that he defended it against half-Christianity. He demonstrated the consistency of the orthodox as opposed to the half-measures of their opponents. He never wanted to do more than this. And, afterwards, he stood on that point of indifference, where the most various systems were only various sides of the same truth. This point

⁷⁶ We leave the terms *Naturphilosophie* and *Naturphilosophen* (Ger., philosophy/philosophers of nature) untranslated. *Naturphilosophie*, as practiced by the *Naturphilosophen*, refers specifically to a post-Kantian philosophical movement which took a speculative approach to the scientific investigation of nature. The most prominent *Naturphilosoph* was Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854), discussed in Book Three.

⁷⁷ Isaac Newton (1643–1727), pre-eminent English scientist, discoverer of the Law of Universal Gravitation. He remarked famously that he “did not frame hypotheses” about the ultimate explanation of physical laws.

of indifference was later recognized by Mr. Schelling and given a rigorous foundation by Hegel, as a system of systems.⁷⁸ In the same way, Leibniz worked to harmonize Plato with Aristotle. More recently, this task has ever again been attempted among us. Has it been accomplished?

No, truly no! Because this task is no different from that of finding a settlement of the conflict between idealism and materialism. Plato is an idealist through and through and knows only innate, that is, inborn ideas or, rather, ideas born along with us; human beings bring ideas with them into the world, and when they are conscious of them, they seem like memories from an earlier existence. Hence also what is vague and mystical in Plato: we remember them more or less clearly. In the case of Aristotle, on the other hand, everything is clear, distinct, and certain. Knowledge, for him, is taken from experience, not revealed in relation to what came before this world, and he knows how to classify all of it in the most definite way. For this reason, he also remains a model for all empiricists, and they cannot praise God enough that he became the tutor of Alexander, that he found so many opportunities to promote knowledge through the latter's conquests, and that his victorious student gave him so many thousands of *talents*⁷⁹ to finance his zoological research. The old tutor used this money conscientiously to dissect a considerable number of mammals and stuff a considerable number of birds, thereby making the most important observations. But unfortunately he overlooked that great beast right in front of his eyes; he left unstudied the one he himself had raised, and who was far more remarkable than all of the animals in the world at that time put together. He left us with no knowledge at all about the nature of this youth-king, whose life and deeds we gaze at in wonder and mystery. Who was Alexander? What did he want? Was he a madman or a God? We still do not know. Instead, the good Aristotle gives us all the more information about Babylonian meercats, Indian parrots, and Greek tragedies (which he also dissected).

Plato and Aristotle! These names represent not only two systems, but also models of two different human types, which, since time immemorial, have been in more or less openly hostile conflict with each other, whatever the costume. This battle was fought especially throughout the Middle

⁷⁸ Schelling and Hegel both used the term *Indifferenzpunkt*, borrowed from magnetism (the point of indifference of a magnet is halfway between its poles), to characterize a philosophical viewpoint uniting seemingly contradictory views (see the note below on the term "philosophy of identity").

⁷⁹ A unit of ancient Greek currency.

Ages and continues to the present day. It is the basic content of the history of the Christian Church. Whatever names appear, it is always a matter of Plato and Aristotle. Visionary, mystical, Platonic natures bring forth Christian ideas, with corresponding symbols, from the depths of their souls. Practical, organizing, Aristotelian natures build a solid system out of these ideas and symbols, a dogma and a cult. The Church, in the end, embraces both natures. One is ensconced mostly in the clergy, the other in monasticism, but still they feud incessantly with each other. The same battle can be seen in the Protestant Church, in the conflict between the Pietists and the Orthodox who correspond in a particular way with the Catholic mystics and dogmatists.⁸⁰ The Protestant Pietists are mystics without imagination, and the Protestant Orthodox are dogmatists without spirit.

We find these two Protestant factions in bitter conflict at the time of Leibniz. Later, the philosophy of Leibniz was itself brought into the conflict, when Christian Wolff took it over, adapting it to the needs of the time and, most importantly, presenting it in the German language. Before we speak more of this student of Leibniz, of the influence of his efforts, and of the later fate of Lutheranism, we must discuss that providential man who, at the same time as Locke and Leibniz, was educated in the school of Descartes, was long regarded with scorn and hatred, but who in our present day has achieved a unique spiritual authority.

I speak of Benedict Spinoza.⁸¹

One great genius learns from another less by assimilation than by friction. One diamond cuts the other. Thus, the philosophy of Descartes by no means produced that of Spinoza, but only advanced it. We find, at first, the method of the master in the pupil; this is a great advantage. Next, we find in Spinoza, as in Descartes, a method of proof borrowed from mathematics. This is a great defect. The mathematical form gives Spinoza a bitter appearance. But, like the bitter shell of the almond, it makes the kernel all the more sweet. When we read Spinoza, we are seized with a feeling like that of seeing nature at its grandest in most vigorous repose: a

⁸⁰ Pietism was a reform movement within the Protestant Church in Germany, stressing personal faith and individual experience. Its main figures Phillipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705) and August Hermann Francke (1663–1727) are discussed below by Heine. The Pietists were opposed by the official Lutheran Orthodoxy.

⁸¹ Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677), Dutch philosopher, came from a Portuguese Jewish family which had fled the Spanish Inquisition. Author most famously of the *Ethics* (1677) as well as the *Tractatus Politicus* (*Political Treatise*, 1677).

forest of thoughts, tall as the sky, whose blooming tree-tops sway back and forth, while imperturbable trunks stand rooted in the eternal soil. There is a certain soft breeze in the writings of Spinoza which is inexplicable. It stirs the reader with the winds of the future. The spirit of the Hebrew prophets still rested perhaps on their late descendant. At the same time, there is a seriousness to him, a self-confident pride, a grandeur of thought which also seems to be an inheritance, since Spinoza belonged to one of those families of martyrs which had been expelled from Spain by those most Catholic of kings. Added to this is the patience of the Dutch which was never abandoned, neither in his life nor in his writings.

It has been established that Spinoza's life was free of all blemishes, as pure and immaculate as the life of his divine cousin, Jesus Christ. Like Jesus, he suffered for his teachings and wore the crown of thorns. Everywhere a great spirit expresses its thoughts in Golgotha.

Dear reader, if you ever go to Amsterdam, please have your guide show you the Spanish synagogue. It is a beautiful building, and the roof rests on four colossal pillars. In the middle is the pulpit where the anathema was once pronounced against the scorner of the Mosaic law, the Hidalgo Don Benedikt de Spinoza. On this occasion, a ram's horn, called a *shofar*, was blown. There must be something terrible about the *shofar*. I once read in Salomon Maimon's autobiography that the Rabbi of Altona at one point tried to bring this student of Kant back to the old faith, and when Maimon persisted obstinately in his philosophical heresy, the Rabbi showed him the *shofar* with the dark words: "Do you know what this is?" When Kant's student answered very calmly "It's the horn of a ram!" the Rabbi fell over backwards in horror.⁸²

This horn accompanied the excommunication of Spinoza; he was ceremoniously thrown out of the community of Israel and declared unworthy from then on to carry the name of a Jew. His Christian enemies were magnanimous enough to let him keep this title. The Jews, however, the Swiss Guards of deism, were unrelenting, and one can see the square in front of the Spanish Synagogue in Amsterdam where they once stabbed at him with their long daggers.

I could not avoid making especial note of this man's personal misfortunes. He was educated not only by school but also by life. That

⁸² Salomon Maimon (1753–1800), Kantian philosopher, originally of Polish-Jewish extraction, author of a famous autobiography.

distinguishes him from most philosophers, and in his writings we see the indirect effects of his life. Theology was not just an academic pursuit for him. The same with politics, which he also learned through practice. The father of his beloved was hanged because of political offences in the Netherlands.⁸³ And nowhere in the world is it worse to be hanged than in the Netherlands. You have no idea how many preparations and ceremonies go along with the hanging. The offender dies simultaneously of boredom, and the spectator has ample leisure for reflection. I am thus convinced that Benedict Spinoza reflected at length about the execution of the old Van Ende; and just as the daggers before had helped him to understand religion, so now did the nooses teach him politics. We see the results in his *Tractatus politicus*.

Here, my sole task is to describe the greater and lesser manner in which philosophers are related to each other, and I will show only the degrees of their family relationships and their lines of succession. The philosophy of Spinoza, the third son of René Descartes, as presented in his main work the *Ethics*, is just as distant from the materialism of his brother Locke as from the idealism of his brother Leibniz. Spinoza does not struggle analytically with the question of the ultimate sources of our knowledge. He gives us his great synthesis, his explanation of the divinity.

Benedict Spinoza teaches: there is only one substance; this is God. All finite substances derive from it, are contained in it, appear in it, and disappear in it; they have only a relative, passing, accidental existence. The absolute substance reveals itself to us both in the form of infinite thought and in the form of infinite extension. Infinite thought and infinite extension together are the two attributes of the absolute substance. We can know only these two attributes; however, God, the absolute substance, has perhaps still others of which we do not know. “Non dico me deum omnino cognoscere, sed me quaedam ejus attributa, non autem omnia, neque maximam intelligere partem.”⁸⁴

Only malice or lack of judgment could describe this teaching as “atheistic.” No one has ever expressed himself more sublimely about the divinity than Spinoza. Instead of saying that he denies God, one could say that he

⁸³ This refers to Franciscus van den Enden (1600–1674), friend of Spinoza, who was hanged in Paris after participating in a conspiracy against King Louis XIV.

⁸⁴ From Letter LX. “I do not claim that I can know God fully, but rather, that I can perceive certain characteristics of him, even if not all, or, indeed, even the greater part of them.”

denies the human. For him, all finite things are only modes of the infinite substance. All finite things are contained in God. The human soul is only a light ray of infinite thought, and the human body is only an atom of infinite extension. God is the infinite cause of both, of souls and bodies, *natura naturans*.⁸⁵

Voltaire, in a letter to Madame du Devant, appears quite enchanted by her idea that all things which surpass human knowledge are surely of no use for us to know.⁸⁶ I could well apply this remark to the words of Spinoza quoted above, according to which not only the two knowable attributes, thought and extension, belong to the divinity, but also perhaps others which are unknowable for us. What we cannot know has no value for us, at least no value from the standpoint of the social, where we are solely concerned to bring what is known in spirit into material appearance. In our explanation of the nature of God, we will thus only refer to those two knowable attributes. In that case, everything that we call an attribute of God is, in the end, just a different form of our intuition, and these different forms of intuition are identical in the absolute substance. Thought is, in the final analysis, only invisible extension, and extension is only visible thought. We have here arrived at the main theorem of German Identity-Philosophy which, in essence, is not at all different from the doctrine of Spinoza.⁸⁷ Let Mr. Schelling protest that his philosophy is different from Spinozism, that it is more “a living fusion of the ideal and the real,” that it is as different from Spinozism as “the cultivated Greek statues are from the stiff Egyptian originals”; nevertheless I still must declare most certainly that Mr. Schelling, in his earlier phase, when he was still a philosopher, did not differ in the least from Spinoza. He merely took a different route to the same philosophy. I will explain this later, when I describe how Kant entered upon a new path, how Fichte followed him, how Mr. Schelling walked still farther in Fichte’s footsteps, and then, blundering through the forest darkness of *Naturphilosophie*, finally stood face-to-face with the great statue of Spinoza.

⁸⁵ Latin: Nature, as creative.

⁸⁶ Voltaire’s letter of April 3, 1769, to Marie, Marquise du Deffand (1697–1770), who hosted a famous salon.

⁸⁷ Schelling characterized the philosophy he presented in his *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* (*Presentation of my System of Philosophy*, 1801) as *Identitätsphilosophie*; its goal is to show the unity of *Naturphilosophie* and Fichtean transcendental philosophy.

The later *Naturphilosophie* has only the merit of demonstrating the eternal parallelism between spirit and matter in a most astute manner. I say spirit and matter, and I use these terms as synonyms for what Spinoza calls thought and extension. To a certain extent, these terms are also synonymous with what our *Naturphilosophen* call spirit and nature, or the ideal and the real.

In what comes, I will use the term pantheism to designate Spinoza's way of thinking, rather than his system. This term, like deism, assumes the unity of God. But the God of the pantheists is itself in the world – not in that it suffuses the world with its divinity in the way that once St. Augustine attempted to illustrate by comparing God to a great sea and the world to a large sponge which lay in the middle and soaked up divinity.⁸⁸ No, the world is not merely saturated with God or filled by God, it is identical with God. “God” – which Spinoza calls the one Substance and the German philosophers call the Absolute – “is everything that is,” matter as well as spirit. Both are equally divine, and whoever insults holy matter is just as sinful as one who sins against the Holy Spirit.

The God of the pantheists is different from the God of the deists in that the former is in the world itself, whereas the latter is entirely outside it, or, to say the same thing, above it. The God of the deists rules the world from above, as if it were an establishment entirely separate from himself. The deists can only be differentiated from one another by the type of rule they envision. The Hebrews see God as a thundering tyrant; the Christians as a loving father; the students of Rousseau, the whole school of Geneva, as a wise artist who produced the world in about the same way as their papa made his watches, and as connoisseurs of art they admire the work and praise the master above.⁸⁹

For the deist, who thus assumes a God outside of or above the world, only the spirit is holy, since he regards it, as it were, as the divine breath that the world-creator blew into the human body, itself formed by his hands out of clay. The Jews therefore think of the body as something of little value, as a miserable hull of the *ruach ha-kodesh*, the holy breath, the spirit, and only to the latter do they devote their care, their reverence, and their cult. For that reason, they truly became *the* people of the spirit,

⁸⁸ Saint Augustine (354–430), most important Patristic theologian and philosopher.

⁸⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), French writer and philosopher, was born in Geneva to a watch-maker.

chaste, modest, serious, abstract, stubborn, suited for martyrdom, and their most sublime blossom is Jesus Christ.⁹⁰ He is in the true sense of the word the spirit incarnate, and there is profound meaning in the beautiful legend that an immaculate virgin, untouched in body, gave birth to him by means of an entirely spiritual conception.

If the Jews regarded the body only with contempt, the Christians went even farther and regarded it as something reprehensible, as something bad, as evil itself. We thus see, a few centuries after the birth of Christ, the rise of a religion which will always astonish humanity and elicit the most dreadful admiration, even from the last generations. Yes, it is a great, holy religion, filled with infinite bliss, a religion which wanted to conquer for the spirit the most unconditional sovereignty over this earth. – Yet this religion was all too sublime, all too pure, all too good for this same earth, and, here, it was only possible to proclaim its idea in theory, but never to put it into practice. The attempt to implement this idea produced innumerable glorious phenomena in history which will remain subjects for the songs and tales of poets for a long time to come. But, as is clear in the final analysis, the attempt to implement the idea of Christianity failed most miserably, and this unfortunate effort demanded incalculable sacrifices from humanity – whose dismal consequence is the social unease in all of Europe today. If, as many believe, we are still living in humanity's youth, then Christianity was, as it were, one of the most extravagant notions of its college days, which do much more credit to its heart than its head. Christianity left matter, the worldly in the hands of Caesar and his Jews, and was satisfied with denying the former ultimate supremacy and openly denouncing the latter – but, lo and behold! In the end, the sword they hated and the money they despised achieved ultimate power, and the representatives of the spirit were forced to come to an understanding with them. Indeed, this understanding has become an alliance. Not just Roman priests, but also the English, the Prussian, in short, all of the privileged priests have allied themselves with Caesar and Co. to oppress their peoples. But this alliance serves only to hasten the destruction of religion's spiritualism. Some priests have realized this, and, in order to save religion, they act as if they have abandoned

⁹⁰ There are a number of parallels in this work to the later works of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). In *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Nietzsche also sees the triumph of Christianity, in the figure of Jesus, as the fulfillment of Jewish goals. See also the note to Heine's discussion of Jews and Rome below.

the corrupting alliance. They run to our side, they put on red caps, they swear hatred and death to all kings, to the seven bloodthirsty, they demand equality of earthly possessions, and they curse, despite Marat and Robespierre.⁹¹ – Between you and me, if you look at them closely enough, you will see that they now read Mass in the language of the Jacobins, and, as they once brought Caesar poison hidden in their hosts, now they want to bring their hosts to the people hidden in revolutionary poison, because they know that we love this poison.⁹²

But, you priests, all your efforts are in vain! Humanity has grown tired of such hosts and hungers now for nutritious food, true bread and beautiful meat. Humanity smiles fondly at its youthful ideals, which, despite all its efforts, could never be realized – and it becomes manly and practical. Humanity does homage today to the system of earthly utility; it thinks seriously about a prosperous bourgeois order, about a sensible household budget, and about comfort for its old age. There is truly no more talk of leaving the sword in the hands of Caesar and certainly none of leaving the purse in the hands of his Jews. Serving the prince has lost its privileged honor, and industry has been relieved of its former ignominy. The task now is to become healthy, since our limbs still feel ever so weak; the holy vampires of the Middle Ages sucked out so much of our lifeblood. Next, we will need to slaughter great sacrifices as atonements to Matter so that it will forgive us the old insults. We might even be wise to set up festivals to do still more extraordinary honor to Matter. For Christianity, being incapable of annihilating matter, denounced it everywhere, belittled its most noble enjoyments, and forced the senses to be hypocrites, creating lies and sins. We must dress our women in new blouses and thoughts, and we have to fumigate all of our feelings, as if we had survived the plague.

The most immediate purpose of all of our new institutions is thus to rehabilitate matter, to reinstate it in its dignity, to recognize its moral worth and give it religious consecration, to reconcile it with spirit. *Purusa*

⁹¹ Jean-Paul Marat (1743–1793) and Maximilien de Robespierre (1758–1794) were two of the most prominent Jacobins, the leading political party during the French Revolution, one of whose symbols was the red cap. The “seven bloodthirsty” is a reference to a work of the writer Félicité Lamennais (1782–1854), who attempted to argue for both revolution and Catholicism.

⁹² This passage refers to an old legend about the death of Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII (1274–1313) by means of a poisoned host. Nietzsche, in his book *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1, Section 9, also speaks of “loving the poison” of revolution.

must be remarried to *Prakriti*.⁹³ Their violent separation, so profoundly conveyed in the Indian myth, caused the great rending of the world, evil.

Do you know what in the world is evil? The spiritualists have always accused us of obscuring the difference between good and evil from our perspective of pantheism. But, on the one hand, what they call evil is only a delusion based upon their view of the world; on the other hand, real evil results from the world-order based on this view. From their point of view, Matter is in and of itself evil – this point of view itself is slander, is horrible blasphemy. Indeed, Matter only becomes evil when it is forced to conspire in secret against the usurpations of spirit, when spirit has denounced it, and it prostitutes itself out of self-hatred, or wreaks its vengeance on spirit with desperate hatred. Evil is thus itself a result of the spiritual world order.

God is identical with the world. He manifests himself in plants, which lead cosmic-magnetic lives devoid of consciousness. He manifests himself in animals, which in their sensuous dream-lives have more or less vague feelings of existence. But most magnificently, he manifests himself in the human being, who feels and thinks at the same time, who knows how to differentiate himself as an individual from objective nature, and who, in his reason, already possesses the same ideas which exhibit themselves to him in the world of appearance. In the human being, divinity comes to self-consciousness, and such self-consciousness again itself reveals the divine by means of the human being. But this revelation does not occur in and through the individual human being, but rather in and through the entirety of humanity, so that each person only grasps and represents a part of the God-World-Universe, but all of humanity together will grasp and represent the entire God-World-Universe in idea and in reality. Every people, perhaps, has the mission to know and make known a particular part of that God-World-Universe, to comprehend a series of appearances and to bring a series of ideas to appearance, and to hand down these results to the peoples who come after, who have their own, similar missions. God is thus the true hero of world-history; it is his constant act of thinking, his constant action, his word, his deed. And one can justly say of humanity in its entirety, it is an incarnation of God!⁹⁴

⁹³ In Hindu mythology, spirit, and matter.

⁹⁴ These views resemble closely those of Hegel. Heine had the opportunity to hear Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history in Berlin in 1822–1823.

It is a mistaken opinion that this religion, pantheism, leads people to indifferentism. Quite the contrary, the consciousness of one's own divinity will inspire one to express it, and thus only now will truly great deeds of true heroism begin to glorify this earth.

The political revolution based on the principles of French materialism will find no opponents among the pantheists, but allies – allies whose convictions are taken from a deeper source, from a religious synthesis. We support the wellbeing of matter, the material happiness of peoples, not because we are contemptuous of the spirit, like the materialists, but because we know that the divinity of the human being is also revealed in his bodily appearance, that misery destroys or demeans the body, the image of God, and that the spirit is destroyed thereby as well. The great motto of the revolution expressed by Saint-Just: "Bread is the right of the people" reads for us "Bread is the divine right of the human being."⁹⁵ We do not fight for the human rights of the people, but for the divine rights of the human. In this and several other things, we differ from the men of the revolution. We want to be neither *sans-culottes*, nor frugal citizens, nor parsimonious presidents; we will found a democracy of gods, equally glorious, equally holy, equally joyous. You demand simple clothes, abstemious morals, and spiceless enjoyments; we, on the other hand, demand nectar and ambrosia, kingly robes, costly fragrances, sensuality and splendor, the dances of laughing nymphs, music, and comedies. – Please do not complain, o virtuous republicans! We respond to censorious reproaches like one of Shakespeare's fools: "Do you think that because you are so virtuous there shall be no more tasty cakes and sweet champagne on this earth?"⁹⁶

The Saint-Simonians have understood, and desired, something like this. But they were on unfavorable ground, and the materialism around them beat them down, at least for a time. In Germany, they were better appreciated. For Germany has the most fertile soil for pantheism; it is the religion of our greatest thinkers, our best artists. Deism, as I will discuss later, has long since collapsed there in its theoretical form. It is still present only in the thoughtless multitude, without rational justification, like so much else. No one says it, but everybody knows it; pantheism is the open

⁹⁵ Louis de Saint-Just (1767–1794), French revolutionary.

⁹⁶ A modified quotation from Act II, Scene 3 of *Twelfth Night*.

secret of Germany. Indeed, we have outgrown deism. We are free and want no thundering tyrants. We are of age and need no fatherly care. We are also not the concoctions of a great mechanic. Deism is a religion for servants, for children, for Genevans, for watch-makers.

Pantheism is the clandestine religion of Germany, as was predicted fifty years ago by those German writers who campaigned so intensively against Spinoza. The fiercest of these opponents of Spinoza was Fr. Heinr. Jacobi, who is occasionally honored by being named among the German philosophers.⁹⁷ He was nothing but a quarrelsome sneak, who, disguising himself in a philosopher's cloak, made his way in among the philosophers, first whimpering to them about his love and his tender soul, and then letting loose against reason. His refrain always went: philosophy, knowledge through reason, is a vain delusion; reason does not even itself know where it leads; it brings one into a dark labyrinth of error and contradiction; and only faith can lead one securely. That mole! He did not see that reason is like the eternal sun, which, as it makes its steady way above, illuminates its own path with its own light. Nothing compares to the pious, smug hatred little Jacobi harbored for the great Spinoza.

It is remarkable how the most diverse factions fought against Spinoza. It is most amusing to examine the sundry composition of the army they formed. Alongside a swarm of black-and-white hoods with crosses and smoking censers marches the phalanx of the Encyclopedists, who also campaigned against this “penseur téméraire.”⁹⁸ Beside the Rabbi of the Amsterdam synagogue, sounding the battle call on the ram's-horn of faith, walks Arouet de Voltaire, playing the piccolo of satire on behalf of deism. Between is that whining old woman Jacobi, tending the canteen wagon for these crusaders.

Let us leave this pandemonium behind as quickly as possible. We return from our excursion into pantheism to continue the story of the philosophy of Leibniz.

Leibniz wrote the works you are familiar with in part in Latin and in part in French. Christian Wolff is the name of the excellent man who

⁹⁷ Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819), German writer who caused a controversy by his claim that Lessing, in conversation with him, had declared himself a Spinozist.

⁹⁸ French reckless thinker. The Encyclopedists were the most prominent figures in the French Enlightenment, including Voltaire, Denis Diderot (1713–84) and Jean-le-Rond d'Alembert (1717–83).

not only systematized the ideas of Leibniz but also presented them in German.⁹⁹ His true contribution did not lie in the solid system in which he enclosed these ideas, and even less in the fact that he made this system accessible to a greater public through the German language. Rather, his true contribution was to stimulate us to philosophize also in our mother tongue. As was the case for Luther in theology, until Wolff we only knew how to discuss philosophy in Latin. No one had followed the example of those very few who had previously presented philosophy in German, but the literary historian must lavish them with especially high praise. For this reason, we mention here the name Johannes Tauler, a Dominican monk, who was born on the Rhine at the beginning of the fourteenth century and who died, on the Rhine still, in Strassburg, I think, in 1361.¹⁰⁰ He was a pious man and one of those mystics belonging to what I have labeled the Platonic faction of the Middle Ages. In the last years of his life, the man renounced all scholarly haughtiness and found no shame in preaching in the humble language of the people. These sermons, which he set down, as well as the German translations he made of some of his early Latin sermons, are among the most remarkable monuments of the German language. For here, it is clear already that the German language is not only acceptable for metaphysical investigations, but is actually far more suitable than Latin. Latin, the language of the Romans, can never deny its origins. It is a language of command for generals, a language of decrees for administrators, a language of law for usurers, a lapidary language for the rock-hard Romans. It became the proper language for materialism. Although Christianity, with true Christian patience, struggled for more than a millennium to spiritualize it, it never succeeded; and when Johannes Tauler wanted to immerse himself fully in the ghastliest abysses of thought, when his heart swelled up with greatest holiness, he had to speak German. His language is like a mountain spring bursting forth from hard rock, wonderfully heavy with the scent of unknown herbs and secret mineral powers. But only in modern times did the usefulness of the German language for philosophy become fully apparent. In no language besides our German mother tongue could nature have revealed its most secret workings. Only on the strong oak could the holy mistletoe flourish.

⁹⁹ Christian Wolff (1679–1754), dominant German philosopher in the first half of the eighteenth century.

¹⁰⁰ Johann Tauler, German mystic (c. 1300–1361).

This, of course, would be the correct place to discuss Paracelsus, or as he called himself, Theophrastus Paracelsus Bombastus von Hohenheim, because he also wrote mostly in German.¹⁰¹ But I will speak of him later in an even more meaningful context, for his philosophy was what we today call *Naturphilosophie*. This kind of teaching, describing nature as animated by ideas, and so mysteriously appealing to the German spirit, would have developed among us at that time, had not the lifeless, mechanistic physics of the Cartesians become generally predominant, through chance influence. Paracelsus was a great charlatan and always wore a scarlet coat, scarlet pants, red socks and a red hat, and claimed to be able to make homunculi, miniature people; at the very least, he stood in intimate acquaintance with the hidden beings who lived in the different elements – but he was at the same time one of those most profound investigators of nature who understood pre-Christian folk belief and Germanic pantheism with a truly German enthusiasm for inquiry. What these investigators did not know, they divined, and completely correctly.

I should also mention Jakob Böhme in this connection.¹⁰² For he also used the German language in his philosophical accounts, and was highly praised for it. But I have never been able to bring myself to read him. I do not like to be made a fool of. You see, I suspect those who praise this mystic of intending to mystify the public. As far as the content of his works, Saint-Martin has communicated some of it to you in French.¹⁰³ The English have also translated him. Charles I thought so highly of this theosophical shoe-maker that he sent a scholar to Görlitz just to study him. This scholar was luckier than his royal master. While the king lost his head to Cromwell's axe in Whitehall, the scholar merely lost his mind to Jacob Böhme's theosophy.

As I have already said, Christian Wolff was the first to successfully introduce the German language into philosophy. His lesser contribution was to systematize and popularize the ideas of Leibniz. In fact, both of these tasks are subject to the greatest criticism, which I must mention in passing. His systematization was only for show, and for the sake of appearance he sacrificed the most important parts of Leibniz's philosophy, for

¹⁰¹ Paracelsus (1493–1541), doctor and alchemist.

¹⁰² Jakob Böhme (1575–1624), German shoe-maker, and mystic from Görlitz, a favorite of the romantics and, as the legend goes, also of the British King Charles I (1600–1649) shortly before his execution.

¹⁰³ Louis de Saint-Martin (1743–1804), French mystic.

example, the best part of the doctrine of monads. True, Leibniz did not leave behind a systematic edifice of teachings, but only the ideas necessary to construct one. It would have taken another giant to assemble those colossal blocks and columns which a giant had dug out of the deepest marble quarries and carved delicately. What a beautiful temple it would have been. Christian Wolff, however, was rather stocky and could only master one portion of such construction materials; he built them into a woeful tabernacle of deism. Wolff had more of an encyclopedic mind than a systematic one, and he understood the unity of a doctrine to mean only its completeness. He was satisfied with a certain framework, where the pigeon-holes were well ordered, excellently filled, and equipped with clear labels. Thus he gave us an *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Of course, it is to be understood that he, the grandchild of Descartes, had inherited his grandfather's form of mathematical proof. I have already criticized this mathematical form in my discussion of Spinoza. In Wolff's case, it led to the greatest harm. His students turned it into the most unbearable schematism and a ridiculous mania to demonstrate everything in mathematical manner. What emerged was the so-called Wolffian dogmatism. All more profound research came to a halt and was replaced by a boring enthusiasm for clarity. Wolff's philosophy became ever more watery and finally flooded all of Germany. The traces of this deluge can be seen up to the present day, and here and there in our highest academies one can still find old fossils from Wolff's school.

Christian Wolff was born in 1679 in Breslau and died in 1754 in Halle. His spiritual dominance over Germany lasted more than a half-century. Of particular interest is his relationship to the theologians of those days, and this discussion will add to our treatment of the later history of Lutheranism.

There is no section of church history more complicated than the disputes of the Protestant theologians since the Thirty Years' War. Only the hair-splitting of the Byzantines can compare to it, yet these were not nearly as boring, since they were pretexts for courtly intrigues of political interest, whereas the Protestant polemics were largely based on the pedantry of narrow-minded professors and scholars. The universities, especially Tübingen, Wittenberg, Leipzig, and Halle, are the arenas for such theological battles. The two parties which we saw in conflict during the entire Middle Ages in Catholic dress, the Platonists and the Aristotelians, have simply changed their costumes, and fight as before. These are the Pietists

and the Orthodox, characterized above as mystics without imagination and dogmatists without spirit. Johannes Spener was the Scotus Eriugena of Protestantism.¹⁰⁴ Just as Eriugena founded Catholic mysticism with his translation of the legendary Dionysius Areopagita, so Spener founded Protestant Pietism with his collections of devotional literature, *colloquia pietatis*, perhaps the source of the name Pietists which has been attached to his followers. He was a devout man, honor to his memory. A Berlin Pietist, Mr. Franz Horn has produced a good biography of him.¹⁰⁵ Spener's life story is a constant martyrdom for the Christian idea. He was in this respect superior to his contemporaries. He insisted on good works and piety; he was much more a preacher of the spirit than of the word. His homiletic inclinations were praiseworthy for the time, since theology as taught in the abovementioned universities consisted only of narrow dogmatics and quibbling polemics. Exegesis and church history were entirely neglected.

A student of that Spener, Hermann Francke, began to hold lectures in Leipzig, following the example and way of thinking of his teacher. As always, we are glad to give him credit for holding them in German. The favorable response he received for these lectures roused the envy of his colleagues, who made life very difficult for our poor Pietist. He was forced to leave, and he moved to Halle where he taught Christianity in word and by deed. The memory of him will never fade there, since he founded the Halle orphanage. The University of Halle was now populated with Pietists, and they were called the "orphanage faction." And, incidentally, this faction persists there up to the present day; Halle is still the *taupenièrre*¹⁰⁶ of the Pietists. As recently as a few years ago, their disputes with the Protestant rationalists produced a scandal which spread its odor through all of Germany.¹⁰⁷ You, happy French, who heard nothing of it! You do not even know of the existence of those evangelical gossip sheets, where the pious fishwives of the Protestant Church hurl lengthy invectives at each other.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ John Scotus Eriugena (c. 810–877), theologian.

¹⁰⁵ Published in 1817. ¹⁰⁶ French: hiding place, refuge.

¹⁰⁷ Heine refers to an attack in the pages of the *Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung* (*Newspaper of the Protestant Churches*) against two Halle theology professors in 1830, claiming that they had deviated from the faith with their Enlightenment biblical criticism.

¹⁰⁸ Passage added in the second edition: You, happy French, who have no idea how maliciously, how pettily, how offensively our Protestant priests can vilify each other. You know, I am no supporter of Catholicism. The dogma of Protestantism is no longer part of my religious convictions, but

If I am not mistaken, it was the orthodox in Halle who, in their battle with the Pietist émigrés, called on Wolffian philosophy for assistance. Religion, if it can no longer burn us at the stake, comes begging to us. But all our gifts bring it only scant profit. With true affection, Wolff clothed poor religion in the narrow-fitting vestments of mathematical demonstration; but the fit was so tight that religion became even more constricted and made a fool of itself. Everywhere, weak seams burst. Most exposed was an intimate part, Original Sin, in glaring nakedness. No logical fig-leaf could help here. Christian-Lutheran original sin and Leibnizian-Wolffian optimism are incompatible. For this reason, the French mockery of optimism displeased our theologians very little. Voltaire's wit came to the rescue of naked Original Sin. The German Pangloss, though, lost a great deal in this annihilation of optimism and looked long and hard for a similar doctrine of consolation, until Hegel's phrase "Everything that is, is rational" gave him at least a partial substitute.¹⁰⁹

As soon as a religion looks to philosophy for help, its downfall is inevitable. In trying to defend itself, it talks itself more and more deeply into ruin. Religion, like any absolutism, must not try to justify itself. Prometheus is chained to the rock by silent Force. Yes, Aeschylus does not allow personified force to say a single word.¹¹⁰ It has to be mute. As soon as religion allows a catechism to be printed which makes appeal to reason, as soon as political absolutism publishes an official state newspaper,

its spirit certainly lives on in them. Thus, I am still biased towards the Protestant Church. But in the interests of truth, I must admit that in all the annals of papism, I have never found anything as sordid as the *Berlin Newspaper of the Protestant Churches* when the abovementioned scandal came to light. The nastiest treachery of monks, the pettiest monastery intrigues are still noble and good-natured in comparison to the Christian heroic deeds which our Protestant Orthodox and Pietists perpetrated upon the hated rationalists. You French have no idea of the hate which comes to light on such occasions. The Germans are, in any case, more vindictive than the romantic peoples.

This is because they are idealists even in hatred. We do not hate because of external things like you, say, because of insulted vanity, because of an epigram, because of a visiting card which went without a reply. No, we hate the most profound, the most essential parts of our enemies, their thoughts. You French are rash and superficial in love as well as hate. We Germans hate thoroughly, lastingly; since we are too honorable – and clumsy – to revenge ourselves with quick perfidy, we hate to our last breath.

"My good sir, I know this German calmness," a lady said recently, looking at me with wide eyes with disbelief and unease, "I know you Germans use the same word for pardon and poison." And, in fact, she is right; the word *vergeben* means both.

¹⁰⁹ Pangloss is the title character's tutor in the novel *Candide* (1759) by Voltaire; his catchphrase is "all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds." Voltaire uses him to mock the philosophy of Leibniz. Hegel's phrase occurs in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right* (1821).

¹¹⁰ The character of *Bia* (Greek: Force) has no lines in *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus (525–456 BC).

both are ended. But that is precisely our triumph; we have brought our enemies to speech and they have to explain themselves to us.

Certainly, one cannot deny that religious absolutism, like the political kind, has found powerful organs for its word. But let us not despair on this account. If the word lives, it can be carried by dwarfs; if it is dead, not even giants can uphold it.

From that time onwards, when religion sought help from philosophy, German scholars have performed countless experiments on it, in addition to putting it in its new costume. Some wanted to renew its youth and behaved like Medea at the rejuvenation of King Aeson.¹¹¹ First, one of its veins was opened and the blood of superstition was slowly drained out of it; or, without the images, the attempt was made to remove all historical content from Christianity and keep only the moral part. In this process, Christianity became pure deism. Christ stopped being the co-ruler of God; he was, so to speak, demoted, and was from then on venerated only as a private person. His moral character was praised beyond all measure. One could not say enough what a good person he was. As far as the miracles he performed, they were either explained with physics, or one attempted to make as little of them as possible. Miracles, some said, were necessary in those earlier ages of superstition; a reasonable man who had some truth to proclaim used them, as it were, for publicity. These theologians who removed everything historical from Christianity were called rationalists, and both the Pietists and the Orthodox turned their rage against them. Since then, these latter two groups have fought less intensively with each other and, not infrequently, have formed an alliance. What love could not accomplish was achieved by shared hatred, hatred against rationalists.

The rationalist direction in Protestant theology begins with the even-tempered Semler, whom you do not know, reached worrisome heights with the clear Teller, whom you also do not know, and arrived at its peak with the shallow Bahrdr, whom you do not need to know.¹¹² The most powerful support came from Berlin, where Frederick the Great, and the bookseller Nicolai, reigned.¹¹³

¹¹¹ From Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

¹¹² Johann Semler (1725–1791), Wilhelm Teller (1734–1804), Karl Bahrdr (1741–1792) were all theologians who tried to reconcile Christianity with the Enlightenment.

¹¹³ Friedrich Nicolai (1733–1811), friend of Lessing, was one of the leading advocates of the Enlightenment in Berlin.

You already know enough about the first of these figures: materialism, with a crown. You know that he wrote French verses, played flute well, won the battle at Rossbach, took a lot of snuff, and believed only in cannons.¹¹⁴ Surely, a few of you have visited Sanssouci, and the old invalid who was palace guard showed you the French novels in his library which Frederick read in church as a crown-prince and which he had bound into black goatskin, so that his strict father would think he was reading a Lutheran songbook.¹¹⁵ You know him, the royal philosopher, whom you called the Solomon of the North.¹¹⁶ France was the Ophir of this Nordic Solomon, and here he obtained his poets and philosophers, to whom he showed a great partiality, like the Solomon of the South, who, as we read in chapter ten of the Book of Kings, through his friend Hiram, received whole shiploads of gold, ivory, poets, and philosophers from Ophir. Because of this partiality for foreign talent, Frederick the Great had little influence on the German spirit. In fact, he insulted it; he wounded the German national feeling. The contempt in which Frederick the Great held our literature still irritates us, generations later. Except for the old Gellert – with whom he had a remarkable discussion – none of them enjoyed his most gracious favor.¹¹⁷

The more Frederick the Great ridiculed us, without supporting us, the more the bookseller Nicolai supported us; nevertheless, we have felt no compunction about ridiculing him. This man worked tirelessly, his whole life long, for the good of the fatherland; he spared no effort or money where he hoped to be promoting something good; and yet no man in Germany has ever been so cruelly, so mercilessly, so devastatingly insulted as this one. Although we who were born later know quite well that old Nicolai, friend of the Enlightenment, did not err in the most important things; although we know that it is mostly our own enemies, the obscurantists, who destroyed him with mockery; still, we cannot think about him with a completely straight face. Old Nicolai tried to do in Germany what the French *philosophes* did in France; he sought to eliminate the influence of the past over the spirit of the people, a praiseworthy first task, without

¹¹⁴ In 1757, Frederick the Great defeated Austrian and French forces at the battle of Rossbach during the Seven Years' War. Frederick the Great was well known for his strategy of military conquest.

¹¹⁵ Frederick the Great's father, King Frederick Wilhelm I (1688–1740), was notably more devout than his son.

¹¹⁶ A quotation from Voltaire.

¹¹⁷ Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715–1769) was a German writer of the sentimental movement. His conversation with Frederick the Great took place on December 18, 1760.

which no radical revolution can occur. But he tried in vain, for he was not up to such an undertaking. The old ruins were too solidly anchored. Ghosts rose up out of them and mocked him. At this, he became very indignant and laid into them blindly, causing great amusement among those watching when the bats hissed around his ears and got caught in his well-powdered wig. It also happened now and again that he took windmills to be giants and fought against them. It was even more unfortunate for him when, on occasion, he took real giants to be mere windmills, for example, a certain Wolfgang Goethe. He wrote a parody of Goethe's *Werther* in which he misinterpreted most crudely all the intentions of its author.¹¹⁸ Again, he was always right as regards the main point. Even though he did not understand what Goethe really wanted to say with his *Werther*, he understood at least fairly well what its effect would be: the insipid melodrama and sterile sentimentality which sprang up because of this novel and which stood in contradiction to any reasonable way of thinking necessary for us. Here, Nicolai agreed completely with Lessing, who wrote the following judgment of "Werther" to a friend:¹¹⁹

If such an ardent work is not supposed to cause more harm than good, do you not think that it should have a short and cold epilogue? A few hints afterwards as to how Werther became such a bizarre character; how another youth, given by nature a similar predisposition, could protect himself from it. Do you think it likely that ever a Roman or Greek youth would have thus taken his life for the same reason? Certainly not. They knew how to protect themselves from the melodramatics of love in a completely different way; and in the times of Socrates, not even a girl would have been forgiven such raptures of love, which result in such unnatural actions. Only a Christian upbringing, which can so nicely change a bodily need into a spiritual perfection, could have produced such presumptuous originals, at once despicable and valuable. So, dear Goethe, add a small chapter at the end, and the more cynical, the better!

Lessing's friend Nicolai, following these instructions, actually published an altered edition of *Werther*. In this version, the hero did not

¹¹⁸ *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 1774) was the work which made Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832) famous throughout Europe (discussed below in Section One of *The Romantic School*). Nicolai's parody was entitled *Freuden des jungen Werthers* (*Joy of Young Werther*, 1775).

¹¹⁹ The slightly modified quotation is from a letter written by Lessing on October 26, 1774,

shoot himself, but only covered himself with chicken blood, which was in the pistol rather than lead. Werther makes a fool of himself, remains alive, marries Charlotte, in short, has a more tragic ending than in Goethe's original version.

The *Universal German Library*¹²⁰ was the name of the periodical founded by Nicolai and in which he and his friends fought against superstition, Jesuits, court servants, and the like. It cannot be denied that some of the blows aimed against superstition unfortunately also struck poetry. For example, Nicolai challenged the emerging taste for Old German folk-songs. But at base, he was right again. For all their excellence, these songs sometimes did conjure memories which were not right for the times; the old cowherd songs of the Middle Ages might have lured the feelings of the people back into the stables of past beliefs. Like Odysseus, he sought to plug the ears of his contemporaries against the sirens' song, not worrying that they might also become deaf to the innocent tones of the nightingale. This practical man had no reservations about uprooting flowers in order to submit the field of his time to a thorough weeding. In reaction, the faction of flowers and nightingales, and everything which belonged to it, beauty, grace, wit, and humor, rose up in a most hostile manner, and poor Nicolai was defeated.

In today's Germany, the circumstances have changed, and the faction of flowers and nightingales is closely connected to the revolution. To us belongs the future, and our victory already dawns red. If ever its beautiful daylight pours over all of our fatherland, we will also keep the dead in our thoughts; then we will certainly remember you as well, old Nicolai, poor martyr of reason! We will carry your ashes to the German Pantheon, a joyous triumphal procession will surround your sarcophagus, accompanied by a choir of musicians, which, you can be sure, will not include a fife. We will lay the most respectable crown of laurels on your tomb – and try as hard as we can not to laugh.

To give you an idea of the philosophical and religious conditions of that time, I must also mention here those thinkers who worked more or less in cooperation with Nicolai in Berlin, and who created, so to speak, a happy medium between philosophy and *belles-lettres*. They had no definite system, only definite leanings. They are like the English moralists in their style and in their fundamental principles. They do not write in

¹²⁰ In the original, *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*.

a scientifically rigorous form, and moral conscience is the only source of their knowledge. Their leanings are exactly like those of the French philanthropes. In matters of religion, they are rationalists. In matters of politics, they are cosmopolitan. In matters of morality, they are human beings, noble, virtuous human beings, strict with themselves, lenient with others. As far as talent goes, Mendelssohn, Sulzer, Abbt, Moritz, Garve, Engel, and Biester might be named the most excellent.¹²¹ Moritz is my favorite. He accomplished much in the study of experiential psychology. He possessed a precious naïveté, not much understood by his friends. His life story is one of the most important monuments to those times. However, of all of them, Mendelssohn had the greatest social importance. He was the reformer of the German Israelites, his co-religionists; he destroyed the reputation of talmudism and founded the pure Mosaic religion. This man, called “the German Socrates” by his contemporaries, and so reverently admired for his nobility of soul and intelligence, was the son of a poor sexton of the synagogue in Dessau. Aside from this misfortune of birth, providence also burdened him with a hunchback, as if to instruct the rabble in a crude manner to value people for their inner worth rather than for their external appearance. Or, rather, did providence, with equal benevolence, give him a hunchback so that he could attribute some of the unfairness of the rabble to an evil for which a wise man could easily find consolation?

As Luther overthrew the papacy, so Mendelssohn overthrew the Talmud, and in the exactly the same way: by rejecting tradition, declaring the Bible to be the source of religion, and translating its most important part. He thus destroyed Jewish Catholicism as Luther destroyed the Christian version. Indeed, the Talmud is the Catholicism of the Jews. It is a Gothic cathedral, overloaded, to be sure, with childish embellishments, but also reaching audaciously to the heavens in a gigantic way which astonishes us. It is a hierarchy of religious laws, often concerning the oddest and most ridiculous subtleties; but these laws are so ingeniously placed above and below each other, supporting and bearing each other, and work together

¹²¹ Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), philosopher, friend of Kant, and reformer of Judaism, Johann Sulzer (1720–1779), member of the Berlin academy and author of a famous lexicon of aesthetics, Thomas Abbt (1738–1766), member of the Berlin Enlightenment circle, Christian Garve (1742–1798), moral philosopher, Johann Engel (1741–1802), writer, Johann Biester (1749–1816), academician, Karl Philipp Moritz (1756–1793), novelist and psychological investigator. His novel *Anton Reiser* (1794) is autobiographical.

in such a formidably consistent way that they make up a frighteningly defiant and colossal whole.

After Christian Catholicism fell, Jewish Catholicism, the Talmud, had to fall as well, for the Talmud had lost its meaning. It had served as a defensive wall against Rome, and the Jews credit it with having allowed them to resist Christian Rome just as heroically as they once did pagan Rome. And they not only resisted, but also triumphed. The poor Rabbi of Nazareth, above whose dying head the Roman heathens wrote the malicious words “King of the Jews” – this mock-King of the Jews, crowned with thorns, dressed ironically in crimson robes, became in the end the God of the Romans, and they had to kneel down in front of him.¹²² Just like pagan Rome, Christian Rome was also defeated and even became tributary. If, dear reader, you proceed in the first days of the trimester to Rue Laffitte, to be precise, the building at number fifteen, you will see, in front of a high portal, a fat man climbing out of a slow-moving carriage. He will go up a flight of stairs to a small room where a young blond man is sitting. This young man, however, is older than he appears, and in his elegant, lordly nonchalance there is nonetheless something so solid, so positive, so absolute, that it might seem that he has all the money of this world in his pocket. And, indeed, he does have all the money of this world in his pocket, for he is Monsieur James de Rothschild.¹²³ The fat man is Monsignor Garibaldi, representative of his Holy Majesty the Pope, and he is delivering, in the pope’s name, the interest on the Roman loan, the tribute from Rome.

Of what use, then, is the Talmud any longer?

Moses Mendelssohn thus deserves great praise for overturning this Jewish Catholicism, at least in Germany, for it had become superfluous, and what is superfluous is harmful. Rejecting tradition, he nonetheless sought to preserve the Mosaic ceremonial law as a religious duty. Was it cowardice or cleverness? Was it wistful nostalgia which stopped him from laying a destructive hand on the holiest objects of his forefathers for which

¹²² Compare Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1, Section 16: “Who has triumphed for the present, Rome or Judea? But there is no doubt at all: just think about who one bows down to in Rome, as if to the quintessence of all the highest values – and not only in Rome, but over almost half the earth, everywhere man has become tame or wants to become tame –, to three Jews, as you know, and one Jewess (to Jesus of Nazareth, Peter the fisher, Paul the rug-weaver, and the mother of the Jesus named here, called Mary). This is remarkable: without doubt, Rome has lost.”

¹²³ Member of the famed Rothschild banking family.

martyrs had shed so much blood and so many tears? I think not. Kings in the realm of spirit, like those in the realm of matter, must be merciless to their family feelings; one is not allowed to give in to gentle sentimentality, even on the throne of thought. I am rather of the opinion that Moses Mendelssohn saw in pure Mosaism an institution which could serve as a last line of defense for deism, as it were, for deism was his most inner faith and his deepest conviction. When his friend Lessing died and was accused of Spinozism, Mendelssohn defended him with the most fearful zeal, and his anger at this controversy led to his own death.

Here, I have mentioned for the second time a name which no German can speak without hearing a stronger or weaker echo in his own breast. Since Luther, Germany has not produced a greater or better man than Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. These two are our pride and our joy. In the dreary times of the present, we look to their comforting images, and they nod to us in glowing promise. Yes, a third man will come as well, who will finish what Luther began, what Lessing continued, and what the German fatherland so desperately needs – the third liberator! – I can see already his golden armor shining out of the crimson emperor's robe, "like the sun shining out of the rosy dawn!"

As in the case of Luther, Lessing's influence was not only due to his particular deeds, but also to his deep inspiration of the German people, and to his founding of a salutary intellectual movement through his criticism and his polemics. He was the living voice of criticism of his time, and his whole life was polemical. This criticism was aimed at the farthest reaches of thought and feeling, at religion, science, and art. These polemics vanquished every opponent and became stronger after every victory. Lessing, as he himself confessed, needed conflict to develop his own spirit. He was like that legendary Norman who received the talents, knowledge, and powers of those he killed in duels and, in this way, was gifted with all possible advantages and excellences. It is understandable that such an argumentative warrior caused not a little noise in Germany, in quiet Germany, which at the time was even more Sabbath-quiet than today. Most were taken aback by his literary daring. But this daring was of greatest use for him, since "*Oser!*"¹²⁴ is the secret motto of literary as well as revolutionary success – not to mention success in love. All trembled before his sword. No head was secure from it. Indeed, he cut off

¹²⁴ French: *Dare!*

some heads out of pure exhilaration and was malicious enough to pick them off the ground to show the public that they were hollow inside. Those he could not reach with his sword, he killed with arrows of wit. His friends admired the colorful feathers on these arrows; his enemies felt their sharp tips in their hearts. Lessing's wit was not the lively, gay, and leaping whimsy you know here in France. His wit was no small French greyhound running after its own shadow. His wit was much more like a large German tom-cat who plays with a mouse before killing it.

Yes, polemic was the joy of our Lessing, and, for that reason, he never thought too long about the worthiness of his opponent. Ironically, because of his polemics, some names were rescued from well-deserved obscurity. He spun a web of the most inspired mockery and the most precious humor around several tiny little writers, and they are now preserved for eternity in Lessing's works, like insects stuck in amber. He made his opponents immortal at the same time as he killed them. Who of us otherwise would have heard anything about that Klotz, upon whom Lessing wasted so much scorn and acumen?¹²⁵ The boulders he hurled onto this poor classicist to smash him are now his indestructible memorial.

Remarkably, this wittiest person in Germany was also the most honorable. Nothing equals his love of truth. Lessing did not make the smallest concession to falsehood, even as a tactic to promote the victory of truth, in the normal manner of the worldly-wise. He did everything for truth, except lie. He once said, "He who thinks about bringing truth to a man in all sorts of masks and make-up may well be her pimp but has never been her lover."

Buffon's wonderful saying, "The style is the man!" applies to no one better than Lessing.¹²⁶ His way of writing is just like his character, true, solid, unadorned, beautiful, and impressive through its inner strength. His style is like the style of Roman architecture, the highest solidity paired with the highest simplicity. His sentences rest on each other like pillars; held together, as with invisible cement, by logical reasoning, as the others are joined by the law of gravity. Thus, Lessing's prose uses so few expletives and turns of phrase, which in our periods function as a kind of

¹²⁵ Christian Klotz (1738–1771), professor of rhetoric in Halle, subject of Lessing's *Antiquarian Letters* (1768–1769).

¹²⁶ George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707–1788), French naturalist.

mortar. We find even fewer of those caryatids of thought, which you in France call “la belle phrase.”¹²⁷

As you can easily understand, a man like Lessing could never have been happy. And even if he had not loved truth and even if he had not by his own choice defended it everywhere, he would have had to have been unhappy, for he was a genius. “They will forgive you anything,” a sighing poet said recently, “Your wealth is forgiven, your high birth is forgiven, your good proportions are forgiven, they even wink at your talent, but there is no mercy for genius.” Alas! And even if others harbor him no ill intentions, a genius still finds within himself an enemy to bring him misery. Thus, the history of great men has always been a story of martyrs. Even if they did not suffer for all of humanity, they still suffered for their own greatness, for the type of greatness of their being, which is completely opposed to the Philistine, for their discomfort at the boastful normality, the smiling mediocrity of their environment – a discomfort which naturally brings them to extravagances, for example, to the playhouse or even to playing cards, as happened to poor Lessing.

No worse than this has been spoken of Lessing, and from his biography we learn only that he found pretty actresses more amusing than pastors from Hamburg, and that the mute cards gave him better conversation than chatty Wolffians.¹²⁸

It is heart-breaking when we read in this biography how fate took every joy from this man, and how it was not even granted to him to recover from his daily conflicts in the comfort of familial surroundings. Only once did fortune seem to favor him, she gave him a dear wife and a child – but this happiness was like the ray of sun which gilds the wing of a passing bird. It vanished as quickly as it came; the wife died in childbirth, the child soon after, and about the latter he wrote a friend with horrible wit:¹²⁹

My joy was short-lived. And I was loathe to lose him, this son. For he had so much understanding! So very much understanding! – Do not think that my few hours of paternity made me into a fool of a father; I know whereof I speak. – Was it not understanding that he had to be pulled into the world with iron forceps? That he so quickly smelled a

¹²⁷ French: flowery language.

¹²⁸ A reference to Johann Melchior Goeze (1717–1786), a pastor in Hamburg with whom Lessing had a prolonged and bitter exchange.

¹²⁹ Slightly modified quotation from a letter of December 31, 1777.

rat? – Was it not understanding that he took the first opportunity to escape again? – I wanted for once to have it as good as other people. But it did not suit me.

There was one misfortune about which Lessing never wrote to his friends: this was his dreadful loneliness, his spiritual isolation. Some of his contemporaries loved him, but no one understood him. Mendelssohn, his best friend, defended him with passion when he was accused of Spinozism. Defense and passion were as absurd as unnecessary. Rest in peace, old Moses. It is true that your Lessing was on the way to this horrible error, to this wretched misfortune, namely, to Spinozism – but the Most High, the father in heaven, saved him at the right time through death. Rest in peace, your Lessing was no Spinozist, as was slanderously claimed. He died a good deist, like you and Nicolai and Teller and the “Universal German Library”!

Lessing was simply the prophet who, starting from the second testament, pointed beyond it to the third.¹³⁰ I have said that he continued the work of Luther, and it is in this light that I must discuss him here. Only later can I speak of his importance for German art. In the latter, he brought about a salutary reform not only by means of his criticism but also through his example, and this side of his activity is the one which is usually most emphasized and elucidated. We, however, consider him from a different standpoint, and his philosophical and theological conflicts are more important to us than his dramaturgy and his dramas. The latter, however, like all of his writings, have social importance, and *Nathan the Wise*¹³¹ is not merely good comedy but also fundamentally a philosophical-theological treatise in favor of pure deism. Art was for Lessing likewise a grandstand, and when he was pushed off the pulpit and lectern, he leaped to the theater, and spoke even more clearly there and won a still greater audience.

I say that Lessing continued the work of Luther. After Luther freed us from tradition and made the Bible into the sole source of Christianity, there arose, as I have discussed above, a rigid worship of the word, and the

¹³⁰ A reference to the *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (*The Education of Humanity*, 1780), where Lessing prophesies a new, third Gospel, which will preach virtue for its own sake.

¹³¹ Lessing wrote *Nathan der Weise* (1779) after he was prohibited by his employer, the Duke of Brunswick, from engaging in debates about religion. In this comedy, members of the three major monotheistic faiths learn that they share a common respect for humanity as well as hidden family relationships.

letter of the Bible ruled just as tyrannically as once tradition had. Lessing was the one who contributed most to our liberation from the tyranny of the letter. Just as Luther was not the only opponent of tradition, Lessing, too, had his allies, but he was the most forceful in the fight against the letter. This is where his battle-voice rings out the loudest. This is where his sword swings most happily; it shines and kills. However, this is also where Lessing was the most pressed by the black legions, and in such distress he once called out:

O sancta simplicitas!¹³² – But I have not yet reached the point, where that good man stood, who, when he called this out, had only this to call out (Hus spoke these words at the stake). We will only be heard and judged by the one who can and should hear and judge us!

Oh, if only he could, he, whom I would like best to have as my judge. – You, Luther! – Great, misunderstood man! And misunderstood by nobody more than by those obstinate ones who, with your slippers in hand, stroll along the path you cleared, shouting, but indifferent. – You saved us from the yoke of tradition; who will save us from the even more unbearable yoke of the letter! Who will finally bring us a Christianity as you yourself would have taught; as Christ himself would have taught!¹³³

Yes, the letter, said Lessing, is the last veil of Christianity, and only after this veil falls will the spirit emerge. This spirit, however, is no different from what the Wolffian philosophers thought they were demonstrating, what the philanthropists felt in their souls, what Mendelssohn found in Mosaism, what the freemasons sang and the poets whistled, what made itself heard at that time in Germany in every form: pure deism.

Lessing died in Braunschweig in the year 1781, misunderstood, hated, and in ill repute. In the same year, *The Critique of Pure Reason* by Immanuel Kant appeared, in Königsberg. With this book, which, curiously, was not generally known until the end of the eighties, a spiritual revolution begins in Germany which has the oddest analogies with the material revolution in France, and to which the serious thinker must assign equal importance. It went through the same phases, and there is the most remarkable parallelism between the two. On both sides of the Rhine, we see the same break with the past; all reverence for tradition is annulled. As with every law here in France, in Germany every thought must be justified, and as

¹³² Latin: O holy simplicity!

¹³³ A modified quotation from Lessing's polemic, *A Parable* (1778).

here the monarchy, the keystone of the old social order, there deism is overthrown, the keystone of the spiritual *ancien régime*.

We will speak of this catastrophe, of 21 January of the deists in the following section.¹³⁴ A unique horror, a mysterious piety does not allow us to write any further today. Our heart is full of terrible compassion – it is old Jehovah himself who is readying himself for death.¹³⁵ We have gotten to know him so well, from his cradle, in Egypt, where he was raised among the divine calves, crocodiles, holy onions, ibises, and cats – We saw him bid farewell to the playmates of his childhood, along with the obelisks and sphinxes of his homeland, the Nile valley, and become a small God-King in Palestine over a poor shepherd people, living in his own temple palace. – We saw later how he came into contact with Assyrian-Babylonian civilization and gave up his all-too-human passions, no longer spewed pure wrath and vengeance, or at least no longer went into rages about every little trifle. – We saw him emigrate to Rome, the capital city, where he gave up all national prejudice and proclaimed the heavenly equality of all peoples. With such splendid phrases, we saw him form a party in opposition to old Jupiter, intrigue long enough to come to power and rule from the Capitol over city and world, *urbem et orbem*. – We saw how he became even more ethereal, how he gently whined, how he became a loving father, a general friend of mankind, a benefactor of the world, a philanthropist – none of this could help him.

Do you hear the bell ringing? Kneel down – Sacraments are being brought to a dying God.

Book Three

As the legend goes, there was once an English mechanic who, having invented the most clever machines, finally decided to put together a person. He was eventually able to do it. His handiwork could deport itself and behave just like a person. In its leather bosom, it carried a kind of human sensibility, really not too different from the normal feelings of the English. It could communicate its feelings in articulate sounds, and the audible noise of its inner gears, rasps, and screws gave these sounds a true English accent. In short, this automaton was a perfect

¹³⁴ Louis XVI was beheaded on January 21, 1793.

¹³⁵ Nietzsche also repeatedly speaks of the “death of God” and the “murder of God.” See, for example, *The Gay Science*, Book 3, Section 125.

gentleman,¹³⁶ and the only thing which prevented it from being a real person was a soul. The English mechanic, however, was unable to give him one, and the poor creature, having become aware of this deficiency, tormented his creator day and night, pleading with him for a soul. This plea, repeated ever more urgently, became so unbearable to the artificer that, finally, he fled from his own handiwork. The automaton, however, took the express post right away and followed him to the continent. There, he constantly travels behind his creator, now and then catching up, rattling and grunting at him: "*Give me a soul!*"¹³⁷ These two figures can be seen in every country now, but only those familiar with their particular relationship understand their strange haste and their anxious ill-humor. If you are familiar with it, you can see in it a reflection of something universal; you see how one part of the English people is tired of its mechanistic existence and demands a soul; the other part, however, is driven ever onwards by fear of such a desire. Neither of them can bear to be at home anymore.

This is a horrifying story. It is dreadful when the body we have made demands a soul from us. But it is far more horrifying, dreadful, and uncanny when we have made a soul, and it demands its body from us and chases after us. When we think a thought, we have made such a soul, and our thought gives us no peace until we give it its body, until we have brought it to sensory appearance. The thought wants to be deed; the word wants to be flesh. And wondrously! A human being, like God in the Bible, has only to express his thought, and the world forms itself; there is light or there is darkness, the water divides itself from the dry land, or wild beasts even appear.¹³⁸ The world is the word's signature.¹³⁹

Take note of this, you proud men of deeds. You are nothing but the unconscious servants of those men of thought, who, often in modest silence, have plotted out all of your doings in advance. Maximilian Robespierre was nothing but the hand of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the bloody hand, which, from the womb of his time, pulled out a body for the soul which Rousseau made. That restless anxiety which haunted the life of Jean Jacques, did it perhaps arise because he sensed in spirit what sort of midwife his thoughts needed to come bodily into the world?

¹³⁶ In English in the original. ¹³⁷ In English in the original.

¹³⁸ A reference to the creation story in the first book of Genesis.

¹³⁹ Signature (*Signatur* in German) is a term taken from the tradition of nature mysticism, referring to hidden correspondences between different realms of nature, for example, the inner and the outer.

Old Fontenelle¹⁴⁰ was perhaps right when he said, “If I had all of the thoughts of this world in my hand, I would be quite careful not to open it.” I, however, think otherwise about myself. If I had all the thoughts of this world in my hand – I might well ask you to cut it off immediately; I could never keep it closed for long. I am not fit to be a jailer of thoughts. No, by God, I set them free, no matter what. They may be embodied in the most dubious phenomena, they may storm through all lands like a crazy Bacchantic procession, they may crush our innocent flowers with their thyrsus staffs, they may break into our hospitals and chase the sick old world from its beds, no matter – though it will weigh upon my heart, and I myself will suffer because of it. For alas! I myself belong to this sick old world, and what the poet says is true: making fun of your crutches does not help you walk better. I am the most sick of all of you and all the more pitiable because I know what health is. You, however, you do not know it; you are enviable. You are capable of dying without even noticing it. Yes, many of you are long dead and still declare that your true life is only now beginning. If I contradict these delusions, people are angry with me and revile me, and – horribly! – their corpses jump up at me and curse me. More than their insults, their scent of decay oppresses me . . . Away, you spirits! For I now speak of a man whose very name carries with it a power of exorcism; I speak of Immanuel Kant.¹⁴¹

It is said that night spirits become alarmed at the sight of an executioner’s sword. – How terrified they must have been when Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* was put in front of them. This book is the sword with which deism was executed in Germany.

To be perfectly honest, you French are tame and moderate in comparison with us Germans. The most you did was to behead a king, but this king had already lost his head before you cut it off. And at the same time you felt it necessary to bang your drum, shout, and stamp your feet so that the whole world shook. It is really far too great an honor for Maximilian Robespierre to be compared to Immanuel Kant. Maximilian Robespierre, that grand *petit-bourgeois* from Rue Saint-Honoré, indeed had his fits of destruction against the monarchy, and trembled terribly enough in regicidal epilepsy; but as soon as the idea of the Highest Being came up, he wiped the foam from his mouth and the blood from his hands and put on

¹⁴⁰ Bernard de Fontenelle, French writer (1657–1757).

¹⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, the main subject of Book Three, preeminent German philosopher (1724–1804).

his Sunday best with the bright buttons, and even stuck some flowers in his vest.¹⁴²

Immanuel Kant's life story is difficult to describe, because he had neither a life nor a story. He lived a mechanically ordered, almost abstract bachelor existence in a quiet isolated lane in Königsberg, an old city on the north-eastern border of Germany. In my opinion, not even the great cathedral clock there went about its daily labor with less passion and more regularity than its compatriot Immanuel Kant. Getting up, drinking coffee, writing, giving lectures, eating, walking: everything had its set time, and the neighbors knew that it was exactly half past three when Immanuel Kant, in his grey frock-coat, rattan cane in hand, emerged from his front door and strolled in the direction of small Lindenallee, which is still called "Philosopher's Way" on his account. He walked there eight times back and forth in every season, and when the weather was dismal or grey clouds indicated rain, one would see his servant, old Lampe, walking with anxious concern behind him, a long umbrella under his arm, like an image of Providence.

What a remarkable contrast between the external life of this man and his destructive, world-crushing thought! Indeed, had the citizens of Königsberg sensed the true meaning of this thought, they would have been in much greater dread of him than of the executioner – the executioner, namely, who only kills people. But the good citizens saw in him only a professor of philosophy, and when he walked by at the proper time, they gave him friendly greetings, and set their watches.

If, however, Immanuel Kant, the great destroyer in the realm of thought, far surpassed Maximilian Robespierre in terrorism, the two, on the other hand, had certain similarities, which invite us to compare them. First, we find in both the same unrelenting, cutting, unpoetic, and sober honesty. Next, we find in both the same aptitude for distrust, only that the first exercises it upon thought and calls it criticism, whereas the second uses it against people and calls it republican virtue. Yet, both demonstrate to the highest degree the type of the *petit-bourgeois* – nature had meant for them to measure out coffee and sugar, but fate forced them to weigh other things, and put a God and a King, respectively, on their scales . . .

¹⁴² Robespierre, born poor, lived in the Rue Saint-Honoré. In May 1794, he reversed the revolutionary persecution of religion with a new cult of the Supreme Being.

And they found their true weight!

The *Critique of Pure Reason* is Kant's main work, and it will be our main focus. No other writing of Kant has greater importance. As I have already mentioned, this book appeared in 1781 but did not become well known until 1789. In the beginning, it was completely overlooked, and only two unimportant reviews of it appeared. Only later did articles by Schütz, Schultz, and Reinhold bring the attention of the public to this great book.¹⁴³ The cause of its delayed recognition is probably its unusual form and poor style. As for the latter, Kant merits greater censure than any other philosopher, all the more so if we consider the better style of his earlier works. His first essays appear in the recently published collection of his small writings, and we are amazed at the good, sometimes very witty style. Kant worked out his great work in his head first, but these short essays he hummed aloud to himself. He smiles in them like a soldier calmly arming himself for a battle in which he is certain of victory. Particularly notable among these small writings are the following: *General Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* (written 1755), *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (written ten years later), as well as the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*,¹⁴⁴ full of good cheer in the style of French *essais*. Kantian wit, as expressed in these writings, is most unique. It climbs like ivy around his thought, and despite its weakness, attains a healthy height. Without such support, even the richest wit cannot flourish. Like a grapevine without a stake, it creeps miserably along the ground and goes to rot along with its most precious fruits.

Why, though, did Kant write his *Critique of Pure Reason* in the grey, dry style of a paper bag? Since he rejected the mathematical form of the Descartes-Leibniz-Wolffians, I think he was afraid that philosophical science would forfeit some of its dignity if it expressed itself in an easy, accessibly bright tone. He thus gave it a rigid, abstract form which coldly rejected all familiarity with the lower spiritual classes. He wanted, in aristocratic fashion, to separate himself from the contemporary "popular philosophers" who strove for the most bourgeois clarity, and he clothed

¹⁴³ Christian Gottfried Schütz (1747–1832), co-founder of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* (*Universal Book Review Newspaper*) in Jena; Johann Schulz (1739–1805), mathematician and colleague of Kant in Königsberg; Karl Leonhard Reinhold (1758–1823), professor of philosophy in Jena, and author of the *Letters on the Kantian Philosophy* (1790/1792).

¹⁴⁴ Published in 1766.

his thoughts in courtly and chilled officialese.¹⁴⁵ Here, the philistine shows himself in full. But perhaps Kant needed an even more carefully deliberate language for his carefully deliberate mode of thought, and he was incapable of creating a better one. Only genius finds a new word for the new thought. But Immanuel Kant was no genius. Feeling this deficiency, just like the good Maximilian, Kant was even more distrustful of genius, and in his *Critique of Judgment*, he even claims that genius has nothing to do with science, its contributions belonging solely to the realm of art.

Kant did much harm with the starchy and ponderous style of his major work. His soul-less imitators mimicked him in this regard, and this led to the superstition among us that good writing was incompatible with being a philosopher. But at least the mathematical form of philosophy could no longer be used after Kant, who mercilessly criticized it in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. He said that mathematical form in philosophy creates nothing but card houses, just as philosophical form in mathematics is mere chatter. For in philosophy there can be no definitions like those in mathematics, where definitions are not discursive, but intuitive, that is, can be demonstrated in intuition; what are called definitions in philosophy can only be produced experimentally, hypothetically; really true definitions appear only at the end, as results.¹⁴⁶

How is it that philosophers demonstrate so much fondness for mathematical form? This fondness began as far back as Pythagoras, who designated the principles of things by numbers.¹⁴⁷ This was a thought of genius. In a number, everything sensuous and finite is stripped away, and yet it designates something definite and this definite thing's relationship to something else definite, which, when also expressed by a number, has the same characteristics of non-sensuousness and non-finiteness. In all of this, numbers are like ideas, which have the same characteristics and the same relationship to each other. Ideas, as they appear in our minds and in nature, can very well be designated by numbers; but the number remains always the mere sign of the idea, not the idea itself. The master is always aware of this difference; the pupil however forgets it and transmits

¹⁴⁵ The "popular philosophers" were members of the German Enlightenment who attempted to spread their beliefs to the reading public by writing in a non-technical manner.

¹⁴⁶ Kant makes these distinctions in the section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled "The Discipline of Pure Reason in its Dogmatic Use," beginning at A712/B740.

¹⁴⁷ Pythagoras, ancient Greek philosopher (c. 580–c. 500 BC).

to his students only a hieroglyphics of numbers, mere numerals, whose living meaning is no longer known and which are parroted with a sort of school pride. The same is true of the other elements of mathematical form. The spiritual in its eternal movement cannot be fixed; just as little by line, triangle, square, and circle as by number. Thought can be neither counted nor measured.

Since my main goal is to make the study of German philosophy easier in France, I will concentrate on those external features which can easily scare off the foreigner who is not yet familiar with them. I would like especially to point out to *littérateurs* who wish to revise Kant for a French audience that they can omit that part of Kant's philosophy which aims at combating the absurdities of Wolffian philosophy. This polemic, which is visible everywhere, can produce only confusion among the French, certainly nothing useful.

The *Critique of Pure Reason*, as I have said, is Kant's main work, and his other writings can be seen as more or less dispensable or, at the most, as commentaries. The social importance of this main work will become apparent in the following.

Philosophers before Kant have thought, it is true, about the origin of our knowledge and, as we have already shown, they have gone down two different paths according to whether they accepted ideas *a priori* or ideas *a posteriori*. However, there has been less thought about our faculty of knowledge itself, about its extent, or about its boundaries. This now became Kant's task: he subjected our faculty of knowledge to an unsparing investigation; he sounded all of the depths of this faculty and established all of its boundaries. Indeed, he found that we can know nothing at all about a great number of things which we earlier thought to know most intimately. That was quite irksome. But it was undeniably useful to know which things there were about which we could know nothing. It is just as helpful to us to be warned away from useless paths as to be shown the right one. Kant proved to us that we know nothing of things as they are in and for themselves, rather we know of them only to the extent that they are reflected in our mind. Thus, we are just like the prisoners spoken of so gloomily in the seventh book of Plato's *Republic*:¹⁴⁸ these unfortunates, bound by the throat and legs so that they cannot turn their heads, sit in a prison open above, and from above they get some light.

¹⁴⁸ The famous myth of the cave, found at the beginning of the seventh book of the *Republic*.

This light, however, comes from a fire burning above and behind them, and, in addition, separated from them by a small wall. People carrying all sorts of statues and images of wood and stone walk along this wall, speaking with one another. The poor prisoners can see nothing of these people, who are not as tall as the wall. They see only the shadows of the statues the people are carrying, which stick out above the wall, and these shadows move back and forth on the wall which faces them. They take these shadows to be real things and, deceived by the echo of their prison, think that it is the shadows which converse with one another.

Philosophy, before the appearance of Kant, had run around sniffing at things, collecting and classifying features of them. With Kant, this ended, and he led research back into the human mind and investigated what was revealed there. Thus, he compared his philosophy, not unjustly, to the method of Copernicus.¹⁴⁹ Earlier, when the world was assumed to stand still, and the sun was assumed to revolve around it, astronomical measurements were not especially consistent. Copernicus let the sun stand still and the earth orbit it; and, look, now everything worked out splendidly. Earlier, reason, like the sun, orbited the world of appearances and sought to illuminate it; Kant, however, let reason, the sun, stand still, and he let the world of appearances orbit around it and become illuminated whenever it entered into the realm of this sun.

From these few words indicating Kant's task, everyone will see that I consider the most important part of his book, and the center of his philosophy, to be the part where he treats so-called phenomena and noumena.¹⁵⁰ Kant, namely, distinguishes between the appearances of things and things in themselves. Since we can only know something about things insofar as they reveal themselves to us through appearance, and since, therefore, things do not show themselves to us as they are in and for themselves, so Kant labeled the things, inasmuch as they appear, phenomena, and the things in and for themselves, noumena. We can only know something about things as phenomena; we can know nothing of them as noumena. The latter are only problematic; we cannot say "they exist," nor "they do not exist." Indeed, the word noumenon is contrasted to the word phenomenon only in order to be able to speak of things inasmuch as they are

¹⁴⁹ In the Preface to the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*.

¹⁵⁰ In the section entitled: "On the Grounds for the Division of All Objects into Phenomena and Noumena," beginning at A235/B294.

knowable to us, without our judgment touching on things which are not knowable.

Thus, Kant, unlike some teachers who will remain nameless here, did not divide things into phenomena and noumena, into things which exist for us and things which do not exist for us. This would be a philosophical Irish bull.¹⁵¹ He only wanted to give us a *Grenzbegriff*.¹⁵²

God is, for Kant, a noumenon. According to his argumentation, the transcendental ideal being which we have, up to now, called God is nothing but a fiction. It arose through a natural illusion. Indeed, Kant shows that we can know nothing of that noumenon, God, and that even any future proof of his existence is impossible. We must write Dante's words: "Abandon all hope!" above this section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

I think many would like to see me relieved of the task of explicating this section, which treats of "the Grounds of Proof Used by Speculative Reason to Derive the Existence of a Highest Being,"¹⁵³ in a way comprehensible to the general reader. Although the actual refutation of these grounds of proof does not take up much space and only emerges in the second half of the book, it is aimed at with the greatest intent from the very beginning, and it is among the book's central conclusions. The "Critique of all Speculative Theology"¹⁵⁴ is attached to it, and all of the other cloud castles of the deists are destroyed. I must add that Kant, in attacking the three main types of argument for God's existence, namely the ontological, the cosmological, and the physico-theological, in my opinion destroys the latter two, but not the first. I do not know if the above expressions are known here, and I thus will provide the passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant formulates these distinctions:

Only three types of proof of God's existence by means of speculative reason are possible. All of the routes which one might take towards this goal begin either with determinate experience and the particular make-up of our sensory world known through it, rising from it according to the laws of causality up to the highest cause outside of the world; or they are based only on indeterminate experience, that

¹⁵¹ I.e., a contradiction in terms.

¹⁵² German: limit-concept. A *Grenzbegriff* is a placemaker which represents negatively the limits of our knowledge.

¹⁵³ Begins at A583/B611.

¹⁵⁴ The section is entitled in full "The Critique of all Theology Based Upon Speculative Principles of Reason," and begins at A631/B659.

is, of some existence or other; or, finally, they abstract from all experience and conclude entirely *a priori* from mere concepts the existence of a highest cause. The first proof is the physico-teleological, the second, the cosmological, and the third is the ontological. There are no more of them, and there also cannot be any more.¹⁵⁵

After studying Kant's main work many times, I came to believe that the polemic against those existing proofs of God's existence is present everywhere, and I would discuss it in more detail if my religious feeling did not restrain me. As soon as I see someone discussing the existence of God, the same singular anxiety arises in me, the same uncanny sense of oppression which I once felt visiting New Bedlam in London, when, surrounded entirely by the insane, I lost sight of my guide.¹⁵⁶ "God is all that is"; doubt about him is doubt about life itself, it is death.

If, however, discussion about the existence of God is deplorable, all the more praiseworthy is contemplation of the nature of God. Such contemplation is true worship of God. By means of it, our soul is taken away from the finite and the transitory and arrives at a consciousness of original goodness and eternal harmony. This consciousness stirs the man of feeling in prayer or in meditation on ritual symbols. The thinker attains this holy mood in the exercise of that sublime power of thought which we call reason and which has as its highest task the investigation of the nature of God. Those who are especially religious have been occupied with this task from childhood on; they are secretly tormented by it at the first stirrings of reason. The author of these pages is himself most joyfully aware of such early, original religiosity, and it has never left him. God was always the beginning and end of all my thoughts.¹⁵⁷ When I now ask: What is God? What is his nature?, so as a child I asked: What is God like? How does he look? And at the time, I could spend entire days gazing into the heavens, growing morose when evening came because I never saw the most holy countenance of God, but always only grey, stupid faces in the clouds. I was utterly confused by astronomical information, which, in that era of Enlightenment, even the smallest children were not spared, and I never ceased to be amazed that all these billions of stars were globes just as large and beautiful as our own, and that above this luminous

¹⁵⁵ This quotation, which contains slight modifications by Heine, can be found at A590/B618.

¹⁵⁶ New Bedlam was an asylum for the insane outside of London.

¹⁵⁷ Compare also Heine's later proclamation of his "return to God," discussed below in the "Afterword" to *Romanzero* and the *Confessions*.

throng of worlds a single God ruled. I recall that once in a dream I saw God on high in the greatest distance. He looked down, pleased, through a small window in the sky, a pious old face with a small Jew's beard, and he scattered a bunch of seeds which, as they fell from heaven, opened up, as it were, in infinite space, expanding immensely until they were beaming, blooming, populated worlds, each as large as our own globe. I have never been able to forget this vision. Often in dreams I would see the happy old man sowing his world seeds out of the small window in the heavens; once I even saw him clicking his tongue just like our maid, when she threw the chickens their barley. I could see only how each of the falling seeds grew into a large luminous globe; but the huge chickens which may have been lurking somewhere with open beaks, waiting to be fed with the scattered globes, those I could not see.

You smile, dear reader, about these huge chickens. However, this childish idea is not so different from the view of the most mature deists. The Occident and the Orient have exhausted themselves in childish hyperboles, attempting to conceptualize their unworldly God. The imagination of the deists has also struggled in vain with the infinity of space and time. Here, their powerlessness is entirely on display, the weakness of their worldview, of their idea of the nature of God. For this reason, it does not disturb us very much when this idea is destroyed. But Kant wounded them deeply when he destroyed their proofs of the existence of God.

Saving the ontological proof would not be particularly useful for deism, since this proof can also be used for pantheism. To make myself more understandable, let me remark that the ontological proof is the one produced by Descartes, and which was expressed a long time ago in the Middle Ages by Anselm of Canterbury in the form of a prayer. Indeed, one can also say that St. Augustine had already produced the ontological proof in the second book of *De Libero Arbitrio*.¹⁵⁸

As earlier stated, I will refrain from any popularization of the Kantian polemic against those proofs. I will merely assert that, since then, deism has faded in the realm of speculative reason. It will perhaps require a few centuries for this distressing death announcement to be heard

¹⁵⁸ The ontological argument, which claims that the idea of God implies God's existence, can be found in the fifth of Descartes *Meditations*, in the *Proslogion* of the scholastic theologian and philosopher St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), and in rudimentary form, in the above-mentioned passage in Augustine.

everywhere – but we have been wearing our mourning clothes for a long time already. *De profundis!*¹⁵⁹

You think we are ready to go home now? By no means! There is still one play left. After the tragedy comes the farce. Up to now, Immanuel Kant has, as relentless philosopher, played the tragic hero: he has stormed heaven, he has disposed of the whole crew, the ruler of the world swims, unprovable, in his own blood, there is now no more mercy, no fatherly benevolence, no reward in the hereafter for abstinence now, the immortality of the soul lies in its final agonies – moans and death rattles –; and old Lampe stands there with his umbrella under his arm, watching in dismay, his face dripping with anxious sweat and tears. Seeing this, Immanuel Kant takes pity and shows that he is not merely a great philosopher but also a good person. He thinks, and half with goodwill and half with irony, he speaks: “Old Lampe has to have a God, otherwise the poor man cannot be happy – people, however, should be happy in this world – that is what practical reason says – well, what do I know? – maybe we can let practical reason vouch for the existence of God.” As a result of this argument, Kant distinguishes between theoretical and practical reason and with the latter, as with a magic wand, he again animates the corpse of deism which had been killed by theoretical reason.¹⁶⁰

Did Kant stage this resurrection not just for old Lampe but also for the police? Or did he really act out of conviction? Was his true intent in destroying all proofs of God’s existence just to show us the difficulty of not being able to know anything about the existence of God? Here, he was almost as wise as my Westphalian friend, who, first, destroyed all of the lanterns on Grohnderstraße in Göttingen, and then delivered a long speech to us in the darkness about the practical necessity of lanterns – which he claimed to have thus destroyed for theoretical reasons, just to show us that without them we could not see.

I have already mentioned that the *Critique of Pure Reason* did not make the least sensation when it appeared. Only several years later when a few astute philosophers wrote commentaries about it did it awaken the attention of the public, and in 1789 nothing was more talked about in Germany than Kant’s philosophy. It already had a profusion of commentaries,

¹⁵⁹ Latin: from the depths, the beginning of a prayer for the dead. Nietzsche also speaks in many places (for example, again section 125 of *The Gay Science*) about the centuries of delay for the impact of events in the world of thought.

¹⁶⁰ This passage refers to the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788).

anthologies, explanations, reviews, apologies, etc. You need only glance at the first good philosophical catalogue you find, and the enormous number of works which appeared at the time about Kant gives ample testimony of the spiritual movement which started with this one man. In one, you see bubbling enthusiasm, in the other a bitter annoyance, and in many a wide-eyed curiosity about the end results of this spiritual revolution. We have uprisings in the world of ideas just as you do in the material world, and tearing down the old dogmatism makes us as hot as storming the Bastille makes you. To be sure, here too there were just a few old invalids who defended dogmatism, that is, Wolffian philosophy. It was a revolution and it did not lack in atrocities. Among the faction of the past, it was the truly good Christians who were the least indignant about these atrocities. Indeed, they wanted even more terrible atrocities in order to exhaust all patience, and thus to spark the counterrevolution, as necessary reaction, all the more quickly. There were philosophical pessimists here just as you had political pessimists. Some of our pessimists deceived themselves so far as to think that Kant had a secret agreement with them, and that he had only destroyed all previous proofs of God's existence so that the world would see that one can never reach knowledge of God through reason, and that one would therefore be forced to adhere to revealed religion.

Kant did not produce this great intellectual movement by means of the content of his writings, but rather through the critical spirit which reigned in them, and which now penetrated into all of the sciences. Every discipline was seized by it. Even poetry was not spared its influence. Schiller, for example, was a powerful Kantian and his views of art are heavy with the spirit of Kantian philosophy.¹⁶¹ This Kantian philosophy, with its abstract dryness, was quite damaging to literature and the fine arts. Fortunately, it did not influence the culinary arts.

The Germans are not easily moved, but once they are brought onto some course or other they will follow it with dogged persistence until the very end, as was demonstrated earlier in regard to religious issues. And now we have demonstrated it in regard to philosophy. Will we be equally consistent in our political progress?

Germany was placed upon a philosophical course by Kant, and philosophy became a matter of national importance. A wonderful crowd of

¹⁶¹ Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), second literary giant (following his friend, Goethe) of the Classical Age of German literature, studied Kant's philosophy intensively.

grand thinkers suddenly sprouted up from German soil as if conjured. If at some point, like the French Revolution, German philosophy finds its Thiers and Mignet, its history will be just as fascinating reading; the German will read it with pride, the Frenchman with admiration.¹⁶²

Among the students of Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte stood out early on.¹⁶³

I almost despair of giving a true idea of the importance of this man. In the case of Kant, we needed to consider only one book. But here, in addition to the book, we must also take into account a man; in this man, thought and character are one, and they act upon their surrounding world in this magnificent unity. We thus have to explain more than a philosophy, but a character, as well, which conditioned this philosophy, so to speak; and, to understand the influence of both, we would also need to present the conditions of those times. What a vast task! We will no doubt meet with your complete indulgence if we are only able to offer scanty information here.

It is quite difficult to speak even of Fichte's thought. Here, too, we encounter unique difficulties, relating not only to content but also to form and method. We would like to begin to make the non-German familiar with these latter two. First then, about Fichte's method. At first, it is completely borrowed from Kant. But soon this method changes because of the nature of its object. Kant, namely, had only a critique, that is, something negative; Fichte, however, was later to create a system, thus something positive. Because of the lack of such a definite system, Kantian philosophy was occasionally refused the title "philosophy." This is correct for Immanuel Kant himself, but by no means for the Kantians, who put together a considerable number of definite systems out of Kant's theorems. In his early writings, Fichte remains, as I have said, loyal to the Kantian method, to the extent that his first treatise, when it appeared anonymously, was able to be taken for a work of Kant's. Later, however, since he sets up a system, he begins to construct zealously, even idiosyncratically, and when he has constructed the entire world, he begins just as zealously and idiosyncratically to demonstrate his constructions from top to bottom. In this construction and demonstration Fichte reveals an abstract passion, so to speak. Just as it dominates the system itself, subjectivity soon also

¹⁶² Adolphe Thiers (1797–1877) and François-Auguste Mignet (1796–1884), historians of the French Revolution.

¹⁶³ Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), German post-Kantian philosopher.

controls its manner of presentation. Kant, on the other hand, lays his thought in front of him, dissects it, and cuts it into its finest fibers. His *Critique of Pure Reason* is, as it were, the anatomical theater of the spirit. He himself remains cold, devoid of feeling, like a true surgeon.

As the method, so also the form of Fichte's writings. It is lively, but it has all of the mistakes of life; it is restless and tangled. To be truly lively, Fichte spurns the conventional terminology of philosophers which seems to him something dead. But, this makes it even harder for us to arrive at an understanding of it. In general, Fichte has many strange ideas about understanding. When Reinhold agreed with him, Fichte explained that no one understood him better than Reinhold. But when Reinhold later deviated from him, Fichte declared that Reinhold never had understood him. When he had differences with Kant, he wrote that Kant did not understand himself. Here, I am emphasizing the rather comic side of our philosophers. They constantly complain about not being understood. When Hegel lay on his deathbed, he said: "Only one person understood me"; but immediately thereafter he added in annoyance, "And even he did not understand me."

In regard to its content in and for itself, Fichte's philosophy has no great importance. It had no social consequences. It is only of some interest insofar as it is one of the most remarkable phases of German philosophy in general, insofar as it documents the fruitlessness of idealism taken to its logical conclusion, and insofar as it provides the necessary transition to today's *Naturphilosophie*. Since, therefore, this content is more important historically and scientifically than socially, I will describe it as briefly as possible.

The problem Fichte sets for himself is this: what grounds do we have to assume that our impressions of objects also correspond to things outside of us? And the solution he gives: all things have reality only in our mind.

If the *Critique of Pure Reason* is Kant's chief work, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is Fichte's.¹⁶⁴ This book is, so to speak, a sequel to Kant's. The *Wissenschaftslehre* also refers the mind back to itself. But where Kant analyzes, Fichte constructs. The *Wissenschaftslehre* begins with an abstract formula ($I = I$) and creates the world from the depths of the mind. It fits together again the pieces which had been taken apart and traces backwards

¹⁶⁴ Fichte published a series of books under the title *Wissenschaftslehre*, which can be translated *Doctrine of Science* or *Theory of Knowledge*, the first and best known in 1794 entitled *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (*Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*).

the path of abstraction until it reaches the world of appearance. This world of appearance can then be explained by the mind as a series of necessary actions of the intelligence.

In Fichte, there is also the particular difficulty that he expects the mind to observe itself while it is active. The I is supposed to make observations about its intellectual acts while it carries them out. Thought is supposed to eavesdrop on itself as it thinks, as it slowly becomes warm and warmer and is finally cooked through. This operation reminds us of the ape who sits at the stove in front of a copper pot and cooks his own tail. For he says: true culinary art consists not merely of cooking objectively but also of becoming subjectively aware of one's own self cooking.

The satire which Fichtean philosophy has always had to endure is its own story. I once saw a drawing of a Fichtean goose. It had such a large liver that it no longer knew if it was the goose or the liver. On its abdomen were the words: I = I. Jean Paul satirized Fichte's philosophy most unsparingly in a book called *Clavis Fichteana*.¹⁶⁵ Since idealism, when carried through consistently to its logical conclusion even denied the reality of matter, it appeared to the greater public as a joke which had been carried too far. We will not make cruel fun of the Fichtean I which produces the entire world of appearance through mere thought. These satirists were aided by a misunderstanding which has become too common for me to leave it unmentioned. The great crowd thought, namely, that the Fichtean I was the I of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and that this individual I denied all other beings. "What impertinence!" cried the good people, "This person does not believe that we exist, we who are much more massive than he, and, as mayors and official scribes, are even his superiors!" The ladies asked, "Doesn't he even believe in the existence of his wife? No? And Madame Fichte puts up with this?"

The Fichtean I is, however, not an individual I, but rather the general World-I come to consciousness. Fichtean thinking is not the thinking of an individual, a particular person, who is called Johann Gottlieb Fichte; it is rather a general thinking which manifests itself in one individual. Just as one says: it is raining, it is lightning, etc., so Fichte should not say "I think" but rather "it thinks," "the universal world-thinking thinks in me."

¹⁶⁵ Latin: *The Key to Fichte*. Jean Paul, pseudonym of Johann Paul Friedrich Richter (1763–1825), author of many satirical novels.

Once, when demonstrating the parallels between the French Revolution and German philosophy, I compared Fichte to Napoleon, more in jest than seriously.¹⁶⁶ But, actually, there are impressive similarities here. Fichte appears after the Kantians have completed their terroristic work of destruction, like Napoleon, who appears after the Convention has, with its own “critique of pure reason,” torn down the entire past. Napoleon and Fichte represent the grand unrelenting I, for whom thought and deed are one, and the colossal structures both were able to construct testify to a colossal will. But both structures were soon to go to ruin because of the limitlessness of this will, and the *Wissenschaftslehre*, like the Empire, was soon to fall apart and vanish as quickly as it arose.

The Empire belongs only to history now, but the movement which the emperor brought into the world has not yet been stopped, and our present still lives off of it. It is the same with Fichtean philosophy. It has entirely collapsed, but our minds are still inspired by the thoughts which spoke through Fichte, and the influence of his work is incalculable. Even if all of transcendental idealism was an error, there was still in Fichte’s writings a proud independence, a love of freedom, a manly dignity, which exerted its salutary influence especially on the youth. Fichte’s I agreed entirely with his uncompromising, stubborn, iron character. The doctrine of such an omnipotent I could perhaps only have arisen from such a character, and this character became even more uncompromising, more stubborn, more iron-willed when re-rooted in such a doctrine.

How atrocious this man must have seemed to the unprincipled skeptics, the frivolous eclectics, and the moderates of every color! His whole life was a constant struggle. His early biography is a series of trials, as it is for almost all of our exceptional men. Poverty sits by their cradle and rocks them to greatness, and this gaunt nanny remains their life-long companion.

Nothing is more moving than seeing the proud-willed Fichte as he attempts to fight his way through the world as a private tutor. He cannot find even such a pitiful livelihood in his homeland, and he has to travel to Warsaw. And there, the old story. The tutor displeases the noble lady or maybe even the unnoble chambermaid. His bows are not fine enough, not French enough, and he is no longer found worthy of being in charge

¹⁶⁶ Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), the French revolutionary general who seized power in 1799 from the Directory (the successor of the more radical Convention) in a *coup d’état* in 1799. He declared himself emperor in 1804.

of the education of a small Polish *Junker*.¹⁶⁷ Johann Gottlieb Fichte is dismissed like a footman, receives hardly enough money for the journey from his displeased master, and, with youthful enthusiasm, leaves Warsaw to travel to Königsberg to learn from Kant. The meeting of these two men is interesting in all respects, and I think there is no better way to show their manners and situations than by sharing a fragment from Fichte's diary contained in his biography, which was recently published by his son:¹⁶⁸

“On June 25th, I left for Königsberg with a driver from there and arrived without notable incident on July 1st. – On the fourth, I visited Kant, who did not receive me in any remarkable manner. I attended his class and found there also my expectations unfulfilled. His delivery is soporific. Meanwhile, I have begun this journal. –

For a long time I wanted to visit Kant more seriously, but found no way. Finally, I thought of writing a “Critique of All Revelation” and sending it to him instead of a letter of introduction. I began with it around the 13th and have been working uninterruptedly on it ever since. – On the 18th of August, I finally sent the now finished work to Kant and went there on the 25th to hear his opinion of it. He received me with extraordinary goodness and seemed to be quite satisfied with the treatise. We did not enter into a deeper technical conversation; because of my philosophical skepticism, he referred me to his *Critique of Pure Reason* and to the court chaplain Schultz¹⁶⁹ whom I will go to see immediately. On the 26th, I ate at Kant's house in the company of Professor Sommer¹⁷⁰ and found Kant to be a very pleasant, elegant man. I finally recognized traits in him which are worthy of the great spirit which is set down in his writings.

On the 27th, I finished this journal after earlier completing my excerpting from Kant's lectures on Anthropology which Mr. v. S.¹⁷¹ lent me. At the same time, I resolved to continue this journal every evening before going to sleep, and to record everything interesting which I encounter, especially character traits and remarks.

The 28th, evening. I began yesterday to revise my critique and arrived at really good, deep thoughts which have unfortunately convinced me that my first treatment is fundamentally superficial.

¹⁶⁷ A *Junker* is a member of the Prussian landed aristocracy.

¹⁶⁸ The quotation, slightly modified, is from *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's Life and Literary Correspondence*, Edited by His Son I. H. Fichte, published in Sulzbach in 1830/1.

¹⁶⁹ Johann Schulz, colleague of Kant mentioned above.

¹⁷⁰ Georg Michael Sommer (1754–1826), pastor in Königsberg.

¹⁷¹ Heinrich Theodor von Schön (1773–1856), student of Kant.

Today, I wanted to continue my investigations but found myself so torn away by my imagination that I have not been able to accomplish anything the whole day. In my present circumstances, that is hardly a wonder! I have calculated that from today on I can only afford to stay here for fourteen days. – It is true that I have been in such difficulties before, but it was in my fatherland, and it is harder and harder as I get older and have a more urgent sense of honor. – I have no resolve, can make none. – I will not reveal my situation to Pastor Borowski,¹⁷² to whom Kant sent me; I would only do this to Kant himself.

On the 29th, I went to Borowski and found him to be a truly good, honest man. He suggested a situation to me which is still not entirely certain and which also does not please me very much; at the same time, he forced me by his openness to confess that I am urgently seeking a means of supporting myself. He advised me to go to Professor W.¹⁷³ I was not able to work. – On the following day, I, in fact, went to W., and afterwards to Court Chaplain Schultze. The prospects with the former are not favorable; nevertheless he spoke of a tutoring position in the Kurland which only the most acute necessity would move me to accept! Afterwards to the Court Chaplain where at first his wife received me. He also appeared, though absorbed in mathematical circles. Afterwards, when he heard my name more clearly, he was much friendlier because of Kant's recommendation. He has an angular Prussian character, but honesty and kind-heartedness radiate from his features. Further, I became acquainted with Mr. Bräunlich and his ward, Count Dänhof, Mr. Büttner, nephew of the Court Chaplain, and a young scholar from Nuremberg, Mr. Ehrhard, a good, first-rate head, but without manners and knowledge of the world.

On the 1st of September, I made a decision which I wanted to share with Kant. A position as tutor, as little as I would have wanted to accept one, cannot be found, and the uncertainty of my situation is preventing me from working with a free spirit and enjoying the educational company of my friends. So back to my fatherland! Perhaps the small sum which I need for this journey can be raised with Kant's assistance. But as I was walking to him and preparing to make my proposal to him, my courage vanished. I decided to write. In the evening, I was invited to the Court Chaplain where I enjoyed a very nice evening. On the 2nd, I completed the letter to Kant and sent it.

¹⁷² Ludwig Ernst Borowski (1740–1832), biographer of Kant.

¹⁷³ Samuel Gottlieb Wald (1762–1828), professor of theology.

Despite its remarkable nature, I will not present this letter here in French. I think I am turning red with embarrassment, as if I were telling strangers all about the shameful problems of my own family. Despite all of my striving for French urbanity, despite all of my philosophical cosmopolitanism, old Germany sits with all of its conventional bourgeois feelings in my breast. – Enough, I cannot share that letter and I will say only: Immanuel Kant was so poor, that despite the heart-rending language of that letter he was unable to lend Johann Gottlieb Fichte any money. The latter was not in the least disturbed by this, as we can see from the words of the journal which I will also share:

On the third of September, I was invited to Kant's house. He received me with his usual openness, but said that he had still not come to a resolution about my request, and that he would be unable to do so in the next fourteen days. What endearing openness! In addition, he saw some problems with my plans which show that he is not well-enough informed about our situation in Saxony. – All these days, I have done nothing. But I want to work again and simply leave the rest to God. – The sixth. – I was invited to Kant who suggested that I sell my manuscript on the "Critique of All Revelation" to the bookseller Hartung with Pastor Borowski as an intermediary.¹⁷⁴ He said it was well written, when I spoke of revisions. – Is this true? And yet Kant says it! – And, by the way, he refused my first request. – On the tenth I was with Kant at midday. Nothing about our affairs; Magister Genischer was present and only very general, and in part very interesting, conversations:¹⁷⁵ Kant is exactly the same towards me. – Today, the thirteenth, I wanted to work, and I do nothing. My ill-humor returns. Where will things go from here? How will things stand with me in eight days? My money will be completely used up by then!"

After much traveling around, after a long stay in Switzerland, Fichte finally finds a good position in Jena, and this is the beginning of the most brilliant period of his life. Jena and Weimar, two small Saxon cities which lie only a few hours distant from each other, were at that time the center of German intellectual life. The court and poetry were in Weimar, in Jena, the university and philosophy. In Weimar, we had the greatest poets, in Jena the greatest scholars of Germany. In the year 1794, Fichte began his

¹⁷⁴ Gottfried Lebrecht Hartung (1747–1797), Kant's publisher in Königsberg.

¹⁷⁵ Johann Friedrich Gensichen (1759–1807), friend of Kant.

lectures in Jena. The date is significant. It explains both the spirit of his writings of the time and also the tribulations to which he was subjected from then on, and to which he finally succumbed four years later. In 1798, namely, charges of atheism were brought against him, bringing him insufferable persecution and also causing his departure from Jena. This affair, the most noteworthy in Fichte's life, has at the same time a more universal meaning, and we must discuss it. In this, also, Fichte's particular view of the nature of God is expressed.¹⁷⁶

In the *Philosophical Journal*, a periodical edited by Fichte at the time, he printed an essay with the title "The Development of the Concept of Religion." This essay was sent to him from a certain Forberg, who was a schoolteacher in Saalfeld. Fichte added to this essay a short explanatory treatise under the title "On the Ground of our Belief in a Divine Government of the World."

The two pieces were then confiscated by the Electoral Saxon government under the pretext that they contained atheism, and at the same time a formal request came from Dresden for Fichte to be seriously punished. The court at Weimar certainly would not have permitted itself to be misled by such a request. However, on this occasion, Fichte committed his greatest error by addressing an appeal to the public without taking into account the official authorities, the Weimar government. As a result, this government was put out and, due to the external pressure, could not avoid issuing a mild reprimand to the professor who had been incautious in his expressions. Fichte, however, who thought himself perfectly within his rights, would not quietly accept such a reprimand, and left Jena. Judging by his letters at the time, it was, in particular, the behavior of two men that rankled him, who, because of their official positions, had especially important voices in his affair, and these were His Honor the High Consistory Councilor von Herder and His Excellence the Privy Councilor von Goethe. But both can be reasonably excused. It is moving to read in poor

¹⁷⁶ The atheism controversy, described by Heine below, began with the publication of an article by Friedrich Karl Forberg (1770–1848), a philosophy instructor in Jena, in Fichte's *Philosophical Journal* in October of 1798. The University of Jena fell within the small territory of the Duchy of Weimar, though, at the time, officially, it was jointly governed by three other duchies as well. It attracted many students from the larger neighboring state of Electoral Saxony. The importance of this affair is underlined by the fact that two of the most important officials in the Duchy of Weimar were also two of the most prominent personalities in the German cultural world, Goethe and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), pastor and pioneer in cultural theory.

Herder's posthumous letters about the difficulties he had with candidates of theology, who, after they studied in Jena, came to him in Weimar to be examined as Protestant preachers. He no longer dared to ask in his exams about Christ, the Son; he was happy enough when the existence of the Father was admitted. As far as Goethe goes, he wrote in his memoirs as follows about the above events:¹⁷⁷

After Reinhold's departure from Jena, which was deemed correctly to be a great loss for the academy, Fichte was boldly, even audaciously, called to replace him. Fichte had written with greatness, but perhaps not enough decorum, about the most important moral and political subjects. He was one of the most formidable personalities one has ever seen, and there was nothing to object to in his convictions in the higher sense; but how was he to keep in step with the world, which he regarded as his own created property?

Since the hours he wanted to use for public lectures during the week had been encroached upon, he decided to give lectures on Sundays, which faced several obstacles. The lesser and greater problems which came out of this had hardly been settled, not without discomfort to the higher authorities, when his remarks about God and divine things – topics about which it is certainly better to observe a deep silence – drew us criticism from outside.

Fichte had dared to speak about God and divine things in his *Philosophical Journal* in ways which seemed to go against the conventional expressions of such mysteries. He was reprimanded. His defense did not help matters, because he set to work with passion, with no idea of how well-intentioned people here were towards him, how favorably they could interpret his thoughts and his words – which they could certainly not come out and say to him in plain words –, and just as little idea of how they tried to help him out of his troubles in the most gentle of ways. All sorts of uncertain talk seethed through the academy, speeches back and forth, conjectures and declarations, voices of support and resolutions. One spoke of a ministerial remonstrance, even of a kind of reprimand which Fichte had to be prepared for. Losing all control, he thought himself thus entitled to submit a fierce statement to the ministry, in which he assumed with certainty that such a measure would be taken; he declared with impetuosity and defiance that he would never tolerate this; he would rather remove himself immediately from the academy;

¹⁷⁷ Also taken from the book by I. H. Fichte.

and if this would happen, in good company, for several important instructors, united with him, were also prepared to leave the place.

As a result of this statement, all good will towards him was instantly obstructed, even paralyzed. There was no other way out, no possibility of mediation, and the mildest measure now possible was to dismiss him with no further ado. Now, finally, when nothing else could be done, did he see how one had wanted to handle the affair, and he was forced to regret, along with us, his over-hasty reaction.

Does this not describe the ministerial, the diplomatic, the discreet Goethe to a T? At base, he is only criticizing Fichte for saying what he thought and not using the time-honored euphemistic expressions. He does not criticize the thought but only the word. As I have already said, it was an open secret that, since Kant, deism had been annihilated in the world of German thought, but a secret one was not supposed to shout out loud in the marketplace. Goethe was as little a deist as Fichte; he was a pantheist. But it was precisely from the height of pantheism that Goethe, with his sharp eye, could best see the untenability of Fichtean philosophy, and his mild lips had to smile. To Jews, which is what all deists are in the final analysis, Fichte must have been a horror; to the great heathen, he was just a fool. "The great heathen" is, namely, the name given to Goethe in Germany. But this name is not entirely fitting. Goethe's heathenism is wonderfully modern. His strong, heathen nature shows itself in his clear and sharp grasp of all external appearances, of all colors and shapes; but Christianity at the same time endowed him with a deeper understanding. Despite his intense resistance, Christianity initiated him into the mysteries of the spiritual world; he had partaken of the blood of Christ, and thus he understood the most hidden voices of nature – like Siegfried, the hero of the *Nibelung*, who suddenly understood the language of birds when a drop of blood from the slain dragon moistened his lips.¹⁷⁸ It is remarkable how, in Goethe, that heathen nature was permeated with the sentimentality characteristic of today, how the antique marble pulsed in such a modern manner, and how he experienced just as intensely the sufferings of a young Werther as the joys of an old Greek god. Goethe's pantheism is thus very different from that of the heathen. To express myself concisely: Goethe

¹⁷⁸ Siegfried, the hero of the *Song of the Nibelung*, a medieval German epic poem (and later the title hero of one of the operas of Wagner's tetralogy *The Ring of the Nibelung*).

was the Spinoza of poetry. All of Goethe's poems are suffused by the same spirit which stirs us in Spinoza's writings. There is no doubt that Goethe paid tribute without reservation to the doctrine of Spinoza. At the very least, he occupied himself with it during his entire lifetime; he candidly confesses as much at the beginning of his memoirs as well as in the recently published final volume. I do not remember any more where I read that once, in irritation, Herder cried out at this preoccupation with Spinoza: "If only Goethe would pick up a book in Latin besides Spinoza!"¹⁷⁹ But this was not only true of Goethe; a number of his friends as well, who later became more or less famous as poets, paid tribute early to pantheism, and it flourished in practice in German literature before it became the leading philosophical theory here. It was at the time of Fichte, just when idealism was celebrating its sublime heyday in the realm of philosophy, that pantheism was violently destroyed in the realm of art, and the famous revolution which arose then, and is still going on today, begins with the battle of the romantics against the classical *ancien régime*, with the Schlegelian uprisings.¹⁸⁰

Indeed, our first romantics acted from a pantheistic instinct which they did not themselves understand. The feeling they took for homesickness for the Catholic Mother Church had a deeper origin than they were aware of, and their veneration, and love, of the traditions of the Middle Ages, its folk beliefs, its realms of demonic and magical beings, its witchcraft . . . all this was a yearning, suddenly awakened but not understood, to go back to old Germanic pantheism. And what they were adoring, in this contemptuously soiled and maliciously disfigured form, was actually the pre-Christian religion of their fathers. Here I must remind you of the first book, where I showed how Christianity absorbed the elements of the Old Germanic religion, and how these elements, after being transformed in the most shameful manner, were preserved in the folk beliefs of the Middle Ages, so that the old worship of nature was considered to be evil wizardry, the old gods, ugly devils, and their chaste priestesses, dissolute witches. We can therefore judge the errors of our first romantics somewhat more mildly than is normally the case. They wanted to restore the Catholicism of the Middle Ages because they felt that preserved in it was something of

¹⁷⁹ As reported by Goethe himself, in his *Journey to Italy*.

¹⁸⁰ Heine refers to the brothers Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) and August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845), two of the founding members of early German romanticism. He speaks of them extensively below in *The Romantic School*.

the holy objects of their oldest patriarchs, something of the splendors of their earliest nationality. It was these mutilated and desecrated relics which so sympathetically attracted their feelings, and they hated Protestantism and liberalism which strove to eliminate these relics along with the entire Catholic past.

But I will speak of this later. Here, I only mention that pantheism in Fichte's time had already entered into German art, that even the Catholic romantics followed its course unwittingly, and that Goethe espoused it most clearly. This happens already in *Werther*, where he yearns for a loving identification with nature. In *Faust*, he seeks to form a relationship with nature in a defiantly mystical, immediate way; he summons secret earth-forces using incantations from a book of black magic.¹⁸¹ But it is in the small songs that Goethe's pantheism is documented most purely and charmingly. Spinoza's doctrine has emerged from its mathematical chrysalis and flutters around us in Goethean song. Thus the rage of our Orthodox and Pietists against Goethe's songs. They grope with their pious bear claws at this butterfly, which constantly eludes them. For it is so delicately ethereal, so softly winged. You French cannot understand it if you do not know the language. These Goethe songs have a mischievous magic which is indescribable. The harmonic verses wrap themselves around your heart like an affectionate lover. The word embraces you, while the thought kisses you.

By no means, then, do we see in Goethe's behavior towards Fichte the ugly motives portrayed by some of their contemporaries in even uglier terms. They did not understand the different natures of the two men. The most moderate of them misinterpreted Goethe's passivity when, later, Fichte was harshly assailed and persecuted. They did not take into account Goethe's situation. This giant was a minister in a German dwarf-state. He could never make natural movements. It has been said that the seated Jupiter of Phidias in Olympia would destroy the ceiling vault of his temple if he were to stand up suddenly. This was precisely the situation of Goethe in Weimar. If he had ever ceased to sit still quietly and had jumped to his feet, he would have broken through the gable of the state, or, more likely, he would have crushed his head on it. And should he have risked all that for a teaching which was not merely wrong, but also ridiculous?

¹⁸¹ *Faust*, Goethe's life-long project and masterpiece, is also treated in *The Romantic School*.

The German Jupiter remained calmly seated and let himself be calmly worshipped and perfumed with incense.

It would take me too far away from my theme if I wanted to offer a deeper justification of Goethe's behavior on the occasion of the accusations made against Fichte, from the standpoint of the interests of art at the time. The only thing which speaks in favor of Fichte is that these accusations were only a pretext, and that political incitement lay behind them. For a theologian can very well be accused of atheism because he has obligated himself to teach particular doctrines. A philosopher, however, has entered into no such obligation; indeed he cannot, and his thought is as free as a bird in the sky. — Perhaps it is unfair that I am not reproducing here everything that founded and justified those accusations, in order to protect my own feelings and those of others. I will merely quote one of the unfortunate passages from the essay criticized:

— The moral order, which lives and is effective, is itself God; we need no other God and cannot understand another. There is no rational reason to go beyond that moral world order and, by means of a conclusion from the grounded to the ground, to assume a particular being as its cause. Hence, understanding in its original form certainly does not draw this conclusion and knows no such particular being; only a philosophy which misunderstands itself does this. —

As is typical of stubborn people, in his "Appeal to the Public" and his legal response, Fichte expressed himself even more crudely and shrilly, indeed, with words which injure our deepest sensitivities. We who believe in an actual God who reveals himself to our senses in infinite extension and to our spirit in infinite thought, we who venerate a visible God in nature and hear his invisible voice in our own soul: we are repulsed by the shrill words with which Fichte declares our God a figment of our imagination and even waxes ironic. It is in fact doubtful if it is irony or mere insanity when Fichte frees our dear God so purely from all sensory admixture that he even denies him existence, since existence is a sensory concept and is only possible in sensible form! The *Wissenschaftslehre*, he says, knows of no other being than the sensible, and since being can only be attributed to the objects of experience, this predicate cannot be used in the case of God. Thus, Fichte's God has no existence; he *is* not, he manifests himself only as pure action, as an order of events, as *ordo ordinans*,¹⁸² as the world-law.

¹⁸² Latin: an order which orders.

In this way, idealism has filtered divinity through all possible abstraction for so long that there is nothing left of it in the end. Now, only the law reigns for us in place of God, as for you in place of the king.

But which is more ridiculous, a *loi athée*, a law without a God, or a *Dieu-loi*, a God which is only a law?

Fichtean idealism is among the most colossal errors ever concocted by the human spirit. It is more godless and damned than the crudest materialism. What, here in France, is called the atheism of the materialists would still be, as I could easily show, something edifying, something pious in comparison with the results of Fichtean transcendental idealism. What I know is that both are repugnant to me. Both points of view are also anti-poetic. The French materialists have produced verse just as bad as the German transcendental idealists. But Fichte's teaching was never a danger to the state, and it deserved even less to be persecuted as such. In order to be misled by this mistaken doctrine, you would need the speculative acumen found only in very few people. For the great crowd, with its thousand thick heads, this false teaching was entirely inaccessible. The Fichtean view of God needed to be refuted by rational means, not by the police. Even in Germany, it was so strange to be accused of atheism in philosophy that Fichte did not know at first what was desired of him. He said, quite correctly, that, to a philosopher, the question whether a philosophy is atheistic or not sounds as strange as the question whether a triangle is red or green does to a mathematician.

That accusation thus had its hidden motives, and Fichte was quick to understand them. Since he was the most honest man in the world, we can put our full trust in a letter in which he expresses his views about those hidden motives to Reinhold; and since this letter, dated May 22, 1799, gives a portrait of the entire period and shows the entire distress of the man, I will present an excerpt of it here:

Exhaustion and disgust lead me to the decision already communicated to you, to vanish entirely for a few years. According to my view of the matter at the time, I was even convinced that duty demanded this decision, since, given the present state of ferment, I would not be heard in any case and would only make this ferment worse. After a few years, though, when the initial shock had worn off, I could speak with all the more emphasis. – I now think otherwise. I may no longer keep silent. If I am quiet now, I might never be allowed to speak again. – Ever since the alliance of Russia with

Austria,¹⁸³ I have regarded as probable what now, because of the latest events, seems certain to me, especially since the horrible murder of the representatives¹⁸⁴ (which is celebrated here, and about which S. and G. proclaim: "Quite right! One must beat these dogs to death"), that despotism will now defend itself with desperate measures, that with the assistance of Paul and Pitt¹⁸⁵ it will follow a plan, that the foundation of this plan is the elimination of the freedom of thought, and that the Germans will not stand in the way of the achievement of this goal.

Do not believe, for example, that the Weimar court thought that attendance at the university would suffer because of my presence; it is all too aware of the opposite. It was forced to dismiss me as a consequence of the general plan, taken up most powerfully by Electoral Saxony. Burscher in Leipzig, an initiate of these secrets, had already made a considerable wager at the end of last year that, by the end of this year, I would be in exile.¹⁸⁶ Because of Burgsdorf, Voigt has long been won over to the cause against me.¹⁸⁷ The Department of Sciences in Dresden has made it clear that no one who is on the side of the newer philosophy would be promoted; whoever already has been, would be demoted. In the Free School of Leipzig, even Rosenmüller's enlightenment has been deemed suspicious.¹⁸⁸ Luther's catechism was recently reintroduced there, and the teachers have again been confirmed according to the symbolic books. This will go farther and spread. In sum: nothing is more certain than this; if the French do not gain enormously superior strength in order to carry out changes in Germany, or at least in a substantial portion of it, in a few years no person who has ever been known to have had a free thought in his head will be able to find a resting-place in Germany. – It is thus more certain to me than certainty itself that if I find a little corner somewhere, I will be chased away in one or at most in two years; and it is dangerous to let oneself be chased away from several places, this is what the historical example of Rousseau teaches.

Even if I silenced myself, did not write the least word any more: under this condition, would I be left in peace? I do not think so, and

¹⁸³ The so-called Second Coalition against France, which Russia abandoned later in 1799.

¹⁸⁴ The killing of two of the French representatives to the congress at Rastatt on April 28, 1799. S. and G., in the parenthetical remark, are Schiller and Goethe.

¹⁸⁵ Tsar Paul I (1754–1801) and British Prime Minister William Pitt (1759–1806).

¹⁸⁶ Johann Friedrich Burscher (1732–1805), theologian.

¹⁸⁷ Christoph Gottlob von Burgsdorf (1736–1807), President of the Consistory in the Saxon city of Dresden; Christian Gottlieb Voigt (1743–1819), Privy Councilor in Weimar.

¹⁸⁸ Johann Georg Rosenmüller (1736–1815), theologian.

even if I could hope this from the courts, would not the clergy incite the crowd against me, anywhere that I could go, have me stoned by them and then – ask the government to remove me as one who causes disturbances? But, may I then be silent? Indeed, I may not; because I have reason to believe that if anything can still be saved of the German spirit, it can be saved by my words, and that, through my silence, philosophy would collapse entirely and too early. Those who would not let me be even were I to be silent, I trust even less to let me speak.

But I will persuade them of the harmlessness of my teaching. – Dear Reinhold, how can you tell me that you think so highly of these people! The clearer I become, the more innocent I appear, the blacker they become and thus the greater will become my true crime. I have never believed that they persecute my supposed *atheism*; they persecute in me a freethinker who begins to make himself *comprehensible* (Kant's obscurity was his good fortune) and a notorious *democrat*. What frightens them like a ghost is the *independence* which, as they darkly suspect, my philosophy awakens.

I say here again that this letter is not from yesterday, but rather carries the date of May 22, 1799. The political circumstances of that time have a depressing similarity to the latest conditions in Germany; only that at that time the desire for freedom flourished more among scholars, poets, and other literati, whereas today it is expressed much less among these groups, but far more in the great active masses, among craftsmen and tradesmen. Whereas at the time of the first revolution, the heaviest German lethargy weighed down on the people, and a brutal calm, as it were, reigned in all of Germany; there was in the world of writing the wildest ferment and seething. The most solitary author living in some remote corner of Germany took part in this movement. Almost sympathetically, with no precise knowledge of political events, he felt their social meaning and expressed it in his writings. This phenomenon reminds me of those large sea shells which now and then ornament our fireplaces, and which, even if they are distant from the ocean, nevertheless begin suddenly to make the rushing sound of water as soon as the tide comes in and the waves break against the coast. While, here in Paris, the revolution surged forth in the great human ocean, while it was raging and storming, on the other side of the Rhine German hearts were rushing and roaring . . . But they were so isolated; they were among unfeeling porcelain, tea cups and

coffee-pots and Chinese pagodas which nodded mechanically as if they knew what the talk was about. Alas! Our poor predecessors in Germany had to pay dearly for their revolutionary sympathies. *Junkers* and insignificant clerics subjected them to the crudest and meanest treachery. A few of them fled to Paris and disappeared into poverty and misery. I recently saw a blind compatriot who has been in Paris since that time. I saw him in the Palais Royal where he was warming himself a little in the sun. It was painful to see how pale and thin he was, and how he felt his way on the buildings. Someone told me it was the old poet Heiberg.¹⁸⁹ I have also seen recently the garret where Citizen Georg Forster died.¹⁹⁰ But the freedom-lovers who stayed in Germany would have had an even worse time had not Napoleon and his French soon conquered us. Napoleon certainly never suspected that he himself was the savior of Ideology. Without him, our philosophers would have been eradicated on the gallows and the wheel, along with their ideas. Nevertheless, German freedom-lovers, with too much republican orientation to venerate Napoleon, and too much courage to collaborate with foreign domination, have wrapped themselves in deep silence since then. They have walked around sadly with broken hearts and closed lips. When Napoleon fell, they smiled wistfully, and remained silent; they took almost no part in the patriotic enthusiasm which at that time, with approval from on high, welled up in Germany. They knew what they knew and remained silent. Since these republicans lead very modest and simple lives, they generally live very long, and, when the July Revolution broke out, many of them were still alive.¹⁹¹ And these old owls, whom we had seen before walking around stooped over and dumbly silent, all of a sudden they lifted their heads, saluted us with friendly laughter, shook our hands, and told us funny stories. I even heard one of them singing; he sang the Marseillaise to us in a coffeehouse, and we learned the melody and the beautiful words there. It did not take long for us to sing it better than the old man himself, since he sometimes laughed like a fool in the best verses or cried like a child. It is always good that people that old are still alive to teach songs to the young. We young ones will never forget these songs, and a few of us will

¹⁸⁹ Peter Andreas Heiberg (1758–1841), exiled Danish poet living in Paris.

¹⁹⁰ Georg Forster (1754–94), German naturalist and radical, played a role in the Mainz Republic and is known for the narrative of his circumnavigation of the globe with James Cook.

¹⁹¹ The July Revolution occurred in France in 1830 and saw the replacement of King Charles X with the constitutional monarch Louis-Philippe, the so-called “Bourgeois King.”

teach them someday to grandchildren not yet born. By that time, though, many of us will have rotted away, either in prison at home or in a garret in exile.

Let us speak again of philosophy. I showed above how Fichtean philosophy, built on the thinnest of abstractions, nevertheless demonstrates an iron-like inflexibility in its conclusions which rise to the most audacious heights. But one early morning we notice a great change: it is flowery, it whimpers, and it becomes mellow and modest. In place of the idealistic Titan, climbing to heaven on the ladder of thought and feeling about with a bold hand in its empty chambers, we find a bent-over Christian, sighing profusely about love. Such is Fichte's second period, which is not of much concern to us here. His whole system undergoes the strangest modifications. During this period, he wrote a book which has recently been translated into French, *The Vocation of Man*. A similar work, *Guide to a Blessed Life*, also belongs to this period.¹⁹²

It is easily understood that Fichte, the obstinate man, never admitted his own great change. He claimed that his philosophy was always the same, only the means of expression had changed, had improved. He had just never been understood before. He also claimed that *Naturphilosophie*, which emerged at that time in Germany, and which displaced idealism, was, in fact, entirely his own system; and his disciple, Mr. Joseph Schelling, who had broken with him and introduced that new philosophy, had merely reshaped his means of expression and made unedifying additions to the old doctrine.

Here we have arrived at a new phase of German thought. We have mentioned the names Joseph Schelling and *Naturphilosophie*.¹⁹³ Since the former is practically unknown here, and since also the expression *Naturphilosophie* is not universally understood here, I must explain the meaning of both. Of course, we cannot do this exhaustively in these pages; we will later devote a book to this task. Here, we only want to refute a few errors which have crept in, and to devote some attention to the social importance of this philosophy.

First, it should be mentioned that Fichte was not so entirely wrong when he protested that Mr. Joseph Schelling's doctrine was actually his own, just formulated in a different way and expanded. Just like Mr. Joseph

¹⁹² The two books appeared in 1800 and 1806, respectively.

¹⁹³ See the note in Book Two, above, for a definition of the term. Heine also draws a comic portrayal of *Naturphilosophie* in the selection translated below from *Lucca, the City*.

Schelling, Fichte also maintained: there is only one being, the I, the absolute; he maintained the identity of the Ideal and the Real. In the *Wissenschaftslehre*, as I have shown, Fichte wanted to construct the real intellectually from the ideal. Mr. Joseph Schelling, though, turned the matter around: he wanted to interpret the ideal as coming out of the real. To express myself even more clearly: based on the principle that thought and nature are one and the same, Fichte, by means of an intellectual operation, arrives at the world of appearance; he creates nature from thought; the real from the ideal. Based on the same principle, for Mr. Schelling, by contrast, the world of appearance becomes pure idea, nature becomes thought for him, the real becomes the ideal. The two directions, then, Fichte's and Schelling's, complement each other to a certain extent. For, according to the highest principle mentioned here, philosophy could separate into two parts. In the first part, one would show how, from the idea, nature comes to appearance; in the other part, one would show how nature resolves itself into pure ideas. Philosophy can thus be divided into transcendental idealism and *Naturphilosophie*. Mr. Schelling actually came to accept these two directions; the latter he pursued in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* and the former in his *System of Transcendental Idealism*.

I only mention these works, the first of which appeared in 1797, the second in 1800, because the complementary directions are mentioned already in their titles, not because there is any sort of complete system contained in them. No, a complete system does not appear in any of Mr. Schelling's books. Unlike the cases of Kant and Fichte, there is no main work of Schelling which can be seen as the center of his philosophy. It would be unjust to judge Mr. Schelling by the content of one book, and strictly by the letter. Rather, one must read his books chronologically and follow the gradual development of his thought, holding fast to his basic idea. Indeed, it also seems to me to be necessary, not infrequently, to determine where thought ends and poetry begins. For Mr. Schelling is one of those creatures to whom nature gave more poetic inclination than potency, and who thus unable to satisfy the daughters of Parnassus, flee into the woods of philosophy and enter into barren marriages with abstract hamadryads. Their feelings are poetic, but their instrument, the word, is weak; they struggle in vain for an art form in which to convey their thoughts and insights. Poetry is Mr. Schelling's strength and weakness. It is the difference between him and Fichte, both to his advantage and his

disadvantage. Fichte is only a philosopher; his power consists in dialectic and his strength in demonstrating. This, though, is the weak side of Mr. Schelling. He lives more in intuitions; he does not feel at home in the cold heights of logic; he likes to lose his head in the flowery valleys of symbolism; and his philosophical strength lies in his ability to construct. The latter however is an intellectual capability which is just as often found in mediocre poets as in the best philosophers.

Following this last remark, it is clear that Mr. Schelling remained and could only remain a mere epigone in that part of philosophy which is pure transcendental idealism, but that in the philosophy of nature where he was busy with flowers and stars he was to bloom and shine powerfully. This direction, therefore, was emphasized not only by him, but also by similarly inclined friends, and the tumult which happened here was, as it were, only the reaction of mediocre poets to the earlier abstract philosophy of mind. Like schoolboys set free after sighing the whole day under the burden of words and figures in narrow classrooms, the pupils of Mr. Schelling stormed outside into nature, into the fragrant and sunny Real, let out cries of joy, turned somersaults, and made a grand spectacle.

The expression "Herr Schelling's pupil" is also not to be taken in its usual sense. Mr. Schelling himself says that he only wanted to form a school after the manner of the ancient poets, a school of poetry where no one is bound to a particular doctrine and by a particular discipline, but where everyone obeys the spirit and reveals it in his own way. He might also have said that he was founding a school of prophets, where those who were inspired would begin to prophesy according to desire and temper, and in any manner of speaking. That is what the disciplines excited by the spirit of the master really did; the most limited minds began to prophesy, each in a different tongue, and there was a great Pentecost of philosophy.

Just as the most meaningful and admirable things can be turned into mere masquerades and nonsense, just as a pack of treacherous scoundrels and sad clowns is capable of compromising a great idea, so this happened in the case of *Naturphilosophie*. But the ridicule which the school of prophets or poets of Mr. Schelling brought to it is really not the fault of *Naturphilosophie*. For its basic idea is fundamentally none other than Spinoza's, that is, pantheism.

Spinoza's doctrine and *Naturphilosophie* as worked out by Schelling in his better period are essentially one and the same. The Germans, after

rejecting Locke's materialism and finding Leibniz's idealism to be unfruitful after taking it to its extreme, arrived finally at the third son of Descartes, Spinoza. Philosophy again completed a great circle, and one can say that it is the same one described two thousand years ago in Greece.¹⁹⁴ But a more exact comparison of these two circular revolutions reveals one essential difference. The Greeks had skeptics just as bold as ours; the Eleatics denied the reality of the outside world as definitively as our new transcendental idealists.¹⁹⁵ Plato, just as much as Mr. Schelling, rediscovered the intellectual world in the world of appearance. But we have an advantage over the Greeks, as well as an advantage over the Cartesian school, namely:

We began our philosophical circle with an examination of the sources of human knowledge, with the *Critique of Pure Reason* of our Immanuel Kant.

Since I mention Kant, I can add here that the one proof of God's existence still permitted by Kant, namely, the so-called moral proof, was overturned by Mr. Schelling to great sensation.¹⁹⁶ However, I have also remarked above that this proof was not particularly strong, and was perhaps only allowed by Kant out of charity. Mr. Schelling's God is the God-Universe of Spinoza. At least that is how it was in the year 1801, in the second volume of the *Journal of Speculative Physics*.¹⁹⁷ Here, God is the absolute identity of nature and thought, of matter and spirit, and the absolute identity is not the cause of the universe, but rather the universe itself. It is thus God-Universe. In this God-Universe, there are, in addition, no oppositions and divisions. Absolute identity is also absolute totality. One year later, Mr. Schelling had developed his God even more, in a work entitled *Bruno, or Of the Divine or Natural Principle of Things*. This title recalls the noblest martyr of our doctrine, Giordano Bruno of Nola, of glorious memory.¹⁹⁸ The Italians claim that Mr. Schelling borrowed his best thoughts from old Bruno, and they accuse him of plagiarism. They are wrong, since there is no plagiarism in philosophy. In 1804, Mr. Schelling's God appeared, at last completely finished, in a work entitled

¹⁹⁴ The motif of developments in ancient Greece repeating in German thought is taken up again by Nietzsche, in his *Birth of Tragedy*.

¹⁹⁵ The Eleatics, foremost representative Parmenides, taught that true Being was one and unchanging, hence the fragmented and changing apparent world was an illusion.

¹⁹⁶ In the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795).

¹⁹⁷ A journal edited by Schelling.

¹⁹⁸ Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), burned at the stake for heresy.

Philosophy and Religion. Here we find the doctrine of the absolute in its full form. Here, the absolute is expressed by means of three formulas. The first is the categorical: the absolute is neither the ideal nor the real (neither spirit nor matter), but is the identity of the two. The second formula is the hypothetical: if a subject and an object are present, the absolute is the essential equality of the two. The third formula is the disjunctive: there is only *one* being, but this *one* can, at the same time or alternately, be considered completely ideal or completely real. The first formula is entirely negative, the second presupposes a condition which is even harder to grasp than that which is conditioned, and the third formula is entirely that of Spinoza: the absolute substance is knowable either as thought or as extension. Philosophically, then, Mr. Schelling was not able to get farther than Spinoza, since the absolute can only be comprehended under the form of these two attributes, thought and extension. But Mr. Schelling now abandons the way of philosophy and seeks, by means of a kind of mystic intuiting, to arrive at an intuition of the absolute itself; he seeks to intuit it in its center, in its essentiality, where it is neither something ideal nor something real, neither thought nor extension, neither subject nor object, neither spirit nor matter, but . . . who knows!

This is where philosophy ends in Mr. Schelling and poetry, or I would say, folly, begins. It is here, though, that he finds the most resonance among a group of drivellers, who are perfectly happy to abandon tranquil thought and, as it were, imitate those whirling dervishes who, as our friend Jules David tells us,¹⁹⁹ spin themselves around in a circle long enough that the objective as well as the subjective world vanishes from them, until both flow together into a white nothingness that is neither real nor ideal, until they see something which is not visible, hear something inaudible, until they hear colors and see tones, until the absolute shows itself to them.

I think that the philosophical career of Mr. Schelling ended with the attempt to intuit the absolute intellectually. A greater thinker now emerges who develops *Naturphilosophie* into a complete system, who explains with this synthesis the entire world of appearances, who adds even grander ideas to the grand ideas of his predecessors, and who carries out the synthesis in every discipline, thus grounding it scientifically. He is a pupil of Mr. Schelling, but a pupil who gradually assumed all of the power of his teacher in the realm of philosophy; seeking dominance, he outgrew

¹⁹⁹ Jules-Amyntas David (1811–1890), French writer.

Schelling, and finally cast him out into the darkness. It is the great Hegel, the greatest philosopher produced by Germany since Leibniz. There is no question that he towers above both Kant and Fichte. He is sharp like the former and powerful like the latter, and at the same time has a fundamentally peaceful soul, a harmony of thought which we do not find in Kant and Fichte, since in these two it is more the spirit of revolution which rages. To compare this man with Mr. Joseph Schelling is completely impossible; for Hegel was a man of character. And even if he, like Mr. Schelling, produced several rather dubious justifications of the powers that be in state and Church, at least this happened for a state which, at least in theory, revered the principle of progress, and for a Church which considered the principle of free research its lifeblood. And he made no secret of it; he admitted all of his intentions. Mr. Schelling on the other hand contorts himself like a worm in the ante-room of a practical, as well as a theoretical, absolutism, and he labors in the Jesuit cave where spiritual fetters are forged; and at the same time he tries to make us believe that he is still the same man of light he once was, he disavows his disavowal, and to the ignominy of the apostate he adds the cowardice of the liar!

We must not conceal it, either out of piety or self-interest, we do not want to hide it: the same man who once expressed most boldly the religion of pantheism, who proclaimed most loudly the sanctification of nature and the reinstatement of humanity to its divine rights, this man became a renegade to his own teaching; he left the altar which he himself had consecrated, he slipped back into yesterday's stables of belief, he is now a good Catholic and preaches an otherworldly personal God, "who foolishly created a world." Let the old believers ring their bells and sing their Kyries at such a conversion – it proves nothing in favor of their opinions; it only proves that people tend towards Catholicism when they are old and tired, when they have lost their physical and spiritual energy, when they can no longer enjoy and think. So many atheists have been converted on their deathbeds – but that is nothing to boast of! These conversion stories belong at best to pathology and are only poor testimony for your cause. In the end, they only show that it was impossible for you to convert these atheists as long as they wandered with healthy senses under God's open skies and were fully in command of their reason.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Compare Heine's preface to the second edition as well as his Afterword to *Romanzero*.

I believe that Ballanche says: it is a natural law that innovators must die as soon as they have completed their work of innovation.²⁰¹ Alas! good Ballanche, that is only true in part, and I must rather claim: when the work of innovation is completed, the innovator dies – or becomes a renegade. And thus maybe we can moderate the strict judgment which thinking Germany has delivered about Mr. Schelling a bit; we can perhaps transform the heavy, thick contempt which weighs upon him into silent sympathy, and we can explain the apostasy from his own teaching as a mere result of the natural law: that whoever has devoted all of his energy to the expression or implementation of a thought sinks down exhausted after it is expressed or carried out, sinks either into the arms of death or into the arms of his former opponents.

According to this explanation, we can perhaps understand the even uglier phenomena of the day which depress us so deeply. We comprehend thus, perhaps, why men who have given up everything for their beliefs abandon them when they are finally victorious, and go over into the enemy camp. After this explanation, I can also draw attention to the fact that not only Mr. Joseph Schelling but also to a certain extent Fichte and Kant can be accused of apostasy. Fichte died early enough, before the apostasy from his own philosophy became all too striking. And Kant was unfaithful to the *Critique of Pure Reason* as soon as he wrote *The Critique of Practical Reason*. The innovator dies – or becomes a renegade.

I do not know why this last sentence makes me feel such sad restraint that I am at the moment incapable of communicating the other bitter truths about Mr. Schelling as he is today. Let us rather praise that former Schelling whose memory will bloom unforgettably in the annals of German thought; for the former Schelling represents, just like Kant and Fichte, one of the greatest phases of our philosophical revolution, which in these pages I have compared to the phases of the French political revolution. Indeed, if one sees in Kant the terrorist Convention and in Fichte the Napoleonic Empire, so we see in Mr. Schelling the reaction of the restoration which followed it. But it was, at first, a restoration in the better sense. Mr. Schelling again returned to nature its legitimate rights; he strove for a reconciliation of spirit and nature; he wanted to join both again in the eternal world-soul. He restored that great *Naturphilosophie* which we find in the ancient Greek philosophers, which Socrates was the

²⁰¹ Pierre Simon Ballanche (1776–1847), French writer.

first to lead back into the human soul, and which later dissolved into the ideal. He restored that great *Naturphilosophie* which, secretly germinating from the old pantheistic religion of Germany, portended the most beautiful blossoms in the time of Paracelsus, but which was crushed by the Cartesianism which had been introduced. Alas! at the end he restored things which allow us to compare him in the worse sense with the French Restoration. But, public reason no longer tolerated him by then; he was shamefully pushed off the throne of thought. Hegel, his major-domo, took the crown from his head and sheared him, and the appalled Schelling lives since then like a wretched monk in Munich, a city which shows its clerical character in its very name, and which is called in Latin *Monacho monachorum*.²⁰² There I saw him hovering like a ghost with his great, pale eyes and his dejected, deadened face, a pathetic picture of fallen magnificence. Hegel, on the other hand, let himself be crowned in Berlin – and unfortunately anointed a little as well –, and, since then, rules over German philosophy.²⁰³

Our philosophical revolution is over. Hegel completed its great circle. All we see since then is the development and expansion of the doctrine of *Naturphilosophie*. As I have said, this doctrine has made its way into all of the sciences and has brought forth the most extraordinary and splendid things. As I have just hinted, much that is unpleasant had to emerge at the same time. These phenomena are so varied that even to list them would take a whole book. This is the truly interesting and colorful part of our philosophical history. Nevertheless, I am convinced that it is more useful to the French to hear nothing about this part of it. Such information could add even more to the confusion in French heads. Some of the assertions of *Naturphilosophie*, when taken out of context, could cause you great harm. I know at least that if you had been acquainted with *Naturphilosophie* four years ago, you would have never been able to produce the July Revolution. This deed required a concentration of thought and powers, a noble one-sidedness, a smug recklessness which only your old school allows. Philosophical follies which can be pressed into the service of the powers that be and the Catholic doctrine of incarnation would have

²⁰² Latin: Munich of the monks.

²⁰³ For Heine's views on Hegel, his philosophy, and the Hegelians, see the introduction and the "Preface to the Second Edition" above, and the letter to Moses Moser, the excerpt from the "Letters about Germany," the poems, the "Afterword" to *Romanzero*, and the selections from the *Confessions*, below.

dampened your enthusiasm and paralyzed your courage. I think it, thus, of world-historical importance that your great eclectics, who, at the time, wanted to teach you German philosophy, did not understand it in the least. Such providential ignorance was beneficial for France and for all of humanity.

Alas, *Naturphilosophie*, which has brought forth the most magnificent fruit in certain areas of knowledge, especially in the true natural sciences, has, in other areas, produced the most pernicious weeds. At the same time as Oken, the most genial thinker, and one of the greatest citizens, of Germany discovered new worlds of ideas, and inspired German youth about the original rights of humanity, about freedom and equality; alas! at the same time Adam Müller lectured on the stabling of humanity according to the principles of *Naturphilosophie*.²⁰⁴ At the same time, Mr. Görres preached the obscurantism of the Middle Ages, according to the scientific insight that the state is just a tree, and, in its organic structure, it must have a root, branches and leaves, all so nicely found in the corporative hierarchy of the Middle Ages; at the same time Mr. Steffens proclaimed the philosophical law according to which the peasantry was distinguished from the nobility because the peasant was determined by nature to work without enjoyment, the nobleman was entitled to enjoy without working; – indeed, a few months ago, as someone told me, a *Junker* in Westphalia, an idiot with the surname Haxthausen, I believe, published a work in which he asked the royal Prussian government to take into account the thoroughgoing parallelism demonstrated by philosophy in the entire world-organism, and to separate the political classes more strictly.²⁰⁵ For just as in nature there are four elements, fire, air, water, and earth, so there are four analogous elements in society, namely, nobility, clergy, townspeople, and peasants.

When one saw such depressing idiocy sprouting out of philosophy and growing into such harmful blossoms; when one indeed noted that German youth, sunk in metaphysical abstractions, was forgetting its nearest temporal interests and becoming unfit for practical life; indeed, patriots and friends of liberty must have felt a justified annoyance with philosophy,

²⁰⁴ Lorenz Oken (actual name: Okenfuß, 1779–1851), liberal scientist and professor at Jena; Adam Müller (1779–1829), conservative political scientist.

²⁰⁵ Johann Joseph Görres (1776–1848), professor of history; Henrik Steffens (1773–1845), member of the romantic circle in Jena; Werner von Haxthausen (1780–1842), government official.

and some went so far as to condemn it out of hand as pointless and useless hot air.

We will not be foolish enough to refute these malcontents all too seriously. German philosophy is an important matter affecting the entire human race, and only our most distant descendants will be able to decide whether we should be praised or reproached for first working out our philosophy before working out our revolution. It seems to me that a methodical people like us had to begin with the Reformation, could only on that basis occupy itself with philosophy, and solely after its completion be able to pass over to political revolution. I find this order to be eminently rational. After philosophy has used its heads for contemplation, the revolution can cut them off for whatever purposes it wants. If, however, the revolution had happened first, philosophy would have been unable to use heads already cut off. But do not despair, you German republicans. The German revolution will not be more mild and gentle because it was preceded by Kantian criticism, Fichtean transcendental idealism, and even *Naturphilosophie*. Because of these very doctrines, revolutionary forces have developed which are simply biding their time to break out and to be able to fill the world with horror and admiration.²⁰⁶ There will be Kantians, unwilling to have anything to do with piety even in the world of appearance, who, with axe and sword, will mercilessly tear up the soil of our European life in order to destroy the past to its very roots. Armed Fichteans will come onto the scene, who, with fanatic will, will be untamable by self-interest or fear; for they live in the spirit, they defy matter just like the first Christians, who also could not be defeated either through bodily torment or bodily enjoyment. Indeed, such transcendental idealists would be even more inflexible in a social upheaval than the first Christians, since the latter bore earthly torment in order to achieve heavenly bliss later, whereas the transcendental idealist considers martyrdom itself to be mere appearance and is unreachable in the fortification of his own thought. But even more terrible than the others would be the *Naturphilosophen*, who would actively intervene in a German revolution and would themselves identify with the work of destruction. For if the hand of the Kantian strikes, strong and certain, because his heart is not moved by any traditional reverence; if the Fichtean courageously

²⁰⁶ See also Heine's speculation about the nature of the German revolution in the "Introduction to Kahldorf," translated below.

defies any danger because it does not exist for him in reality; so the *Naturphilosoph* will enter into terrible association with the original powers of nature. He will be able to conjure up the demonic forces of Old Germanic pantheism, and that lust for battle which we find among the Old Germans will awaken in him, which does not battle to destroy, or to conquer, but solely for the sake of the battle itself. Christianity – and this is its greatest merit – has to some extent tamed that brutal Germanic lust for battle, but could not destroy it; and if ever that restraining talisman, the cross, breaks, the savagery of the old fighters will rattle forth again, the absurd frenzy of the berserker, of which the Nordic poets sing and tell so much.²⁰⁷ That talisman is brittle, and the day will come when it breaks apart miserably. The old stone gods will then emerge from their forgotten ruins and rub the dust of millennia from their eyes. Thor, with the giant hammer, will spring up at last, and destroy the Gothic domes. When you hear stone crashing and glass shattering, be careful, you children next door, and do not mix yourself up in the business we are taking care of at home in Germany. It might not agree with you. Take care not to light such a fire or to extinguish it. You could easily burn your fingers on the flames. Do not take my advice lightly, the advice of a dreamer who warns you about Kantians, Fichteans, and *Naturphilosophen*. Do not take lightly the fantastic poet, who expects in the realm of appearance the same revolution which has happened in the province of the spirit. Thought goes before deed as lightning before thunder. German thunder is certainly German; it is not very agile and begins to rumble very slowly. But it will come and when you hear crashing, as it has never crashed before in all of world history, you will know, German thunder has finally reached its goal. With this sound, eagles will fall dead from the sky, and lions in the most distant desert in Africa will put their tails between their legs and crawl into their royal caves. A play will be enacted in Germany which will make the French Revolution look like a harmless idyll. It is still rather silent, to be sure; and if someone or other is making a bit of noise now, do not think that these are the true actors. They are only small dogs running around in the empty arena, barking and snapping at each other until the hour comes when the troop of gladiators will arrive to fight to the death.

²⁰⁷ Taken up again in Nietzsche's notion of the "blond beast" (in the *Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1, Section 11).

And the hour will come. As on the rows of an amphitheater, nations will gather around Germany to see the great games of battle. I advise you French, when that time comes, to keep very still and, on your life, do not applaud. We could easily misunderstand you and, in our impolite manner, ask you somewhat curtly to be quiet. For if, earlier, we could sometimes outmatch you in our obsequiously sullen state, it will be much easier for us to do so again in the high spirits occasioned by our rush of freedom – you yourselves know what one is capable of in such a state and you are no longer in such a state. Take care! I mean well with you and therefore I tell you a bitter truth. You have more to fear from a liberated Germany than from the entire Holy Alliance including all Croats and Cossacks. For, first of all, you are not loved in Germany, which is hard to believe, since you are all so lovable, and during your presence in Germany you took so much trouble to appeal at least to the better and more beautiful half of the German people. And even if this half actually loved you, it is the half which does not carry weapons, and whose friendship therefore does you little good. I have never been able to understand what we actually hold against you. Once, in a beer cellar in Göttingen, a young Old German said that we have to take revenge on the French for Conrad of Staufen, whom they beheaded in Naples.²⁰⁸ You have certainly long forgotten that. We, however, forget nothing. You see, when we finally want to start a fight with you, we will have no lack of convincing reasons. In any case, I advise you to stay on your toes. Let happen in Germany what will; perhaps the Prince of Kyritz or Doctor Wirth will come to power, always be prepared, remain calmly at your post, rifle in arm.²⁰⁹ I mean well with you, and it almost gave me a fright when I heard recently that your ministers intend to disarm France. –

Since you are born classicists, despite your present-day romanticism, you know Olympus. Among the naked gods and goddesses who amuse themselves there with nectar and ambrosia, take note of one goddess who, though surrounded by such joy and amusement, always wears a suit of armor, a helmet on her head, and keeps her spear in her hand.

It is the goddess of wisdom.

²⁰⁸ In the year 1268.

²⁰⁹ Kyritz is a small town in Prussia; Heine here means the Crown Prince of Prussia, the later Friedrich Wilhelm IV (1795–1861); Johann Georg August Wirth (1798–1848), liberal politician.

Other writings

From a letter to Moses Moser in Berlin,¹
May 23, 1823

. . . So you see I slept Wednesday in Lupteen where I was plagued with the most annoying dreams.² I saw a group of people laughing at me, even little children, and I ran fuming with irritation to you, Moser, and you, my friend, opened your arms to me and consoled me and told me I should not let anything get to me, because I am only an idea, and to prove to me that I am only an idea, you hastily reached for Hegel's *Logic* and showed me a confused passage in it, and Gans knocked at the window, – but I jumped furiously around the room and yelled: I am not an idea and know nothing about any idea, and my whole life I haven't had a single idea – It was a terrifying dream; I remember Gans yelled even louder, and on his shoulder little Marcus was sitting, yelling out more quotations in a frighteningly hoarse voice and smiling in such a terribly friendly way, and I was so scared, it woke me up.

¹ Moses Moser (1796–1838) was a friend of Heine, and co-founder of the “Society for the Culture and Study of the Jews” along with the future professor Eduard Gans (1798–1839), mentioned in the letter. See the Introduction. Another member of the circle of friends was the historian Ludwig Marcus (1798–1843).

² Lübtheen is a small town in northern Germany, east of Lüneburg.

From *The Songbook* (1827),
“Return home”

No. 35

I called the devil and he came,
And I looked at him with amazement.
He is not ugly and not lame,
He is a dear, charming man.
A man in his best years,
Friendly and polite and experienced.
He is a clever diplomat,
And speaks well about church and state,
A little pale, but that’s no wonder,
He is currently studying Sanskrit and Hegel.
His favorite poet is still Fouqué.¹
But now he is done being a critic,
He has fully turned it over
To his dear grandmother, Hecate.²
He praised my juristical strivings,
Once himself spent time on it.
He said nothing was dearer to him
Than my friendship, and nodded.
And asked: have we not met already
At the Spanish ambassador’s?
And when I looked at him closely,
I recognized an old friend.

¹ Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1777–1843), German romantic author.

² Hecate, ancient Greek goddess, but also the name of a journal of criticism in the 1820s.

No. 58

Too fragmentary are world and life!
For the German Professor I am rife.
He skillfully joins all of life's shreds
In a system through rational deduction;
With his nightcap and his sleeping robe's threads,
He stuffs gaps in the world's construction.

From *The Songbook* (1827),
“North sea: second cycle”

No. 9

Happy the man, who has reached harbor,
Leaving behind him sea and storms,
And now sitting warm and calm
In the good Ratskeller in Bremen.

How cozy and charming the world seems
Reflected in the large wine rummer.
And how the surging microcosm
Flows, like sunlight, into the thirsty heart!
I see everything in my glass,
The history of peoples, old and new,
Turks and Greeks, Hegel and Gans,
Lemon-tree forests, the changing of the guard,
Berlin and Schilda¹ and Tunis and Hamburg,
But above all the image of my beloved
With angel's head against the gold Rhine wine.
Oh, how beautiful! How beautiful you are, my love!
You are like a rose!
Not like a rose of Shiraz,
The nightingale bride sung by Hafiz;²
Not like the rose of Saron,

¹ Schilda is a city of fools.

² Hafiz, the famed Persian poet, sang of the roses of the city of Shiraz.

Red and holy, celebrated by the prophets;³ –
You are like the rose in the Bremen Ratskeller!⁴
That is the rose of roses.
The older it is, the more sweetly it blooms,
And I found bliss in its heavenly scent,
It inspired me, it enchanted me,
And had not the Ratskeller-master
Held me by the hair
I would have fallen over.

That good man! We sat together
And drank like brothers,
We spoke of high and secret things
We sighed and fell into each other's arms,
And he made me a convert to the faith of love –
I drank to the health of my bitterest enemies,
And forgave all the bad poets,
As I hope one day to be forgiven –
I cried from devotion and finally
The gates of redemption opened to me,
Where the twelve apostles, the holy wine barrels,
Silently preached, but so understandably
For all peoples.

Those are men!
Nothing to look at from outside, in their wooden cloaks,
But more beautiful and shining inside
Than all the proud Levites of the temple
And the servants and courtiers of Herod,
Adorned in gold, dressed in crimson –
As I have always said
The King of Heaven lives not
Among the common people
But in the company of the best!

Hallelujah! How charming the scent
Spread by the palms of Bethel
How fragrant the myrrh of Hebron!
How the Jordan rushes and staggers with joy!
My immortal soul also staggers,

³ In the Song of Songs, chapter 2.

⁴ The rose is the central wine barrel.

And I stagger with it and staggering
The good Ratskeller-master of Bremen
Leads me up the staircase, into the daylight.

You, good Ratskeller-master of Bremen!
Do you see? The angels sit on the roofs
Of the houses and are drunk and sing;
The shining sun up above
Is just a red, drunken nose,
The nose of the World-Spirit;
And around the red World-Spirit's-Nose
The whole drunken world turns.

From *Lucca, the City*
(in *Travel Pictures, Part IV*, 1831)

Chapter II

“Nothing in the world wants to go backwards,” an old lizard said to me, “Everything strives forward, and, in the end, a great advancement of nature will occur. Stones will become plants, plants will become animals, animals will become people, and people will become Gods.”

“But,” I cried, “What will become of those good people, of the poor old Gods?”

“That will take care of itself, dear friend,” the lizard answered, “Probably they will abdicate, or be placed into retirement in some honorable way.”

I learned many other secrets from my hieroglyph-skinned *Naturphilosoph*; but I gave my word to reveal nothing. I now know more than Schelling and Hegel.

“What do you think of these two?” the old lizard asked me with a derisive smile when once I mentioned these names to him.

“If you consider,” I answered, “That they are only people and not lizards, their knowledge must astound you. At bottom, they teach one and the same doctrine, the philosophy of identity, which is well known to you; they differ only in how they present it. When Hegel sets up the basic principles of his philosophy it is like a skillful schoolmaster who knows how to arrange all kinds of numbers artistically to make a lovely figure, which the ordinary observer sees only superficially, as a little house or boat or simply the mosaic formed from those numbers, whereas a thinking schoolboy

sees in the figure itself, rather, the solution of a complicated numerical calculation. Schelling's expositions are much more like those Indian animal pictures which are composed of all sorts of other animals, snakes, birds, elephants and other such living ingredients intricately entwined. This manner of presentation is much more charming, bright, pulsating, and warm; everything is alive in it in contrast to the abstract Hegelian ciphers which stare at us in such a cold, grey, and dead manner."

"Good, good," the old lizard replied, "I see what you mean; but tell me, do these philosophers have a large audience?"

I now described to him how, in the scholarly caravanserai in Berlin, the camels gather around the fountain of Hegelian wisdom, kneel down in front of it, allow themselves to be loaded up with the precious waterskins, and march off with them through the Brandenburg desert. I further described to him how the new Athenians throng around the source of Schellingian spirit-drink as if it were the best beer, the brew of life, the cheap wine of immortality –

The small *Naturphilosoph* was overcome with pure envy when he heard that his colleagues enjoyed such great popularity, and he asked, annoyed, "Which of the two do you think is greater?" – "I cannot decide that," I gave as an answer, "As little as I could decide if Schechner was better than Sontag, and I think –"¹

"Think!" the lizard cried with a sharp, aristocratic tone of most profound disdain, "Think! Which of you thinks? My wise sir, I have been investigating the spiritual functions of animals for about three thousand years now. I have made human beings, apes, and snakes the special focus of my studies. I have put as much effort into these strange creatures as Lyonnet into his goat-moth caterpillar, and I can assure you with certainty that the result of all of my observations, experiments, and anatomical comparisons is: no human being thinks.² Only once in a while something occurs to a person; such entirely accidental ideas they call thoughts, and the succession of them they call thinking. But you may repeat in my name: No person thinks, no philosopher thinks, neither Schelling nor Hegel thinks, and as for their philosophy, it is vain air and water like the clouds in the sky. In my time, I have seen countless such clouds moving above

¹ Nanette Schechner-Waagen (1806–1860) and Henriette Sontag (1806–1854) were rival singers in Berlin.

² Pierre Lyonnet (1707–1789), Dutch naturalist, published in 1760 a copiously illustrated volume about the anatomy of the above-named caterpillar.

me, proud and certain, and the next morning's sun dissolved them all into their original nothingness; – there is only one true philosophy, and it is written in eternal hieroglyphs on my own tail.”

With these words, which were spoken with a disdainful pathos, the old lizard turned his back to me, and as he slowly crawled off I saw on it the oddest characters which extended along his entire tail in multi-colored significance.

From the *Introduction to “Kahldorf on the Nobility in
Letters to Count M. von Moltke”*¹ (1831)

The Gallic rooster has now crowed for the second time, and in Germany, too, day is coming. Ghosts and sinister shadows flee into distant cloisters, castles, Hanseatic cities and other remaining hiding places of the Middle Ages. Sunlight glitters, we rub our eyes, sweet light stirs our souls; life, awakened, rustles around us. We are amazed, we ask each other: – What were we doing in the night that just ended?

Well, we were dreaming in German fashion, that is, we were philosophizing. Not, to be sure, about the things which are of most direct consequence to us or that directly happened to us, but rather we philosophized about the reality of things in and for themselves, the ultimate principles of things, and similar metaphysical and transcendental dreams. The murderous spectacle of our neighbors to the west was at times really quite distracting, even vexing, since quite often French musket shot whistled into our philosophical systems and tore away whole pieces of them.

Curiously, the practical actions of our neighbors on the other side of the Rhine nevertheless had a certain elective affinity with our philosophical dreams here in tranquil Germany.² Just compare the history of the

¹ In his work “On the Nobility and its Relation to the Bourgeois Classes,” Count von Moltke defended noble privilege in the light of the 1830 Revolution (the second “crowing of the Gallic rooster” referred to in the first sentence, after the Revolution of 1789). Under the pseudonym Kahldorf, Robert Wesselhöft (1796–1852) responded in a series of letters to Moltke, for which Heine wrote an introduction (the first half of which appears in the current translation).

² Heine elaborates on this thought in much more detail in the third section of *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*. See the notes there. “Elective Affinity” was a chemical term of art at the time, made famous in the title of a Goethe novel.

French Revolution with that of German philosophy and you might really begin to believe: the French, who, having so many real responsibilities, needed to remain completely awake, asked us Germans to sleep and dream for them in the meantime, and thus our German philosophy is nothing but the dream of the French Revolution. We, in the realm of thought, broke with our past tradition and present institutions, just as the French in the realm of society; our philosophical Jacobins gathered around the *Critique of Pure Reason* and would accept nothing which could not stand up to that critique. Kant was our Robespierre. – Afterwards came Fichte with his “I,” the Napoleon of philosophy, the highest love and the highest egoism, the despotism of thought, the sovereign will, which improvised a quick universal empire which vanished just as quickly; idealism, despotic and horribly solitary. – The hidden flowers which had yet escaped the Kantian guillotine or had bloomed unnoticed in the meantime groaned under his resolute steps. The oppressed earth spirits stirred, the ground shook, and counterrevolution broke out; under Schelling, the past and its traditional interests again gained recognition, even received compensation. This new restoration, the *Naturphilosophie*, saw the return to business of those grey emigrants³ who constantly intrigue against the rule of reason and the idea: Mysticism, Pietism, Jesuitism, Legitimacy, romanticism, Germanophilia, *Gemütlichkeit*⁴ – until Hegel, the Orléans of philosophy,⁵ founded, or rather, put into order a new regime, an eclectic one, which he leads, despite his own lack of importance, and in which he gave positions, fixed by a constitution, to the old Kantian Jacobins, the Fichtean Bonapartists, the Schellingian high nobility, and his own appointees.

In philosophy, then, we have successfully completed our great circle, and it is natural that we now go over to politics. Will we observe the same method here? Will we begin with the system of the Committee of Public Safety or with the system of Legal Order?⁶ These questions make every heart tremble, and whoever has something valuable to lose, even if only

³ A reference to the nobility who fled the French Revolution.

⁴ The last two terms in German are *Deutschtumlei*, with connotations of chauvinism against anything which does not fit a narrow and idealized portrait of traditional German virtues (which can include, for example, anti-French and anti-Semitic attitudes) and *Gemütlichkeit*, difficult to translate, which suggests a public, sociable setting (for example, a tavern) where one feels comfortable and accepted, with connotations of provincialism, tradition, and inertia.

⁵ King Louis-Philippe, from the Orléans family, came to power in the 1830 Revolution.

⁶ Referring to the French Revolution of 1789 and the Revolution of 1830.

his head, whispers apprehensively: Will the German Revolution be a dry one or wet with red — —?

Aristocrats and priests constantly threaten us with horrific scenes from the times of terrorism; liberals and humanists promise in contrast the beautiful scenes of the Holy Week of the July Revolution and the peaceful celebration thereafter; — both parties are deceiving themselves or intending to deceive others. Just because the French Revolution of the nineties was so bloody and horrible, and the one last July was so humane and gentle, it does not follow that a revolution in Germany must have either the one character or the other. Only if the same conditions are present can one expect to find the same results. The character of the French Revolution at all times, however, was conditioned by the moral condition of the people and especially its political education. Before the first outbreak of Revolution in France there was, to be sure, an already finished process of civilization; but really only in the higher classes and, here and there, in the middle class; the lower classes were spiritually degenerate, kept from any noble upwards striving by narrow-hearted despotism. As far as political education goes, it was lacking not only in the lower but also in the higher classes. At the time, there was only knowledge of petty maneuvers between rival guilds, of the system of mutual weakening, the traditions of routine, of the art of ambiguous formulations, of the influences of mistresses and similar problems of state. Montesquieu had only awoken a relatively small number of spirits.⁷ Beginning always from a historical standpoint, he won little influence over the masses of an enthusiastic people which is most receptive to thoughts which flow fresh and original from the heart, as in Rousseau's writings. When, however, Rousseau, the Hamlet of France, who saw the angry times and understood the wicked souls of crowned poison-mixers, the blazing emptiness of sycophants, the childish lies of court etiquette, and the universal decadence, cried out in pain: "The world is out of joint; O cursed spite that I was ever born to set it right";⁸ when Jean-Jacques Rousseau with half feigned and half real madness of desperation raised his great complaint and accusation; — when Voltaire, the Lucian of Christianity, shattered with his ridicule the deception of the Roman priests and the divine right of despotism built upon it; — when Lafayette, the hero of two worlds and two centuries returned from America with the

⁷ Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755), French political theorist.

⁸ From *Hamlet*, I, 5.

Argonauts of freedom and brought with him the idea of a free constitution, the Golden Fleece; – when Necker calculated, Sieyès defined, and Mirabeau spoke, and the thunder of the Constitutional Assembly rolled over the withered monarchy and its blooming deficit, and new economic and constitutional ideas shot up like sudden bolts of lightning: – it was then that the French had to study the great science of freedom, politics, for the first time; and the elementary principles cost them dearly, it cost them their best blood.⁹

That the French had to pay such expensive tuition was the fault of that despotism, so idiotically afraid of the light, which, as we said, tried to keep the people in intellectual immaturity, prevented all instruction in the science of the state, transferred censorship into the hands of the Jesuits and Obscurantists of the Sorbonne,¹⁰ and, especially, suppressed, in the most foolish way possible, the periodical press, the most powerful means of promotion of the intelligence of the people. Just read the article about pre-revolutionary censorship in Mercier’s “Tableau de Paris,”¹¹ and you will no longer be amazed at the crude political ignorance of the French, which had the consequence later that they were more blinded than illuminated by the new political ideas, more enflamed than aroused, that they took every pamphleteer and journalist at his word, and thus could be misled to the most excessive actions by every self-deceiving fanatic and by every intriguer paid by Pitt.¹² The blessing of a free press is that it removes any charm of novelty from the bold speech of the demagogue; it neutralizes the most passionate speech through an equally passionate rebuttal; and it strangles rumorously lies at birth, which, sowed by chance or evil, rise up so deadly and impudent when hidden, like those poisonous plants which thrive only in dark swamps and in the shadows of old church and castle ruins, but wither away pathetically and miserably in bright sunlight. True, the bright sunlight of press freedom is just as uncomfortable for the slave, who would rather take his royal kicks in the dark, as for the

⁹ Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834) fought in the American Revolution, as well as the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1830; Jacques Necker (1748–1836) tried unsuccessfully to reform the finances of the French monarchy prior to, and at the beginning of, the Revolution; Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836), constitutional theorist, played a significant political role in the Revolution; Honoré-Gabriel, comte de Mirabeau (1749–1791), was an orator at the beginning of the Revolution.

¹⁰ The Sorbonne, before the Revolution, was a theological college in Paris.

¹¹ Descriptions of pre-revolutionary French society by Louis Sébastien Mercier (1740–1814).

¹² William Pitt (1759–1806), Prime Minister of England and opponent of the Revolution.

despot, who does not like to see his lonely impotence illuminated. It is true that censorship is very welcome to such people. But it is not less true that censorship, by fostering despotism for some time, is, in the end, destroyed along with it; that where the guillotine of ideas is used, human censorship will also soon be introduced; that the same slave who puts to death a thought will, with the same composure, later strike his own master from the Book of Life.

Alas! These spiritual hangmen make us too into criminals, and the author, who, while writing, is anxious and apprehensive like a mother giving birth, in this condition quite often commits an infanticide of ideas, precisely out of the insane fear of the censor's sword of execution. In this moment, I myself am suppressing a few newly born innocent observations about the patience and tranquility of soul with which my dear countrymen have for so many years tolerated a law sanctioning spiritual murder; a law, which, when merely promulgated by Polignac in France, caused a revolution.¹³ I am speaking of those famous ordinances, the most disturbing of which ordered a strict censorship of daily newspapers and filled all noble hearts in Paris with horror – the most peaceful citizens grabbed their weapons, barricades were put up in the streets, there was fighting, buildings were stormed, cannons thundered, bells wailed, leaden nightingales whistled, the young brood of the dead eagle, the *École Polytechnique*,¹⁴ fluttered out of the nest with lightning bolts in the claws, old pelicans of freedom plunged into bayonets, and nourished the enthusiasm of the youth with their blood. Lafayette, the incomparable, whose like could only be produced once by nature, which then in her economical way tried to share him across two worlds and two centuries, mounted his horse – and after three heroic days, servitude lay destroyed on the ground with its red henchmen and white lilies; and the holy trinity of color, bathed in the light of the glory of victory, fluttered over the church of Our Lady of Paris! There were no atrocities, no arbitrary murders; no most Christian guillotine was erected; there were no terrible jokes, like for example that famous return from Versailles when the bloody heads of Mr. des Huttes and Mr. de Varicourt were carried like standards and a stop was made in Sèvres in order to have them washed off and nicely arranged by a

¹³ The ordinances promulgated by Prime Minister Jules de Polignac (1780–1847) in July of 1830 instituted press censorship among other repressive measures, and indeed set off the revolutionary unrest.

¹⁴ A technical school in Paris founded by Napoleon.

citizen-wigmaker.¹⁵ – No, since that time of dreadful memory the French press has made the people of Paris more receptive for better feelings and less for bloody jokes, it has weeded ignorance out of the heart and instead sowed intelligence; the fruit of such a seed was the noble, legend-like moderation and moving humanity of the Paris people in that great week – and, in fact, when Polignac later did not also lose his physical head, he owed it singly to the mild effects of that same freedom of the press which he stupidly wanted to repress.

Thus the sandalwood tree refreshes with the sweetest of scents that very enemy who has blasphemously injured its bark.

I think that with these short remarks I have sufficiently indicated how every question about what character the revolution in Germany might take must be turned into a question about the state of civilization and political education of the German people: how this political education is entirely dependent on the freedom of the press; and how it must be our most anxious wish that, by means of the latter, much light will be spread soon, before the hour comes when darkness, rather than passion, will cause havoc, and points of view and opinions will act with all the more vehemence on the blind multitudes, and be used all the more vehemently by the parties as rallying cries, the less they have earlier been brought up and discussed.

“Civic equality” could now in Germany, just as once in France, become the chief rallying cry of the revolution, and the friend of the fatherland must lose no time if he wants to contribute to mediating and settling the “question of the nobility” by calm discussion, before clumsier disputants intervene with all too striking methods of proof, against which neither the syllogisms of the police nor the sharpest arguments of the infantry and cavalry, nor even the *ultima ratio Regis*, which could easily change into an *ultimi ratio Regis*, could accomplish anything.¹⁶ In this gloomy respect, I consider the publication of the present work to be a commendable act. I believe that the tone of moderation which reigns in it is appropriate for its intended purpose.

¹⁵ François Roup de Varicourt (1760–1789) and Des Huttes were killed by a mob who went to Versailles to bring the royal family back to Paris.

¹⁶ Latin: the last resort of the king, an inscription on Prussian cannons; the variant phrase means the resort of the last king.

From *The Romantic School* (1835)

Book One

Madame de Staël's work *De l'Allemagne* is the only comprehensive account the French have received of the intellectual life of Germany. However, since this book appeared much time has passed, and in the meantime an entirely new sort of literature has developed in Germany. Is it only a transitional kind of literature? Is it already in full bloom? Has it begun to fade? Opinions are divided on this issue. Most believe that with the death of Goethe a new literary period has begun in Germany;¹ that along with him, old Germany has also gone to its grave; that the aristocratic period of literature is at an end, and the democratic period is beginning; or, as a French journalist recently put it, "The spirit of the individual has ended, the spirit of all has commenced."

As for myself, I cannot make such definitive judgments about the future evolutions of the German spirit. However, for many years I have been predicting the end of what I was the first to call the "Goethean Period of Art." I could prophesy with ease! I was well acquainted with the various strategies of those discontents who wanted to put an end to the Empire of Goethean art; some even claim to have spotted me at the time taking part in the uprisings against Goethe. But now that Goethe is dead, I am overcome with a wondrous grief.

Although I am presenting these pages as a kind of continuation of Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*, I must urge a certain caution in the use of this latter book, despite my praise for the instruction one can obtain from it, and label it a thoroughly partisan effort. With this book, the late

¹ Goethe died on March 22, 1832.

Madame de Staël opened a salon, as it were, where she received German writers and gave them the opportunity to make themselves acquainted with the civilized world of the French; but in the roar of diverse voices which emerges from this book, the most distinct one is the fine descant of Mr. A. W. Schlegel. Where she is entirely herself, where this woman of great feeling expresses herself directly, her heart shining forth, all of her intellectual fireworks and brilliant madness on display, the book is good and unsurpassed. But as soon as she yields to foreign influences, as soon as she pays tribute to a school whose nature is completely foreign and incomprehensible to her, as soon as, in her praise of the school, she promotes certain ultramontane tendencies which stand in direct contradiction to her Protestant clarity, the book is unbearable and deplorable. In addition to this unconscious partisanship, there is also a conscious one; in praising the intellectual life and the idealism of Germany, she is in fact opposing the realism of her time, the material splendor of the imperial period. Her book *De l'Allemagne* is in this respect like the *Germania* of Tacitus, who also intended to write an indirect satire against his landspeople by means of an apology of the Germans.²

The school mentioned above, to which Madame de Staël paid tribute and whose tendencies she promoted, is the romantic school. In the following pages it will become clear that this school in Germany was something entirely different from the one which goes by the same name in France, and that its tendencies were entirely different from those of the French romantics.

What exactly was the romantic school in Germany?

It was nothing other than a reawakening of the poetic spirit³ of the Middle Ages as manifested in its songs, artistic works, architecture, art, and life. This poetic spirit, however, had emerged out of Christianity; it was a passionflower which grew from the blood of Christ. I do not know if this melancholic flower, called the passionflower in Germany, bears the same name in France, or if French folk belief assigns to it that same mystical origin. It is that strangely miscolored flower containing a likeness of the instruments of martyrdom used in the crucifixion of Christ, namely, the hammer, the pliers, the nails, etc. This is a flower which is not at all ugly,

² Gaius Cornelius Tacitus (AD 56–AD 120), the Roman historian, published *De Origine et Situ Germanorum* in the year 98.

³ The German word, prominent in romantic discourse, is *Poesie*; it refers to all kinds of creative endeavor.

but just eerie; indeed, its mere sight excites a terrible pleasure in our soul, like those feverishly sweet feelings which come from pain itself. In this respect, this flower would be a most appropriate symbol for Christianity itself, which attracts so terrifyingly just because of this voluptuousness of pain.

Even though in France the word Christianity is understood to mean only Roman Catholicism, I must still emphasize that I am only speaking of the latter. I am speaking of that religion whose first dogmas include the damnation of all flesh; which not only grants to the spirit superiority over the flesh, but also seeks to mortify the flesh in order to glorify the spirit. I am speaking of that religion whose unnatural demands themselves were the true origin of sin and hypocrisy, for it was precisely the damnation of the flesh that made the most innocent pleasures of the senses into sins, and it was the impossibility of being wholly spirit which necessitated the development of hypocrisy. I am speaking of that religion which also became the most reliable support of despotism by preaching the reprehensible nature of all earthly goods and by enjoining dog-like humility and angelic patience. People have by now recognized the essence of this religion. They are no longer happy being nourished on references to heaven. They know that matter also has its good side and is not entirely the devil's. And they now lay claim to the enjoyments of the earth, this beautiful divine garden, our inalienable inheritance. Because we now understand so well the full consequences of that absolute spiritualism, it may well be that the Christian-Catholic worldview has reached its endpoint. Every period of time is a sphinx which throws itself into the abyss as soon as its riddle has been solved.

On the other hand, we by no means deny the benefits which came of the Christian-Catholic worldview in Europe. It was an essential, salutary reaction against the horribly colossal materialism which had developed in the Roman Empire and which threatened to annihilate all of the spiritual splendor of humanity. Just as the lewd memoirs of the previous century provide, as it were, the documentary justification for the French Revolution; just as the terrorism of the Committee of Public Safety seems to us a necessary medicine when we read the autobiographies of the French noble world since the Regency;⁴ so one can also recognize the salutary

⁴ The *Comité de salut public* ruled France during the Reign of Terror, 1793–1794; the reference is to the Regency Period (1715–1723) of King Louis XV (1710–1774).

effect of ascetic spiritualism when one has read, say, Petronius or Apuleius, books which can be seen as the justifications for Christianity.⁵ The flesh had become so impudent in this Roman world that it was probably necessary to institute Christian discipline in order to bring it under control. After the banquet of Trimalchio, one needed a hunger cure equal to Christianity.

Or was it rather that aging Rome let itself be flagellated monastically in order to find a refined gratification in the torment itself, to find pleasure in the pain, just as aged voluptuaries have themselves caned to excite their limp flesh to the possibility of new enjoyments?

Oh, terrible overstimulation! It stole away what energy remained in the Roman body politic. Rome did not fall because of its division into two empires;⁶ rather, Rome was consumed by the same Jewish spiritualism, on the Bosphorus as on the Tiber, and here, as there, Roman history became a slow death, an agony lasting centuries. Did Judea, already murdered, want, perhaps, to take revenge on its triumphant enemy, by giving the Romans its spiritualism, just as once the dying centaur craftily gave the son of Jupiter the deadly cloak poisoned with his own blood?⁷ Indeed, Rome, the Hercules of peoples, was so effectively consumed by the Jewish poison that helmet and armor fell from its withering limbs, and its imperatorial battle cry wasted away into the whimpering prayer of clerics and the trills of castratos.

But what took power from the old, gave it to the young. Spiritualism worked in a salutary way on the overly healthy peoples of the north. The all-too-full-blooded barbarian bodies became spiritual, as Christians. European civilization began. This is a praiseworthy, holy side of Christianity. In this respect, the Catholic Church gained claim to our greatest reverence and admiration. Through great and genial institutions it knew how to tame the bestiality of the northern barbarians and how to overcome brute matter.

The art works of the Middle Ages show this overcoming of matter through the spirit, and indeed this is often their entire purpose. The epic

⁵ Petronius (died AD 66), author of the novel *Satiricon* containing the famed scene of Trimalchio's extravagant banquet; Apuleius (c. 125–c. 180), author of *The Golden Ass*.

⁶ The Roman Empire was divided into Eastern and Western parts permanently in AD 395, with capitals in Rome (on the Tiber) and Constantinople (on the Bosphorus Strait).

⁷ A reference to the legend of Hercules and the centaur Nessos. Nessos, killed by Hercules, tricked his wife into giving him a cloak with the centaur's blood on it, which was poisonous.

poems of that time can easily be classified by means of the degree of this overcoming.

[. . .]⁸

The poetry in all of these works of the Middle Ages has a particular character which distinguishes it from the poetry of the Greeks and the Romans. With regard to this difference, we call the first romantic and the second classical poetry. These designations, however, are unreliable labels, and have resulted until now in all sorts of very unhelpful confusions, which were intensified when antique poetry was called plastic rather than classical. This was a basic source of such misunderstandings. Artists, namely, should always structure their content in a plastic manner, whether this content is Christian or pagan. They should represent it with clear outlines; in short, plastic form should be the main point in romantic modern art just as in antique art. Indeed, are not the figures in Dante's *Divine Comedy* or in the paintings of Raphael just as plastic as those in Virgil or on the walls of Herculeaneum?⁹ The difference is the following: in antique art, the plastic forms are entirely identical with what is to be represented, with the idea that the artist wants to represent. For example, the wanderings of Odysseus mean nothing other than the wanderings of a man who was a son of Laertes and a husband of Penelope and was named Odysseus. Further, the Bacchus we see in the Louvre is none other than the graceful son of Semele with boldly wistful eyes and heavenly desire in the soft curved lips. It is different in romantic art; there the wanderings of a knight have in addition an esoteric meaning, they refer perhaps to the wanderings of life in general; the dragon who is conquered is Sin; the almond-tree which sends its aroma so comfortingly to the hero from afar is the Trinity, God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, who together at the same time are one, as nut, fiber, and seed are the same almond. When Homer portrays the armament of a hero, it is just a good suit of armor which is worth so and so many oxen; when, however, a monk in the Middle Ages describes in his poem the skirts of the mother of God, you can rely on the fact that he is thinking of just as many distinct virtues as skirts, that a particular meaning is hidden among these holy coverings of the immaculate virginity of Maria, which

⁸ In what follows, Heine analyzes the epic poetry of the Middle Ages, locating its high point in Gottfried von Straßburg's epic *Tristan und Isolde* (written early in the thirteenth century).

⁹ Ancient city destroyed by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius (AD 79), whose excavations began in the eighteenth century.

is also quite logically described as the almond blossom, since her son is the almond kernel. This then is the character of medieval poetry which we call romantic.

Classical art had only to represent the finite, and its forms could be identical with the idea of the artist. Romantic art has to represent, or rather, refer to, the infinite and purely spiritual relationships, and it took refuge in a system of traditional symbols, or rather, in the parabolic, just as Christ himself already tried to make his spiritualistic ideas clear through all sorts of beautiful parables. Thus, the mystical, mysterious, fantastic, and excessive in the art works of the Middle Ages. Imagination makes horrifying efforts to represent the purely spiritual through sensuous images, and it invents the most colossal products of madness; it piles Pelion on Ossa, the *Parsifal* on the *Titirel* in order to reach its heaven.¹⁰

We also find poems which we consider to be, and which we call, romantic among those peoples, such as the Scandinavians and the Indians, whose poetry too was intended to represent the infinite, and whose imagination gave birth to monstrous offspring.

We cannot say very much about the music of the Middle Ages. We lack the documents. Only later, in the sixteenth century, did the masterworks of Catholic church music come into existence. These cannot be esteemed highly enough in their kind since they are the most pure expression of Christian spiritualism. The arts of recitation, spiritual by nature, also flourished in Christian times. This religion was less favorable for the visual arts, for they were presented with an unnatural task, as it were: they were supposed to represent the triumph of the spirit over matter and yet at the same time use this same matter as the medium of their representations. Thus, those repulsive themes in sculpture and painting: martyrs, crucifixions, dying saints, the destruction of the flesh. These subjects themselves constituted a martyrdom of sculpture, and when I see those distorted works where Christian abstinence and asceticism were supposed to be represented by crooked pious heads, long thin arms, lean legs, and anxiously ungainly garments, I am seized with inexpressible pity for the artists of that time. Painters were in a somewhat more favorable position, since the material basis of their representation, color, being ungraspable in its manifold shadowiness, did not resist

¹⁰ To pile Pelion on Ossa is an expression taken from Greek mythology, meaning to exert enormous effort for a hopeless task. *Parsifal* and *Titirel* are medieval epics by Wolfram von Eschenbach, written early in the thirteenth century.

spiritualism as crudely as did the material of the sculptors. Nevertheless, painters also had to burden their sighing canvases with the most repugnant suffering figures. Indeed, in some collections of paintings, one sees nothing but bloody scenes, floggings, and executions, and it might seem that the old masters had painted these pictures for a hangman's gallery.

But human genius can even transfigure the unnatural; many painters succeeded in solving the unnatural task in a beautiful and uplifting manner. In particular, the Italians knew how to venerate beauty at some expense to spiritualism; they raised themselves to an ideality which reached its peak in so many depictions of the Madonna. The Catholic clerisy in general had always made a few concessions to sensualism with regard to the Madonna. Poets and painters had special permission to celebrate this picture of immaculate beauty, transfigured in addition by motherly love and grief, and to adorn it with all possible sensual enticements, for this image was a magnet which could draw the great multitude into the bosom of Christianity. Madonna Mary was, at it were, the beautiful *dame de comptoir*¹¹ of the Catholic Church, who attracted and retained its customers, especially the northern barbarians, with her heavenly smile.

In the Middle Ages, architecture had the same character as the other arts; indeed, at that time all manifestations of life in general were in most wondrous harmony with each other. In architecture, we can see the same parabolic tendency as in poetry. When we enter a cathedral today, we hardly sense any more the esoteric meaning of the symbolism of its stone. Only the impression of the whole penetrates directly to our soul. We feel our spirit elevated and our flesh crushed. The inside of the cathedral is itself a hollow cross, and we walk there within the instrument of crucifixion. The colorful windows throw their red and green lights onto us, like drops of blood and pus. Surrounding us are dirgeful songs of death. Under our feet are tombstones and decomposition, while the spirit strives upwards with the colossal pillars, painfully tearing itself loose from the body which sinks to the ground like a worn-out garment. Seen from the outside, these gothic cathedrals, these enormous buildings, are ornamented so airily, so finely, so elegantly, so transparently that you might think of them as carved, or as Brabant lace made

¹¹ French: a woman who greets you at the door of an establishment.

of marble; then you truly feel the power of that time, which was able to master even stone to such an extent that, eerily, it almost seems permeated by spirit, so that even this hardest of materials expresses Christian spiritualism.

The arts are only the mirror of life, and as Catholicism died out in life, so it faded and paled in art as well. At the time of the Reformation, Catholic poetry gradually died out in Europe and in its place, the long-dead poetic spirit of ancient Greece came to life again. To be sure, it was only an artificial spring, the work of a gardener and not the sun; the trees and flowers were in narrow pots protected from cold and north wind by a glass ceiling.

In world history, not every event is the immediate outcome of another; all events rather influence each other reciprocally. It was not only because of the Greek scholars who emigrated here following the conquest of Byzantium that the love of everything Greek and the mania to imitate it became universal for us,¹² but also because in art, as in life, Protestantism was astir at the same time. Leo X, the magnificent Medici, was as zealous a Protestant as Luther; whereas in Wittenberg one protested in Latin, in Rome one protested in stone, paint, and *ottava rima*.¹³ The powerful marble figures of Michelangelo, the laughing nymphs' faces of Giulio Romano, the life-drenched cheerfulness of the verses of Master Ludovico: are these not also a Protestant antithesis to old and gloomy, careworn Catholicism?¹⁴ The painters of Italy were perhaps far more effective as polemicists against clericalism than the Saxon theologians. The rosy flesh in Titian's paintings, it is all Protestantism.¹⁵ The loins of his Venus are much more radical theses than those which the German monk attached to the church doors of Wittenberg. – It was, at that time, as if people had suddenly felt themselves released from the constraints of a millennium. Artists, especially, breathed free again; the nightmare of Christianity seemed lifted from their chests. They plunged enthusiastically into the sea of Greek cheerfulness, out of whose foam goddesses of beauty arose to meet them. The painters again painted the ambrosial joy of Olympus. The sculptors again carved the old heroes with ancient delight from blocks of marble. The poets again sang

¹² Byzantium, renamed Constantinople in the fourth century AD, was overrun by the Ottomans in 1453.

¹³ Italian: verse form used in the Italian Renaissance.

¹⁴ Giulio Romano (c. 1499–1546), painter; Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533), author of *Orlando furioso*.

¹⁵ Titian (c. 1485–1576), painter of the "Venus of Urbino."

of the houses of Atreus and Laius.¹⁶ The period of neo-classical poetry began.

Just as modern life developed to its fullest extent in France under Louis XIV, so also the neo-classical period achieved its fullest development there, indeed, with a certain amount of independent originality.¹⁷ Because of the political influence of the great king, neo-classical poetry spread through the rest of Europe. In Italy, where it was already native, it gained a French shading. With Philip of Anjou,¹⁸ the heroes of French tragedy also arrived in Spain. They went to England with Madame Henriette,¹⁹ and we Germans, naturally, built our boorish temple to the powdered Olympus of Versailles. The most famous high priest of this temple was Gottsched, that great “allonge wig” whom our beloved Goethe described so well in his memoirs.²⁰

Lessing was the literary Arminius²¹ who freed our theater from foreign rule. He showed us the triviality, the ridiculousness, the tastelessness of those imitations of French theater, which itself seemed to be an imitation of the Greek. But it was not only through his criticism, but also through his own works of art that he became the founder of modern original German literature. This man pursued with enthusiasm and selflessness all of the directions of the intellect, all of the aspects of life. Art, theology, classics, poetry, theater criticism, history, he did everything with the same zeal and for the same purpose. The same great social ideal lives in all of his works, the same idea of progressive humanity, the same religion of reason whose John he was and whose Messiah we still await. He preached this religion always, but unfortunately often entirely alone and in the desert. In addition, he lacked the talent to turn stone into bread. He spent the greater part of his life in poverty and hardship; that is a curse which weighs upon almost all of the great spirits of Germany and perhaps will only be remedied by political liberation. More than is commonly recognized, Lessing was also motivated by politics, a characteristic which we do not find in his contemporaries. Only now do we see what he intended in

¹⁶ Families in Greek mythology and tragedy.

¹⁷ King Louis XIV ruled France from 1648 to 1715.

¹⁸ Philip of Anjou was Philip V of Spain, first of the Spanish Bourbon Dynasty.

¹⁹ Henriette Maria (1609–1669), French wife of King Charles I.

²⁰ In his autobiography, Goethe describes, at Gottsched’s expense, a comical scene with his wig when they met.

²¹ German tribal victor over the Romans at the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, in AD 9, a figure much in vogue in Germany during the Napoleonic occupation.

his portrayal of petty despotism in *Emilia Galotti*. At the time, he was considered merely to be a champion of intellectual freedom and a fighter of clerical intolerance, for at the time his theological writings were better understood than the others. The fragments “On the Education of the Human Race,” translated into French by Eugène Rodrigues, can perhaps give the French reader a sense of the comprehensive reach of Lessing’s spirit. The two critical works which had the most influence on art are his *Hamburg Dramaturgy* and his *Laokoon, or the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. His most excellent theater pieces are *Emilia Galotti*, *Minna von Barnhelm*, and *Nathan the Wise*.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was born in Kamenitz in Lusatia on January 22, 1729, and died in Brunswick on February 15, 1781. He was a complete man, who, as he fought with his polemic to destroy what was old, at the same time created something new and better. A German author writes, “He was like those pious Jews who, when building the Second Temple, were often interrupted by enemy attack, and then with one hand fought against the enemies and with the other continued to build.” This is not the place for me to say more about Lessing, but I cannot avoid mentioning that of all the authors in literary history, I love him the most. Here, I will only mention one other writer who worked in the same spirit, and to the same end, as Lessing, and who can be called Lessing’s closest follower; certainly, a testimonial to him does not belong here either, since he occupies a very lonely place in literary history, and his relationship to his time and his contemporaries is still incapable of precise expression. I am speaking of Johann Gottfried Herder, born 1744 in Mohrungen in East Prussia and died in the year 1803 in Weimar in Saxony.

Literary history is a giant morgue where people come to find their dead, the ones they love or are related to. When I look in and see Lessing or Herder with their sublime human faces among so many unimportant corpses, my heart pounds. How could I pass by without giving your pale lips a quick kiss!

If, however, Lessing powerfully destroyed the epigones of French pseudo-classicism, he himself, precisely through his references to the actual art works of Greek antiquity, encouraged the development of another sort of foolish imitation. Through his fight against religious superstition he even promoted that sober addiction to Enlightenment which spread around Berlin, whose main proponent was the late Nicolai and whose arsenal was the “Universal German Library.” The sorriest

mediocrity, more repulsive than ever, began to work its mischief, and what was silly and vapid puffed itself up like the frog in the fairy-tale.

It is quite incorrect to think that Goethe, who had already made his appearance, was generally recognized at the time.²² His *Götz of Berlichingen* and his *Werther* were received with enthusiasm, but so too were the works of the most ordinary incompetent writer, and he was given only a small niche in the temple of literature. Yes, only *Götz* and *Werther* were received with enthusiasm, but more because of their content than the artistic merits which almost no one knew how to appreciate in these masterworks. *Götz* was a dramatized tale of chivalry, a genre loved at the time. *Werther* was seen as a version of a true story, that of young Jerusalem, who shot himself because of love, thus making a large racket in that silent, windless time. His moving letters were read with tears. One also noticed astutely how Werther's world-weariness was intensified by the way in which he was removed from a gathering of nobles. The issue of suicide caused even more discussion of the book. A few fools arrived at the idea of shooting themselves on the occasion. Because of its content, the book caused a sensation. The novels of August Lafontaine, however, were read just as eagerly, and since he wrote incessantly, he was much more famous than Wolfgang Goethe. Wieland was the great poet of the time, whose only competition was something like Mr. Ramler, author of odes, in Berlin. Wieland was worshiped like an idol, more so than Goethe ever was. Iffland reigned over the theater with his maudlin bourgeois dramas, and Kotzebue with his banal witty farces.²³

The school we call romantic arose against this literature in Germany in the last years of the previous century. The self-appointed directors of the school were Messrs. August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel. Jena, where these two brothers often met, along with many like-minded spirits, was the center from which the new aesthetic doctrine spread. I say doctrine, because this school began with a judgment of past art works and with a prescription for future ones. In both of these directions, the Schlegelian school made great contributions to aesthetic criticism. In judging art works already made, they either demonstrated their flaws and

²² The following works of Goethe are referred to by Heine in the sequel: *Götz of Berlichingen* (1773), *Werther* (1774), *Egmont* (1788), *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796), *West-Eastern Divan* (1819), *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Wandering* (1821).

²³ Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813), Karl Wilhelm Ramler (1725–1788), August Wilhelm Iffland (1759–1814), August von Kotzebue (1761–1819).

defects or else illuminated their merits and attractions. In their polemics, the exposure of artistic flaws and defects, Messrs. Schlegel were entirely the imitators of old Lessing. They used his great battle sword. Only, the arm of Mr. August Wilhelm Schlegel was much too delicate and tender, and the eye of his brother Friedrich was too mystically veiled to be able to strike, in the first case, as strongly, and in the second, as accurately, as Lessing. In their reproductive criticism, though, where the fine points of an art work are made visible, where it was a matter of delicately feeling out its particularities and conveying them clearly, there the Messrs. Schlegel are quite superior to the old Lessing. But what can I say about their prescriptions for still-to-be-written masterworks? The Messrs. Schlegel show the same weakness here which we seemed to find in Lessing. Lessing, too, so strong in his denials, is correspondingly weak in his affirmations. Only rarely does he find a basic principle, and even more rarely is it a correct one. He lacks the solid ground of a philosophy, a philosophical system. In the case of Messrs. Schlegel, this is even more hopelessly the case. One often hears stories about the influence of Fichtean idealism and Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* on the romantic school; indeed, it has even been claimed that this school emerged entirely from these philosophies. Here, though, I see at most the influence of a few fragments of Fichte and Schelling's thought, not at all the influence of a philosophy. Be that as it may, Mr. Schelling, who taught at the time in Jena, exerted great personal influence on the romantic school. What is generally unknown in France is that he is also a bit of a poet, and it is said that he is still unsure whether he should publish all of his philosophical doctrines in poetic, indeed metrical form. This doubt is typical of the man.

Even if the Messrs. Schlegel cannot present any solid theory for the masterworks they have solicited from the poets of their school, they made up for this defect by praising the best art works of the past as paradigms and making them available to the members of their school. These were primarily the works of Christian-Catholic art of the Middle Ages. Shakespeare, who stands on the border of this type of art, smiling already with Protestant clearness into our modern times, was translated only for polemical purposes, a discussion of which would take us too far afield here. In addition, this translation was taken up by Mr. A. W. Schlegel before inspiration had led them all backwards all the way to the Middle Ages. Later, after this had occurred, Calderon was translated and was praised far

above Shakespeare.²⁴ For in Calderon, one found the poetry of the Middle Ages expressed most purely, indeed, in its two main forms, the chivalric and the monastic. The pious comedies of the Castilian priest-poet, whose works were sprinkled with holy water and fumed by church incense, were now imitated with all of their holy grandeur, with all their priestly excess, with all of their blessed madness; and Germany saw a blossoming of those colorfully devout, foolishly profound poems in which people mystically fell in love, as in the *Devotion to the Cross*, or fought for the honor of the mother of God, as in the *Steadfast Prince*. And Zacharias Werner took the thing as far as one could take it without getting locked up in a madhouse by the authorities.²⁵

Our poetry, Schlegel says, is old. Our muse is an old woman with a distaff; our Amor no blond youth, but a shrunken dwarf with grey hair. Our feelings have faded; our imagination has withered. We must refresh ourselves, we must seek out again the buried sources of the naïve, simple poetry of the Middle Ages; from these sources flows the tonic of our rejuvenation. We arid and dry Germans did not have to be told twice. Especially those with parched throats sitting in the sands of Brandenburg wanted to be young and in bloom again; and they threw themselves at those wonder-wells and swigged and gulped and quaffed with excessive greed. But it was like the story of the old chambermaid who learned that her lady possessed a wondrous elixir of youth. When the lady was gone, she stole the flask containing the elixir from her dressing table. But instead of drinking only a few drops, the gulp she took was so big and long that the effect of the wondrous rejuvenating drink was concentrated; so that not only did she become young again, but was even turned into a very small child. And that is what really happened to our excellent Mr. Tieck, one of the best poets of the school.²⁶ He swallowed down so much from the chap-books and poems of the Middle Ages that he himself almost became a child again, blossoming in reverse into that babbling simple-mindedness that Madame de Staël had so much trouble admiring. She herself admits that it seemed curious to her that a character in a play would first appear with a monologue beginning with the words: "I am the valiant Boniface, and I come to tell you . . ." etc.

²⁴ Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–1681), Spanish Golden Age playwright; Heine mentions his *Devotion to the Cross* and *The Steadfast Prince*.

²⁵ Zacharias Werner (1768–1823). ²⁶ Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), subject in Book Two, below.

Mr. Ludwig Tieck made the naïve, crude beginnings of art into an ideal also for the visual artist in the novel *Sternbald's Wanderings* and in the *Outpourings from the Heart of an Art-Loving Monk*, written by a certain Wackenroder,²⁷ and edited by Tieck. The devoutness and childlikeness of medieval works of art, as revealed in their technical clumsiness, were recommended for imitation. No one was interested any more in Raphael, not even in his teacher Perugino, who was certainly held in higher esteem.²⁸ In Perugino, one still found remnants of that full excellence which was admired so reverently in the immortal masterworks of Fra Giovanni Angelico da Fiesole.²⁹ To get an idea of the taste of the art enthusiasts of the time, you have to go to the Louvre, where the best paintings of the masters they revered the most still hang. And to get an idea of the great crowd of poets who imitated the literary works of the Middle Ages in every possible verse form, you have to go to the madhouse at Charenton.

But I think that these paintings in the first gallery of the Louvre are still much too refined for one to have a true idea of the artistic taste at the time. You must, in addition, imagine these Old Italian pictures translated into Old German as well, because the works of the Old German masters were taken to be much more simple and childlike and therefore more worthy of imitation than those of the old Italians. For, as it is said, the Germans with their "soul" (there is no expression for this word in the French language³⁰) grasp Christianity at a deeper level than other nations; and Frederick Schlegel and his friend Mr. Joseph Görres rummaged around the old cities on the Rhine for the remains of Old German paintings and sculptures, which were worshipped blindly like holy reliquaries.³¹

I have just compared the German Parnassus of that time to Charenton. I think I still have not done it justice. A French madness is by no means as insane as a German one; for in the latter, as Polonius would say, there is method. That German madness was pursued with unrivaled pedantry, with horrible conscientiousness, with a thoroughness of which a superficial French fool has not the least idea.

The political condition of Germany was especially favorable for a Christian, Old German orientation. "Misery teaches us to pray," the saying

²⁷ Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773–1798). ²⁸ Perugino (c. 1450–1523), painter.

²⁹ Fra Angelico (1400–1455). ³⁰ The original German term is *Gemüt*.

³¹ Joseph Görres (1776–1848). Heine discusses Görres in more detail in a section from Book Two, omitted here, where he denounces Görres's political Catholicism.

goes, and, indeed, never was the misery greater in Germany; and thus prayer, religion, and Christianity were more accessible to the people than ever before. No people is more devoted to its princes than the Germans. It was not so much the tragic condition of the land at war and under foreign occupation which so unbearably distressed the Germans; it was rather the miserable sight of their conquered princes crawling at the feet of Napoleon. The German people as a whole were like those loyal old servants in great houses who feel all the humiliations of their noble masters even more deeply than the masters themselves. They cry, alone, in great despondency, when, say, the master's silver is to be sold, and even secretly use their meager savings so that noble wax, as opposed to bourgeois tallow, candles can be placed on the masters' table, as we see in the old plays with suitable emotion. This general state of depression found its consolation in religion, and there arose a pietistic submission to the will of God, from whom alone help was expected. And indeed against Napoleon, the good Lord was the only one who could help. One could no longer count on the worldly armies; one had to turn one's trusting gaze to heaven.

We could also have tolerated Napoleon quite easily. But while our princes hoped for God to free them from him, they also gave some room to the thought that the combined forces of their people could also provide a substantial contribution. In this way, one sought to waken the sense of community among the Germans, and even the highest persons spoke now about German customs, of the common German fatherland, of the unification of the Christian-Germanic tribes, of the unity of Germany. Patriotism was commanded us, and we became patriots, for we do everything that our princes command. But one must not confuse this patriotism with the feeling here in France which goes by the same name. The patriotism of a Frenchman consists in the warming of his heart; through this warmth it expands, grows larger, so that it includes in its love not only his nearest relatives, but rather all of France, the entire land of civilization. The patriotism of the German, on the other hand, consists of the narrowing of his heart, so that it contracts like leather in the cold. It means that he hates all foreign things; that he no longer wants to be a citizen of the world or a European, but just a narrow German. We then witnessed boorishness as an ideal, which Mr. Jahn brought into a system.³² Thus began the

³² Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1852), early German nationalist, later famous as the “Father of Gymnastics” for his patriotic sport movement.

miserable, crude, unwashed opposition against those convictions which were precisely the most magnificent and holy things which Germany had ever produced, namely, against the ideas of humanity and universal brotherhood, against that cosmopolitanism which our great spirits, Lessing, Herder, Schiller, Goethe, Jean Paul, and all cultured people in Germany have always revered.³³

You know all too well what happened in Germany soon thereafter. When God, the snow, and the Cossacks had destroyed the best of Napoleon's forces, we Germans received the command from on high to free ourselves from the foreign yoke, and we blazed up in manly anger against the servitude we had suffered all too long. Inspired by the good melodies and bad verses of Körner's songs, we fought for our freedom.³⁴ You see, we do everything our princes order us to do.

During the period of preparation for this struggle, a school hostile towards the essence of the French and laudatory of everything traditionally German in art and life was bound to reach the acme of its development. The romantic school went hand-in-hand at the time with the striving of the governments and the secret societies, and Mr. A. W. Schlegel conspired against Racine towards the same end as Minister Stein against Napoleon.³⁵ The school flowed with the current of its times, that is, with the current of a river flowing backwards to its source. When finally German patriotism and German nationality triumphed completely, so also did the popular-Germanic-Christian-romantic school, the "new-German-religious-patriotic art." Napoleon, the great Classicist, as classical as Alexander and Caesar, fell to defeat; Messrs. August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, the small romantics, as romantic as Tom Thumb and Puss in Boots, arose as victors.³⁶

But here, too, the reaction which follows closely behind every extreme, did not fail to materialize. [. . .]³⁷

If then, the romantic school was destroyed in the realm of public opinion through the disclosure of its Catholic intrigues, at the same time it received a devastating protest within its own temple from the mouth of one of those

³³ Jean Paul Richter (1763–1825), author and aesthetician.

³⁴ Theodor Körner (1791–1813).

³⁵ Schlegel and Racine are discussed below; Heinrich Freiherr vom und zum Stein (1757–1831) was a minister in the Prussian government under the French occupation and later advisor to the Tsar in the struggle against Napoleon.

³⁶ *Puss in Boots* and *Tom Thumb* are two plays by Tieck.

³⁷ The omitted section contains a discussion of Johann Heinrich Voss as representative of the Enlightenment and his fight against politically conservative Catholicism.

very gods that it itself had set up there. None other than Wolfgang Goethe stepped off of his pedestal and spoke the verdict of damnation over the Messrs. Schlegel, over the same high priests who had perfumed him with so much incense.³⁸ This voice destroyed the entire apparition; the ghosts of the Middle Ages fled, the owls crept away back into obscure castle ruins, the ravens fluttered back to their old church steeples; Friedrich Schlegel went to Vienna where he daily attended Mass and ate roast chicken. Mr. August Wilhelm Schlegel retired into the pagoda of Brahma.³⁹

In all candor, Goethe played a very equivocal role at the time and does not deserve unconditional praise. It is true that the Messrs. Schlegel had never been entirely honest with him. Perhaps it was only because they also needed a living poet to use as an example in their polemic against the old school, and could find none more suitable than Goethe, that they built him an altar, burned incense for him, and made the people kneel before him, also expecting from him some literary promotion. They also had him so close by. From Jena to Weimar there is an avenue of pretty trees with plums which taste very good when you are thirsty from the summer heat. The Schlegels walked this way very often, and in Weimar they had many a conversation with Mr. Privy Counselor von Goethe, who always was a very great diplomat and listened quietly to the Schlegels, smiling in approval, sometimes giving them something to eat, and occasionally doing them a favor etc. They had also approached Schiller; but Schiller was an honest man and did not want to have anything to do with them. The correspondence between him and Goethe, printed three years ago, sheds some light on the relationship of these two poets to the Schlegels.⁴⁰ Goethe shrugs them off with an elegant smile; Schiller is annoyed by their impertinent attraction to scandal, by their manner of gaining attention through scandals, and he calls them whippersnappers.

However much Goethe wanted to rise above it all, he nonetheless owed the larger part of his reputation to the Schlegels. They introduced and promoted the study of his works. The contemptuous and insulting way in which he rejected these men in the end reeks of ingratitude. Perhaps Goethe, the profound observer, was annoyed that the Schlegels only

³⁸ This refers to the essay mentioned below, "About Christian-Patriotic-new-German Art," which at the time was taken to be Goethe's work, but was really the work of the art historian Heinrich Meyer (1760–1832).

³⁹ As Heine mentions below, August Wilhelm Schlegel began his studies of Sanskrit in 1818.

⁴⁰ The letters were published 1828/29.

wanted to use him as a means to their ends. Perhaps these very ends threatened to compromise him, the minister of a Protestant state. Perhaps it was even the old pagan divine wrath which rose in him when he saw the moldy Catholic schemes. — Just as Voss is like the stubborn one-eyed Odin, Goethe is like the great Jupiter in stature and manner of thinking. The former had to pound Thor's hammer diligently; the latter needed only to give his head, with its ambrosial locks, an indignant shake, and the Schlegels trembled and crept away. In the second issue of Goethe's journal *Art and Antiquity*, a public document of that protest from the side of Goethe appeared under the title "About Christian-Patriotic-new-German Art." This article was, as it were, Goethe's eighteenth of Brumaire in German literature.⁴¹ By chasing the Schlegels out of the temple in such a curt manner, attracting many of their most zealous disciples, and receiving acclaim from the public who had been horrified for a long time at the Schlegelian directorate, he founded his own dictatorship in German literature. From that moment on, no one had much to say any more about the Messrs. Schlegel; only now and then were they mentioned, as one now mentions occasionally Barras or Gohier. There was no longer any talk of classical and romantic poetry, but just of Goethe and Goethe. Certainly, in the meantime a few poets came onto the scene who were not so far behind him in power and imagination, but out of courtesy they acknowledged him as their leader, they surrounded him reverently, they kissed his hand, and they kneeled before him. These grandees of Parnassus were distinguished from the great crowd, though, because they were allowed to keep their laurel wreaths on, even in Goethe's presence. Sometimes they would attack him, but they were annoyed when some lesser person also felt justified in criticizing him. Aristocrats, too, no matter how angry they are at their sovereign, become irritated when the masses rise against him. And the intellectual aristocracy of Germany had in the two last decades quite justifiable reasons to be indignant at Goethe. As I myself often said at the time, with ample bitterness, Goethe was like King Louis XI who suppressed the high nobility and raised up the Third Estate.⁴²

That was repugnant. Goethe was afraid of every independent original author and praised highly every insignificant lesser spirit. Indeed, he

⁴¹ Napoleon seized power in 1799 on the 18th of Brumaire (according to the French Revolutionary calendar) from the Directory, which governed France from 1795 to 1799. Barras and Gohier, a few sentences below, were prominent members of the Directory.

⁴² King Louis XI (1423–1483), founder of the absolute monarchy in France.

went so far that, in the end, it was a badge of mediocrity to gain his praise.

Later, I will speak of the new poets who emerged during the Goethean Imperial period. It is a young forest whose trunks are only now showing their greatness since the fall of the hundred-year-old oak, whose branches had grown so far over them and overshadowed them so much.

As I have mentioned, Goethe, this great tree, was not without an opposition, which agitated bitterly against him. Those with the most contrary views were united in this opposition. The old faithful, the orthodox were annoyed that there was no niche in the trunk of the great tree with a statue of a saint in it, rather the naked dryads of paganism did their witches' work there. They would have gladly cut down this old realm of magic, like holy Boniface, with a consecrated axe.⁴³ The new believers, the adherents of liberalism, on the other hand, were annoyed that this tree could not be made into a liberty tree or used as a barricade at all. Indeed, the tree was too high to crown with a red cap and dance the Carmagnole underneath.⁴⁴ The greater public however honored this great wonder-tree, precisely because it was so self-sufficiently magnificent, because it filled the whole world so sweetly with its wonderful scent, and because its branches reached so majestically into the sky, so that the stars seemed to be its golden fruit.

The opposition to Goethe actually begins with the appearance of the so-called apocryphal *Years of Wandering* which came out under the title *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Wandering* with Gottfried Basse in Quedlinburg in the year 1821, that is, soon after the downfall of the Schlegels. You see, Goethe had announced a sequel to his *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* with the very same title; and strangely enough, the sequel appeared simultaneously with that literary *Doppelgänger*, which not only imitated Goethe's style of writing, but also presented the hero of Goethe's original novel as an active character. This imitation did not reveal great talent, but rather a great deal of tact. Since the author was able to maintain his anonymity for a time, the interest of the public was heightened artificially through vain attempts to guess his identity. It turned out in the end, however, that the author was a previously unknown country preacher whose name was Pustkuchen – which is *omelette soufflée* in French, a name which

⁴³ Saint Boniface, in his attempts to convert the Germans, cut down the sacred oak tree of the pagan god Thor.

⁴⁴ A reference to a ritual conducted by supporters of the French Revolution.

also characterizes his whole essence. It was nothing but that old pietistic leaven,⁴⁵ which had puffed itself up aesthetically. Goethe was criticized in this book for the lack of moral purpose in his literary works and for an inability to create noble characters as opposed to mere vulgar figures. On the other hand, it was claimed, Schiller had created the most ideally noble characters and was thus a greater poet.

The latter assertion, namely, that Schiller was greater than Goethe, was the key issue raised by the book. Thus began a mania of comparing the products of the two poets, and opinions were divided. The Schillerians made much of the moral greatness of a Max Piccolomini, a Thekla, a Marquis Posa, and other Schillerean heroes, whereas in contrast they declared the Goethean personages, Philine, Gretchen, Klärchen, and other pretty creatures to be immoral hussies.⁴⁶ The Goetheans remarked, smiling, that these latter figures, along with the leading men in Goethe, were difficult to depict as moral, but that the promotion of morality which was being demanded of Goethe's literary works was hardly the purpose of art, since in art as in the universe itself there are no purposes; it is only human beings who have read the concepts "means and ends" into things. Art, like the world, is there for its own sake, and just as the world will eternally remain the same, even if the opinions of people judging it constantly change, so art must also remain independent of the historical views of humanity. Thus, art must be especially independent of morality, which changes on this earth every time a new religion emerges and the old religion is suppressed. In fact, since a new religion appears in the world every few centuries, and, after becoming custom, becomes a binding new system of morality, every time period would denounce the art works of the past as immoral if they are to be judged by the standards of historical morality. As we ourselves have experienced, good Christians, who condemn flesh as devilish, have always taken offense at the sight of the statues of Greek gods. Chaste monks tied an apron onto antique Venus. Even in the most recent times, ridiculous fig-leaves have been stuck on to naked statues. A pious Quaker sacrificed his entire fortune to purchase the most beautiful mythological paintings of Giulio Romano in order to burn them – truly, he deserved for that to go to heaven, and be whipped daily! A religion which, say, places God only into matter and thus considers

⁴⁵ A biblical reference (1 Corinthians 5:7).

⁴⁶ Characters, respectively, from Schiller's *Wallenstein* trilogy (1799), *Don Carlos* (1787); and from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Apprenticeship* (1796), *Faust, Part I* (1808), and *Egmont* (1787).

only the flesh to be divine must produce, when it becomes custom, a morality, according to which only those art works are worthy of praise which glorify the flesh. In contrast, Christian art works which portray only the vanity of the flesh would be rejected as immoral. Indeed, the art works which are moral in one country would be considered immoral in another, where another religion is traditional. For example, our visual arts arouse repugnance in a strict Muslem, and, in contrast, some arts which are considered completely innocent in the harems of the Orient are loathsome to the Christian. Since in India the profession of a Bajadere is not disapproved of by custom, the drama *Vasantasena* whose heroine is a prostitute is not considered to be immoral there at all.⁴⁷ If an attempt were ever made to perform this play in the Théâtre Français, the whole parterre would scream about immorality, the same parterre which daily watches with pleasure dramas of intrigue whose heroes are young widows who make happy marriages at the end instead of, as demanded by Indian morality, burning themselves along with their dead husbands.⁴⁸

Starting with such a viewpoint, the Goetheans view art as an independent second world which they place high above the world of variable and ever-changing human activity, their religion and their morality, which goes on below. However, I cannot swear my complete allegiance to this point of view. The Goetheans allowed themselves to be misled by it to proclaim art itself as the highest value and to turn away from the demands of that first actual world, to which, however, precedence is due.

Schiller was much more definitely attached to this first world than Goethe, and in this respect we must praise him.⁴⁹ The spirit of his times captured him, Friedrich Schiller, alive, he struggled with it, he was conquered by it, he followed it to combat, he wore its banner, and it was the same banner under which one fought so enthusiastically on the other side of the Rhine as well, and for which we are still prepared to shed our best blood. Schiller wrote for the great ideas of the Revolution; he destroyed spiritual Bastilles; he worked to build the temple of freedom, indeed, that rather large temple which was to enclose all nations, like a single community of brothers; he was a cosmopolitan. He began with that hatred against

⁴⁷ *Vasantasena* is the hero of the ancient Indian drama *Mricchakatika*, translated into German in 1828.

⁴⁸ The Théâtre Français is the French national theater.

⁴⁹ The works of Schiller mentioned in the following section are: *The Robbers* (1781), *Don Carlos* (1787), *History of the Decline of the Netherlands* (1788), *History of the Thirty-Years' War* (1793), *The Maiden of Orleans* (1801), *William Tell* (1804).

the past which we see in the *Robbers*, where he is like a small Titan who has run away from school, drunk schnapps, and broken Jupiter's windows. He ended with that love of the future which already blooms forth in *Don Carlos* like a forest of flowers, and he himself is that Marquis Posa, at the same time prophet and soldier, who also fights for what he prophesies, and who bears, under his Spanish coat, the most beautiful heart which ever loved and suffered in Germany.

The poet, who imitates the Creator in his small way, is also like God Almighty in that he creates people in his own image. If Karl Moor and Marquis Posa are entirely Schiller himself, so Goethe is his Werther, his Wilhelm Meister, and his Faust, and we can study the phases of his spiritual progress. If Schiller plunges himself entirely into history, waxes enthusiastic for the social progress of humanity, and sings the story of world history, Goethe sinks more and more into individual feeling or into art or nature. For Goethe, the pantheist, the study of nature, of course, had to be a central occupation, and the results of his research are given to us not only in literary but also in scientific works. His indifferentism was also a result of his pantheistic view of the world.

It is unfortunately true, we have to admit it, that it is far from rare that pantheism has made people into indifferentists. The thought goes: if everything is God, then it is all the same what you work with, whether with clouds or antique gems, with folk songs or ape-bones, with people or actors. But herein lies the error: Not everything is God, but God is everything. God does not manifest himself in equal degrees in all things, rather he is manifested in different things in different degrees, and every thing is impelled from within to attain a higher degree of divinity. This is the great law of progress in nature. The knowledge of this law, which was described most profoundly by the Saint-Simonists, turns pantheism into a worldview which does not at all lead to indifferentism, but rather to the most self-sacrificing desire for progress. No, God is not manifested to the same degree in all things, as Wolfgang Goethe believed, thus becoming an indifferentist; and instead of occupying himself with the highest interests of humanity, he chose rather artistic playthings, anatomy, the theory of colors, botany, and observations of clouds. Rather, God is manifested to a greater or lesser degree in all things. His life is this constant manifestation; God is in movement, in action, in time; his holy breath blows through the leaves of history, the latter is the true book of God. And Friedrich Schiller felt and sensed this, and he became a "prophet facing backwards"

and wrote the *Decline of the Netherlands*, the *Thirty-Years' War* and the *Maiden of Orleans* and *William Tell*.

It is true that Goethe celebrated a few great stories of emancipation in verse, but he celebrated them as an artist. He irritably rejected Christian enthusiasm, and did not understand, or did not want to understand, the philosophical enthusiasm of our time for fear of having his spiritual peace interrupted. Thus he treated enthusiasm in general as something entirely historical, as something given, as a content which was to be formed. Spirit became matter in his hands, and he gave it a beautiful, pleasing form. Thus, he became the greatest artist in our literature, and everything that he wrote became a well-rounded work of art.

The example of the master showed the way for the disciples, and thus arose that literary period in Germany which I once called the "period of art," when I described its negative effect on the political development of the German people. By no means, though, did I deny, at the time, the independent value of Goethe's masterworks. They adorn our dear fatherland as beautiful statues adorn a garden, but they are statues. You can fall in love with them, but they are infertile; Goethe's literary works do not beget deeds in the way that Schiller's do. The deed is the child of the word, and the beautiful words of Goethe are childless. That is the curse of everything which has come to be merely through art. The statue that Pygmalion made was a beautiful woman; even the master himself fell in love with it. It came to life under his kisses; but as far as we know, it never had children. I think Mr. Charles Nodier has said something similar at some point in this context, and it came to my mind yesterday, when, wandering through the lower galleries of the Louvre, I saw the old statues of the gods.⁵⁰ They stood with mute white eyes, a secret melancholy in their marble smiles, a dark memory perhaps of Egypt, the land of the dead, where they came from, or a passionate desire for life, from which they have been pushed aside by other, more current deities, or else the pain of their dead immortality: – they seem to be waiting for the word which would bring them back to life, which would release them from their cold, rigid immobility. Strange! These antique statues reminded me of Goethe's works, which seem just as perfect, just as magnificent, just as serene, and yet seem to have the same sad feeling that their rigidity and coldness separate them from the colorfully warm life of the present; that

⁵⁰ Nodier (1780–1844), French romantic author.

they cannot suffer and rejoice with us, that they are not human, but rather unhappy mixtures of god and stone.

These few hints will serve to explain the animosity of the various parties which have raised their voices in Germany against Goethe. The orthodox were indignant at the "great heathen," as Goethe was generally called in Germany. They feared his influence on the people, whom he instilled with his worldview through smiling poems, indeed the most insignificant seeming songs. They saw in him the most dangerous enemy of the cross, which for him was as disagreeable as bedbugs, garlic, or tobacco. That is approximately the text of his *xenie*⁵¹ which he dared to publish in the middle of Germany, the land where that very vermin, garlic, tobacco, and the cross rule everywhere in holy alliance. But, of course, it was not this at all which we, the men of the movement, disliked about Goethe. As already mentioned, we criticized the unfruitfulness of his word, the artistic existence spread through him in Germany that exerted a quietistic influence on the German youth, which worked against a political regeneration of our fatherland. The indifferent pantheist was thus attacked from the most opposite directions. To speak French, the extreme right and the extreme left joined together against him, and while the black priest with the crucifix let loose on him, at the same time the furious *sans-culotte* ran at him with his pike. Mr. Wolfgang Menzel, who led the fight against Goethe with an expenditure of esprit worthy of a better goal, did not demonstrate the one-sidedness of the spiritualist Christian or the unsatisfied patriot in his polemic.⁵² Rather, he based one part of his attack on the last statements of Friedrich Schlegel, who, after his fall, pronounced from the depths of his Catholic cathedral his lamentations about Goethe, about the Goethe "whose poetry has no center." Mr. Menzel went even farther and showed that Goethe was no genius, but only a talent; he praised Schiller as the opposite, etc. This happened some time before the July Revolution. Mr. Menzel was at the time the greatest admirer of the Middle Ages, both for its works of art as well as its institutions. He deprecated Mr. Johann Heinrich Voss with incessant rage, praised Mr. Joseph Görres with unheard-of enthusiasm. His hatred for Goethe was thus authentic and he wrote against him out of conviction and not, as many thought, in order to make a name for himself. Although at the time, I myself was an

⁵¹ The *Xenien* were a collection of satirical distichons, authored with Schiller. The source of the reference, however, is the sixty-sixth *Venetian Epigram* (1795).

⁵² Wolfgang Menzel (1798–1873), literary critic.

opponent of Goethe, I was still unhappy with the bitterness with which Mr. Menzel criticized him, and I lamented this lack of piety. I remarked that Goethe was still the king of our literature. If one needs to apply the critical knife to such a person, one must never lack the proper courtesy, like the executioner who had to decapitate Charles I and, before he performed his office, knelt down before the king and asked his highest forgiveness.⁵³

Among the opponents of Goethe was also the famous Privy Councilor Müllner and the only friend who remained loyal to him, Professor Schütz, son of the old Schütz.⁵⁴ There were a few other public opponents of Goethe who have less well-known names, for example, a Mr. Spaun who spent a long time in jail for political crimes.⁵⁵ Between us, it was very mixed company. I have given a sufficient description of what was brought against Goethe. It is more difficult to guess the particular motives which led each of his opponents to pronounce publicly their anti-Goethean convictions. I have exact knowledge of this motive in only one case; and since this case is myself, I will now honestly state it: it was envy. In my own defense, I must however state once more that I never attacked the poet in Goethe, but only the man. I have never criticized his works. I have never been able to see flaws in them like those critics who, with their well-polished spectacles, have also noticed blemishes on the moon. These sharp-sighted ones! What they see as blemishes are blooming forests, silver rivers, sublime mountains, and happy valleys.

Nothing is more foolish than to disparage Goethe in favor of Schiller. No one ever meant the praise of Schiller seriously; the only purpose of such praise was to disparage Goethe. Or were they really unaware that those highly praised, highly idealistic characters, those altar pieces of virtue and morality produced by Schiller are much easier to make than those sinful, limited, blemished beings which Goethe shows us in his works? Do they really not know that mediocre painters most of the time paint life-sized pictures of saints on canvas, but that you have to be a great master to paint in a true-to-life and technically perfect manner, say, a Spanish beggar boy who is delousing himself, a Dutch peasant vomiting or having a tooth pulled out, and ugly old women as seen in small Dutch

⁵³ King Charles I of England, executed 1649.

⁵⁴ Adolf Müllner (1774–1829), Friedrich Schütz (1779–1844), son of Christian Gottfried Schütz (1747–1832), editor of the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*.

⁵⁵ Franz Ritter von Spaun (1753–1826).

cabinet pictures? The great and the terrible are far easier to portray in art than the small and plain. The Egyptian magicians were able to imitate many of Moses's tricks, for example, the snakes, the blood, even the frogs, but when he produced magical things which were seemingly much easier, such as vermin, they admitted their impotence. They could not imitate the small vermin and they said, "This is the finger of God." Complain as you will about the vulgarities in *Faust*, the scenes on the Brocken, in Auerbach's Tavern, complain about the dissoluteness in *Meister* – you nonetheless could not imitate any of it: this is the finger of Goethe! But you do not want to imitate, and I hear you say with abhorrence: "We are not sorcerers, we are good Christians." You are not sorcerers – that I know.

Goethe's greatest merit lies in the perfect completion of everything he portrays. No parts are strong while others are weak; no part is fully illustrated while others are only sketched; there are no awkward places, no traditional filler material, and no preference for particular details. He treats every person in his novels and dramas, when he or she appears, as the main character. Thus it is in Homer, thus in Shakespeare. In the works of all great poets there are actually no secondary characters at all, each figure is the main character when it appears. Those poets are like the absolute princes who attach no independent worth to people but rather themselves confer upon them their highest recognition as they see fit. When once a French diplomat mentioned to Emperor Paul of Russia that an important man of his empire was interested in something, the emperor interrupted him sternly with the remarkable words: "There is in this empire no important man except for the one with whom I am talking at the moment and only as long as I am speaking with him is he important."⁵⁶ An absolute poet, who has similarly obtained his power by the grace of God, in the same way considers the most important person of his spiritual empire to be the one whom he is currently causing to speak, who has just wound up under his feather; and to such an artistic despotism, we owe that marvelous perfection of the smallest figures in the works of Homer, Shakespeare, and Goethe.

If I have spoken of the opponents of Goethe with some bitterness, I likely have cause to say much bitterer things about his apologists. Most of them have brought forth even greater idiocies in their zeal. One of them, namely Mr. Eckermann, who, by the way, is not otherwise lacking in talent,

⁵⁶ Emperor Paul of Russia (1754–1801).

stands, in this respect, on the verge of the ridiculous.⁵⁷ Karl Immermann, who is now our greatest dramatic poet, earned his critical spurs in the battle against Mr. Pustkuchen, by producing an excellent short work. In this matter, it was primarily the Berliners who stood out. The most important of Goethe's champions at that time was Varnhagen von Ense, a man with thoughts in his heart as big as the world, who expresses them in words which are as precious and elegant as cut gems. Goethe always placed the highest weight on the opinions of that noble spirit. – Perhaps it is useful to mention here that already earlier Mr. Wilhelm von Humboldt had written an outstanding book about Goethe. For the last ten years, every fair in Leipzig has produced many works about Goethe. The investigations of Mr. Schubarth about Goethe belong to the curiosities of higher criticism. What Mr. Häring, who writes under the name Willibald Alexis, has said in various periodicals about Goethe is as important as ingenious. Mr. Zimmermann, professor at Hamburg, has offered in his lectures the most excellent judgments about Goethe, which can be found sparingly, but all the more profoundly in his *Dramaturgical Papers*. At various German universities, there were colloquia about Goethe, and of all of his works, it was primarily *Faust* which concerned the public. It was pursued and commented upon in many ways; it was the secular bible of the Germans.

I would not be a real German if, after mentioning *Faust*, I did not express a few edifying thoughts on the topic. From the greatest thinker to the smallest waiter, from the philosopher downwards to the doctor of philosophy, everyone tests his acumen on this book. But really it is as broad as the Bible, and like the Bible, it contains heaven and earth, including the human being and his exegesis. Its content is again the main reason why *Faust* is so popular. However, it is a testimony to Goethe's unconscious profundity, his genius, that he always knew how to seize the nearest and best, that he took the content from folk legend. I may assume that the content of *Faust* is familiar; this book has also recently become famous in France. But I do not know if the old folk legend itself is known; if here, also, at fairs, a grey book is sold, printed badly on blotting paper,

⁵⁷ The defenders of Goethe mentioned here: Johann Peter Eckermann (1792–1854), Goethe's private secretary; Karl Immermann (1796–1840), author; Karl August Varnhagen von Ense (1785–1858), biographer, husband of salonnière Rahel née Levin; Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), philosopher, linguist, diplomat; Karl Ernst Schubarth (1796–1861); Wilhelm Häring (1798–1871); Friedrich Gottlieb Zimmermann (1782–1835).

decorated with crude woodcuts, in which one can read at length how the arch-sorcerer Johannes Faustus, a learned doctor who has studied all of the sciences, in the end has thrown aside his books and concluded a pact with the devil by means of which he can enjoy all of the sensual pleasures of the earth, but in return has to give up his soul to hellish ruin.⁵⁸ The people in the Middle Ages always ascribed any great intellectual powers, wherever it saw them, to a such a pact with the devil, and Albertus Magnus, Raimund Lullus, Theophrastus Paracelsus, Agrippa of Nessesheim, also in England, Roger Bacon, were considered to be sorcerers, black magicians, exorcists. But far stranger things are said and sung of Doctor Faustus, who not only demanded knowledge of things from the devil but also the most concrete enjoyments; and that is just the Faust who invented printing and lived at the time where people began to preach against the strict authority of the Church and to research independently – so that, with Faust, the medieval period of faith ends and the modern critical period of science begins. It is very significant, indeed, that at the time when, according to folk opinion, Faust lived, the Reformation begins and that he was supposed to have himself invented the art which would grant to knowledge victory over faith, namely, printing, an art which also took from us Catholic peace of mind and plunged us into doubt and revolutions. Someone other than myself might add, and finally delivered us into the power of the devil. But no, learning, the knowledge of things through reason, science finally gave us the enjoyments which faith, Catholic Christianity had so long cheated us out of. We now know that humanity is not only called to heavenly, but also to earthly equality. The political brotherhood preached to us by philosophy is more beneficent to us than the purely spiritual brotherhood which Christianity helped us to achieve. And knowledge became word, and the word became deed, and we can, during our lifetimes, be blessed on this earth. – If then we are also in addition able to partake of the heavenly blessedness which Christianity so definitely promises after death, we certainly would welcome it as well.

The Germans have sensed this deeply for a long time; the German people is itself that learned Doctor Faust, it is itself that spiritualist who finally understands with his spirit the insufficiency of the spirit, demands material enjoyments, and reinstates the rights of the flesh. – But still

⁵⁸ The original *Faust*-book was published in 1587 by Johann Spies.

caught up in the symbolism of Catholic poetry, where God is the representative of the spirit and the devil the representative of the flesh, one called that rehabilitation of the flesh an apostasy from God, a pact with the devil.

It will be some time yet before the German people sees the fulfillment of the prophecies which it so profoundly expressed in the poem, before it understands through its spirit the usurpations of this spirit and vindicates the rights of the flesh. That will be the Revolution, the great daughter of the Reformation.

[. . .]⁵⁹

Indeed, in Goethe, personality is entirely in agreement with genius, as is demanded of extraordinary people. His outer appearance was just as important as the word which lived in his works. His figure too was harmonious, clear, joyful, nobly measured, and you could study Greek art from his body as from a classical sculpture. This dignified body was never stooped with Christian worm-like humility. The features of this face were never contorted by Christian contrition. The eyes did not have the shyness of the Christian sinner, they were not sunken in prayer or raised toward heaven, not moved flickeringly: – no, his eyes were calm like those of a God. It is in general the mark of the gods that their gaze is steady and their eyes do not move back and forth in uncertainty. Thus, when Agni, Varuna, Yama, and Indra take on the shape of Nala at Damayanti's wedding, the latter recognizes her lover by the blinking of his eyes, since, as I have said, the eyes of the Gods never move.⁶⁰ The eyes of Napoleon also had this trait. Thus, I am convinced that he was a God. Goethe's eye remained in advanced age just as divine as in his youth. Time had also covered his head with snow but could not bow it down. He carried it always just as proudly and high, and when he spoke, he would always become taller, and when he stretched out his hand, it was as if he could dictate to the stars in heaven the paths they should take with his finger. It was thought that there was a hint of cold egoism around his mouth; but this feature is also proper to the eternal gods, and even to the father of the gods, the great Jupiter, to whom I have already compared Goethe. When I visited him in Weimar and stood across from him, I looked to his side, involuntarily, to see if I could see the eagle next to him with lightning

⁵⁹ Here Heine discusses several later works of Goethe, namely, the *West-Eastern Divan*, and Goethe's view of India.

⁶⁰ Figures from the ancient Indian epic *Mahabharata*.

bolts in its beak. I almost spoke to him in Greek; but then I noticed that he understood German, so that I told him in German that the plums on the way from Jena to Weimar tasted very good. I had spent so many long winter nights pondering what sublime and profound things I would say to Goethe, if I ever saw him. And when I finally did see him, I told him that the Saxon plums taste very good. And Goethe smiled. He smiled with the same lips which once kissed beautiful Leda, Europa, Danae, Semele, and so many other princesses or just everyday nymphs.⁶¹ –

*Les dieux s'en vont.*⁶² Goethe is dead. He died on 22 March last year, that ponderous year when our earth lost its greatest dignitaries. It is as if death that year suddenly became an aristocrat, as if it wanted to single out especially the notables of this earth by sending them into the grave at the same time. Maybe in the beyond, the realm of shadows, it wanted to set up a high aristocracy and in that case the crop was well chosen. Or, on the other hand, did Death want to advance democracy by annihilating not only the dignitaries, but also their authority, thus promoting intellectual equality? Was it out of respect or insolence that Death in the previous year left kings untouched? Just as a diversion, he lifted his scythe towards the King of Spain, but he came to his senses at the right time and let him live. Last year no single king died. *Les dieux s'en vont*; – but we keep the kings.

Book Two

To be as strictly conscientious as I have prescribed for myself, I must note here that several French people have complained to me that I have been all too harsh in my treatment of the Schlegels, especially Mr. August Wilhelm. However, I do not think that such complaints would arise if one were better acquainted here with German literary history. Many Frenchmen know Mr. A. W. Schlegel solely from the work of Madame de Staël, his noble benefactor. Most know him only by name; this name sticks in their memory as something honorably famous, like, say, the name Osiris, which they associate only with a strange sort of god who is venerated in Egypt. Any further similarity between Mr. A. W. Schlegel and Osiris is entirely unknown to them.

⁶¹ Mythological women seduced by Jupiter.

⁶² French: the Gods die.

As I was once an academic student of the older Schlegel, it might be expected that I owe him more merciful treatment. But did Mr. A. W. Schlegel spare old Bürger, his literary father?⁶³ No, and he acted according to tradition and custom, since in literature, as in the wild forests of North America, the fathers are struck dead by their sons as soon as they have become old and weak.

I remarked already that Friedrich Schlegel was more important than Mr. August Wilhelm, and, indeed, the latter simply lived off the ideas of his brother and was skilled only in the art of developing them. Friedrich Schlegel was a deep-thinking man. He recognized all the glories of the past and felt all of the pains of the present. But he did not understand that these pains were sacred, and necessary for the future redemption of the world. He saw the sun going down, looked sadly towards the place it was setting, and mourned the nocturnal darkness he saw approaching. And he did not notice that there was already a new dawn coming up on the opposite side.⁶⁴ Fr. Schlegel once called the historian “a prophet, turned around.”⁶⁵ This phrase is his own best characterization. He hated the present, the future scared him, and his prophetic revelatory glances penetrated only into the past, which he loved.

Poor Fr. Schlegel! In the pains of our time he did not see the labor pains of a new birth, but rather the agony of death; and his death horror caused him to flee into the shaky ruins of the Catholic Church. In any case, this was the most suitable refuge for his state of mind. In his life, he had demonstrated much cheerful exuberance; but he regarded it as sinful, as a sin which demanded later repentance, and the author of *Lucinde* was forced to become Catholic.⁶⁶

Lucinde is a novel, and besides his poems and a drama, *Alarkos*, based on Spanish models, this novel is the single original creation which Fr. Schlegel left to us. In its time, there was no lack of people to praise this

⁶³ Reference to August Wilhelm Schlegel's review essay "About Bürger's Works" of Gottfried August Bürger's (1747–1794) poetry from the *Characteristics and Critiques* of 1801, further discussed below. It should be pointed out that Schiller's famous review of Bürger from 1791 was far more critical. Bürger's best-known poem is the ballad "Lenore."

⁶⁴ A famous short poem by Heine runs: "The girl stood on the seashore / And sighed so hard and long / So very moved was she / By the setting of the sun. 'Oh maiden! Be not saddened / The sun's on her old track / She goes down here in front / And behind she will come back.'"

⁶⁵ From a *Fragment* in the *Athenäum* collection, no. 80.

⁶⁶ The works of Friedrich Schlegel discussed by Heine are: *Lucinde* (1799), *Alarcos* (1802), *Poems* (1809), *The Wisdom and Language of the Indians* (1808), and *History of Ancient and Modern Literature* (1815).

novel. The now Very Reverend Mr. Schleiermacher back then published enthusiastic letters about *Lucinde*.⁶⁷ There were even no few critics who praised it as a masterwork and even prophesied that it would once be considered to be the best book in German literature. These latter critics should have been taken into custody, as in Russia, where prophets prophesying a public catastrophe are locked away until their predictions have come true. No, the gods have saved our literature from that catastrophe; Schlegel's novel was soon universally rejected because of its obscene triviality and, by now, has vanished entirely. *Lucinde* is the name of the heroine of this novel, and she is a sensuous and witty woman, or rather, a mixture of sensuality and wit, for her true flaw is that she is no woman, but an inanimate composite of two abstractions, wit and sensuality. The Blessed Virgin may well forgive the author for having written this book; the Muses, never.

A similar book, named *Florentin*, is ascribed in error to the late Schlegel. It is said that this book is by his wife, a daughter of the famous Moses Mendelssohn, whom he seduced away from her first husband, and who converted with him to the Roman Catholic Church.⁶⁸

I truly believe that Fr. Schlegel was serious about Catholicism. I do not think the same of many of his friends. It is very difficult to find the truth here. Religion and hypocrisy are twins; they look so similar that it is occasionally difficult to tell them apart. The same figure, clothing, and language. The only difference is that the latter pronounces its words somewhat more softly and uses the small word "love" more often. – I speak of Germany; in France, the one sister has passed away, and the other is still in deepest mourning.

Since the appearance of Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*, Fr. Schlegel has presented to the public two additional large works which are perhaps his best, and which in any case deserve the most laudatory mention. They are *The Wisdom and Language of the Indians* and his *Lectures on the History of Literature*. The first of these books not only introduced the study of Sanskrit here, but also founded it. Schlegel was for Germany what William Jones was for England.⁶⁹ In most genial fashion, he learned Sanskrit, and the few pieces of it communicated in the book are masterfully translated.

⁶⁷ *Intimate Letters about Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde* (1800).

⁶⁸ *Florentin* (1801) by Dorothea Schlegel (1763–1839; born Brendel Mendelssohn), whose first husband, chosen by her parents, was the banker Simon Veit (1754–1819).

⁶⁹ William Jones (1746–94), British orientalist.

With his deep intuitive faculty, he fully recognized the meaning of the epic verse form of the Indians, the *sloka*, which flows as wide as the Ganges, the holy clear river. How petty, on the other hand, Mr. A. W. Schlegel showed himself in his translation of a few fragments of Sanskrit into hexameters, whereby he could not praise himself highly enough for not letting any trochees slip in, thus whittling his verse to re-create some of the virtuoso tricks of the alexandrine. Fr. Schlegel's work about India has certainly been translated into French, and I can spare any further praise. My only criticism is of the ideas which lie behind the book. It is written in the interests of Catholicism. These people had found again in Indian poems not only the mysteries, but also the entire hierarchy of Catholicism, along with its battles with worldly power. In the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* they saw, as it were, a Middle Ages with elephants. Indeed, when, in the latter epic, King Visvamitra argues with the Priest Vasishtha, the dispute is the same as the argument here between the emperor and the pope, even if here the object of argument is called investiture, and there the cow Sabala.

The same criticism can be made in regard to Schlegel's lectures about literature. Friedrich Schlegel here views all of literature from a high standpoint; however, this high standpoint is always the bell tower of a Catholic church. And whatever Schlegel says, one always hears those bells ringing; sometimes one even hears the cawing of the tower ravens flying around him. For me, it is as if the incense of High Mass wafts from this book, and its most beautiful passages conceal only tinselled thoughts. However, in spite of this handicap, I know of no better book in this field. Only by putting together Herder's works of this type could you get a better overview of the literature of all peoples. For Herder did not sit in judgment over the diverse nations like a literary grand inquisitor, damning or absolving them according to the degree of their faith. No, Herder saw all of humanity as a great harp in the hand of the great master; every people seemed to him one string of this giant harp tuned in a distinctive manner, and he understood the universal harmony of their different sounds.

F. Schlegel died in summer of 1829 as a result (it is said) of gastronomical immoderation. He was fifty-seven years old. His death resulted in one of the most repulsive literary scandals. His friends, the party of the priests, whose headquarters was in Munich, were indignant about the indecorous way in which the liberal press discussed the death. They therefore slandered, scolded, and calumniated the German liberals. Of course, they could not say of any of the liberals that "he seduced the wife

of his host and for a long time afterward lived off the generosity of the offended husband.”

Since it has been demanded of me, I must now speak of the older brother, Mr. A. W. Schlegel. If I were still to speak about him in Germany, I would be looked at in amazement.

Who in Paris still talks about the giraffe?⁷⁰

Mr. A. W. Schlegel was born in Hanover on September 5, 1767. I do not know that from himself directly. I was never so ungallant as to ask him his age. I found that date, if I am not mistaken, in Spindler's lexicon of German women writers. Mr. A. W. Schlegel is thus now sixty-seven years old. Mr. Alexander von Humboldt and other naturalists maintain that he is older.⁷¹ Champollion⁷² was also of that opinion. If I am to speak of his literary accomplishments, I must first of all praise him again as a translator. Here there is no question that he accomplished the extraordinary. In particular, his translation of Shakespeare into German is masterful and unsurpassable. Perhaps with the exception of Mr. Gries and Count Platen, Mr. A. W. Schlegel is the best metricist of Germany.⁷³ In all other activities, he merits only second, or perhaps even third, place. In aesthetic criticism, he lacks the grounding of a philosophy, and other contemporaries are far superior to him, especially Solger.⁷⁴ In the study of the Old Germans, Mr. Jakob Grimm towers over him; with his *German Grammar*, he freed us from the superficiality with which the monuments of Old German language had been interpreted following the example of the Schlegels.⁷⁵ Mr. Schlegel might have been able to accomplish much in the study of the Old German if he had not changed over to Sanskrit. But Old German had gone out of fashion, and with Sanskrit fresh attention could be aroused. Here, too, he remained to a certain extent a dilettante; the initiative for his thoughts still belongs to his brother Friedrich, and the scientific part, the sound part of his accomplishments in Sanskrit, belongs, as everyone knows, to his scholarly collaborator, Mr. Lassen.⁷⁶ Mr. Franz Bopp in Berlin is the true Sanskrit scholar in Germany; he is the first

⁷⁰ Giraffes were first exhibited in Paris in 1827.

⁷¹ Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1832), famous German naturalist.

⁷² Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832), the Egyptologist (part of the Osiris comparison).

⁷³ Johann Diederich Gries (1775–1842), translator.

⁷⁴ Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger (1780–1819), romantic aesthetician.

⁷⁵ Jakob Grimm (1785–1863), one of the Grimm brothers and one of the founders of German philology.

⁷⁶ Christian Lassen (1800–1876); Franz Bopp (1791–1867).

in his field. In the study of history, Mr. Schlegel once wanted to attach himself to the fame of Niebuhr, whom he criticized. But when he is compared to this great researcher or with a Johannes von Müller, a Heeren, a Schlosser, or similar historians, you have to shrug your shoulders.⁷⁷ How far did he get as a poet? That is hard to determine.

The violinist Salomon who gave lessons to King George III of England once said to his illustrious pupil: "Violinists are divided into three classes; the first class consists of those who cannot play at all; the second class consists of those who play very badly; and the third class finally is those who play well. Your Majesty has already risen to the second class."⁷⁸

Now, does Mr. A. W. Schlegel belong to the first class or the second class? Some say he is no poet at all; the others say he is a very bad poet. As far as I know, he is no Paganini.

In actuality, Mr. A. W. Schlegel achieved his fame only through the unheard-of audacity with which he attacked the existing literary authorities. He tore laurel wreaths from the old wigs and set much powder flying thereby. His fame is the bastard daughter of scandal.

As I have mentioned several times, the sort of criticism with which Mr. Schlegel attacked the existing authorities rested on no philosophy at all. Once we have recovered from our astonishment at the degree of its impudence, we can see fully the inner emptiness of so-called Schlegelian criticism. For example, when he wants to belittle the poet Bürger, he compares his ballads with the old English ballads collected by Percy, and shows how the latter are written in a much simpler, more naïve, and more antique fashion, and hence are more poetic.⁷⁹ Mr. Schlegel has adequately understood the spirit of the past, especially of the Middle Ages, and he is thus successful in demonstrating this spirit also in the monuments of art of the past and showing their merits from this point of view. But he cannot understand anything which is contemporary; at most he has overheard something of the physiognomy, of a few of the external features of the present, and those are mainly the less attractive ones. Since he does not understand the spirit which animates it, he sees in our entire modern life only a prosaic caricature. In general, only a great poet can know the poetry of his own time. Poetry from the past reveals itself to us

⁷⁷ All historians: Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776–1831), Johannes von Müller (1752–1809), Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren (1760–1842), Friedrich Christoph Schlosser (1776–1861).

⁷⁸ Johann Peter Salomon, violinist (1745–1815).

⁷⁹ Thomas Percy (1729–1811), *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765).

much more easily, and its knowledge is easier to communicate. Thus, Mr. Schlegel succeeded in praising the works in which the past lies entombed to the great crowd, at the expense of those works in which our modern present breathes and lives. But death is not more poetic than life. The Old English poems which Percy collected reveal the spirit of their time, and Bürger's, the spirit of ours. Mr. Schlegel did not understand this spirit. Otherwise in the wild intensity with which this spirit now and then emerges in Bürger's poems, he would not have heard the crude outbursts of an uncultured university instructor, but rather the powerful cries of pain of a titan being tortured to death by an aristocracy of Hanoverian young nobles and school pedants. This, to be sure, was the situation of the author of "Lenore" and the situation of many other genial persons who, as poor instructors in Göttingen, lived in poverty, withered away, and died in misery. How could the refined, restored, baronized, beribboned knight August Wilhelm von Schlegel, who was also protected by aristocratic patrons, have understood those verses in which Bürger loudly proclaims that an honorable man should rather starve himself out of the world than beg for the mercy of the great.

The name "Bürger" has in German the same meaning as the word *citoyen*.⁸⁰

What increased the fame of Mr. Schlegel even more was the attention which he later received here in France when he attacked the literary authorities of the French. We saw with proud joy how our battle-happy countryman showed the French that their entire classical literature was worthless, that Molière was a buffoon and no poet, that Racine was also worth nothing, that, on the other hand, the Germans had to be viewed as the kings of Parnassus.⁸¹ His refrain always ran: the French are the most prosaic people in the world, and there is no poetry at all in France. The man said this at the very time when before his very eyes many a chorus leader of the convention, that great tragedy of titans, was still roaming around in the flesh; at a time when Napoleon was improvising a good epic every day; when Paris was teeming with heroes, kings, and Gods . . . Mr. Schlegel, however, did not see any of this. While he was here, he looked just at himself in the mirror, constantly, and now it is understandable that he saw absolutely no poetry in France.

⁸⁰ *Citoyen* being the term of appellation used by citizens of the French Republic.

⁸¹ Jean Racine (1639–1699), author of *Phèdre* (1677).

But Mr. Schlegel, as I said above, was always able to understand only the poetry of the past and not that of the present. Thus, all of modern life had to appear prosaic to him, and the poetry of France, the native soil of modern society, remained inaccessible to him. Racine must have been the first one whom he could not understand. For this great poet is the early herald of modern times along with the great king with whom modern times began. Racine was the first modern poet, just as Louis XIV was the first modern king. In Corneille, we still find the breath of the Middle Ages.⁸² In him and in the Fronde, old chivalry still rattles.⁸³ For that reason, he is sometimes called romantic. In Racine, though, the way of thinking of the Middle Ages is completely extinguished. In him all sorts of new feelings awaken. He is the organ of a new society. In his breast is the scent of the first violets of our modern life. Indeed, we can even see there the laurel buds, which only later, in most recent times, have shot up so powerfully. Who knows how many deeds have come from Racine's tender verses! The French heroes who lie buried near the pyramids, in Marengo, in Austerlitz, in Moscow, and in Waterloo all heard Racine's verses at some time, and their emperor heard them from the mouth of Talma.⁸⁴ Who knows how many tons of fame in the column in Place Vendôme actually belong to Racine. I do not know if Euripides is a greater poet than Racine. But I do know that Racine was a living source of love and honor, and with his draught he excited, delighted, and inspired an entire people. What more can you ask of a poet? We are all human beings; we climb into the grave and leave our Word behind, and when it has accomplished its mission, it returns to the breast of God, the gathering place of all poetic words, the home of all harmony.

If Mr. Schlegel had limited himself to claiming that the mission of Racine's Word was accomplished, and that the times, which have moved on, require completely different poets, his attacks would have some justification. But it was groundless to attempt to prove Racine's weakness by means of a comparison with older poets. Not only did Mr. Schlegel sense nothing of the infinite grace, the sweet humor, the profound appeal of having dressed his new French heroes in ancient costumes, adding to what is of interest in a modern passion the interest of a witty masquerade;

⁸² Pierre Corneille (1606–1684).

⁸³ The Fronde was a resistance movement of the French aristocracy in the seventeenth century against absolute monarchy.

⁸⁴ The former are scenes of Napoleonic battles; François-Joseph Talma (1763–1826), French actor.

he was foolish enough to take such a disguise at face value, to judge the Greeks of Versailles according to the Greeks of Athens, and to compare the *Phaedra* of Racine with the *Phaedra* of Euripides! This tendency to measure the present against the standard of the past was so deeply rooted in Mr. Schlegel that he always liked to whip a modern poet's back with the laurel branch of an ancient one, and, in order to disparage Euripides himself, knew of no better way than to compare him to the even older Sophocles or even Aeschylus.⁸⁵

It would take us too far afield to go into the details of Mr. Schlegel's great injustice against Euripides, whom he sought to disparage in this manner as once did Aristophanes. The latter, Aristophanes, had, in this respect, a perspective greatly similar to that of the romantic school. Similar feelings and tendencies lie at the base of his polemic, and when Mr. Tieck is called a romantic Aristophanes, we could, with some justification, call the parodist of Euripides and Socrates a classical Tieck. As Mr. Tieck and the Schlegels, despite their own disbelief, nevertheless regretted the decline of Catholicism; as they wanted to restore this faith to the multitude; as they, in this respect, battle the Protestant rationalists, the enlighteners, more the authentic ones than the false ones, with ridicule and slander; as they nourished the most ferocious aversion against men who promoted in life and literature bourgeois respectability; as they mocked this ethos as a sad state of philistine narrow-mindedness, and constantly praised and celebrated the great heroic life of the feudal Middle Ages against it; so, Aristophanes, who himself mocked the gods, nevertheless hated the philosophers who had caused the downfall of all of Olympus; he hated the rationalistic Socrates who preached a better morality; he hated the poets who expressed a life, as it were, already modern, which differed from the earlier period of Greek Gods, heroes, and kings just as much as our times today differ from medieval feudalism; he hated Euripides, who was no longer infatuated with the Greek Middle Ages as Aeschylus and Sophocles were, but was already approaching bourgeois tragedy. I doubt whether Mr. Schlegel was aware of his true motive for disparaging Euripides in comparison with Aeschylus and Sophocles. I think an unconscious feeling led him to it; he caught the scent in the old tragedian of the

⁸⁵ Ancient Greek playwrights: the tragedians: Aeschylus (c. 525–c. 456), Sophocles (c. 496–406), Euripides (c. 484–406 BC); Aristophanes, author of the comedies, *The Birds*, *The Frogs* (450–c. 385 BC).

modern democratic, Protestant element which was already so hateful to the chivalric and Olympic-Catholic Aristophanes.

Perhaps, though, I am showing Mr. A. W. Schlegel an undeserved honor by attributing to him certain sympathies and antipathies. It is possible that he had none. In his youth, he was a Hellenist, and only later did he become a romantic. He was the chorus master of the new school; it was named by him and his brother; and he himself was perhaps the one who was least serious about it. He supported it with his talents, he worked his way into it, he amused himself with it for as long as it was successful, and when it ended badly, he worked his way into another field.

Although the school was now to be destroyed, the efforts of Mr. Schlegel have borne good fruit in our literature. In particular, he demonstrated how one can treat academic objects with elegant language. Earlier, few German scholars dared to write an academic book in a clear and attractive style. They wrote a confused, dry German which smelled of tallow and tobacco. Mr. Schlegel was one of the few Germans who did not smoke tobacco, a virtue which he owed to the society of Madame de Staël. In general, he owes to that lady the outer polish which he was able to assert to so much advantage in Germany. In this respect, the death of the excellent Madame de Staël was a great loss for this German scholar, who found so much opportunity in her salon to get to know the latest fashions and to see the fashionable world in all the capitals of Europe and appropriate for himself its highest manners. This sort of educational situation became such a happy requirement for him, that after the death of his noble patroness, he was not ashamed to offer his accompaniment to the famous Catalani on her travels.⁸⁶

As I have said, the promotion of elegance was one of the main accomplishments of Mr. Schlegel, and through it, more civilization has also come into the life of German poets. Goethe had already provided the most influential example of how one could be a German poet and nonetheless preserve external decency. In earlier times, German poets despised all conventional forms and the name "German poet" or even the name "poetic genius" took on the most unpleasant meaning. A German poet was, back then, a person who wore a tattered, worn-out coat, wrote poems for baptism or weddings for a *Taler*, enjoyed, instead of good society which rejected him, even better drinks, and perhaps also lay drunken in the gutter

⁸⁶ Angelica Catalani (1780–1849), Italian singer.

in the evening, tenderly kissed by Luna's tender rays. When they got old, these poets would typically sink even more deeply into misery; but it was a misery without care, or whose only care consisted in knowing where one could get the most schnapps for the least money.

That is also how I pictured to myself a German poet. How pleasantly surprised I was, then, in the year 1819, when I, being quite young, went to the university in Bonn and there had the honor to see Mr. Poet A. W. Schlegel, the poetic genius, face to face. He was, with the exception of Napoleon, the first great man whom I had seen up to that point. I will never forget the sublime sight. I still feel today the holy trembling which went through my soul when I stood before his lectern and heard him speak. At the time, I was wearing a white brushed-wool jacket with a red cap.⁸⁷ I had long blonde hair and no gloves. Mr. A. W. Schlegel, on the other hand, wore kid gloves and was still dressed entirely according to the latest Parisian fashion. He was still completely perfumed with good society and *eau de mille fleurs*. He was charm and elegance itself, and when he spoke of the Lord Chancellor of England, he added "my friend." Next to him stood his servant in the most baronial Schlegelian house livery, trimming the wax candles which burned on a silver candelabra, which stood next to a glass of sugar water in front of the wonder-man at the lectern. Liveried servant! Wax candles! Silver candelabra! My friend, the Lord Chancellor of England! Kid gloves! Sugar water! What unheard of things in the class of a German professor! This splendor blinded us young people more than a little, myself in particular, and at the time I wrote three odes about Mr. Schlegel, each of which began with the words: "O, thou, who. . . ." etc. But I would have only dared to address such a refined man with the familiar form in poetry.⁸⁸ His external appearance really lent him a certain refinement. There were only a few silver hairs left shining on his thin head, and his body was so thin, so emaciated, and so transparent, that he seemed to be pure spirit; he looked almost like the symbol of spiritualism.

Despite that, he married at that time; he, the leader of the romantics, married the daughter of Ecclesiastical Councilor Paulus, the leader of the German rationalists.⁸⁹ It was a symbolic marriage; romanticism wed

⁸⁷ Typical attire for a member of the *Burschenschaft* movement, political societies of German students begun in the early nineteenth century.

⁸⁸ The German second-person familiar form, "du."

⁸⁹ Sophie Caroline Paulus (1791–1847), daughter of Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761–1851).

rationalism, as it were, but it remained fruitless. Indeed, the separation between romanticism and rationalism became even greater, and already on the morning after the wedding night, rationalism ran home again and did not want to have anything more to do with romanticism. For rationalism, since it is always sensible, did not want to be married only symbolically, and as soon as it recognized the wooden nullity of romantic art, it ran away. I know I am speaking obscurely here, and I will thus attempt to express myself as clearly as possible.

Typhon, evil Typhon, hated Osiris (who, as you know, is an Egyptian God), and when Osiris fell into his power, he ripped him into pieces. Isis, poor Isis, the wife of Osiris, laboriously gathered up these pieces, patched them together and succeeded in putting her torn-apart husband back together again completely. Completely? Alas, no. There was one very important piece missing which the poor Goddess was unable to find, poor Isis! She thus had to settle for a wooden substitute; but wood is only wood, poor Isis! Thus originated what is now in Egypt a scandalous myth and in Heidelberg a mystical scandal.

Mr. A. W. Schlegel has been entirely lost to view since then. He had vanished. His discontent at being thus forgotten drove him in the end, after an absence of many years, to Berlin again, the former capital of his literary brilliance, and he again held a few lectures about aesthetics there.⁹⁰ But in the meantime, he had learned nothing new, and he was now speaking to a public which had acquired from Hegel a philosophy of art, a science of aesthetics.⁹¹ People mocked him and shrugged their shoulders. He suffered the same fate as an old actress who goes back to the scene of her earlier success after twenty years' absence and does not understand why people laugh rather than applaud. The man had changed horribly, and he amused Berlin for four weeks with the display of his absurdness. He had become an old vain fop who let himself be ridiculed everywhere. The most unbelievable stories are told about this.

Here in Paris, I had the sad misfortune of seeing Mr. A. W. Schlegel again personally. Truly, I had not the least idea of this change until my own eyes persuaded me. It was one year ago, shortly after my arrival in the capital. I was going to see where Molière had lived, since I venerate the great poets and search everywhere with religious devotion for traces

⁹⁰ In the summer of 1827.

⁹¹ Hegel's lectures on aesthetics began in winter 1820/1.

of their earthly life. That is a cult. On my way, not far from that sacred dwelling, I saw a being whose wrinkled features manifested some similarity to the former A. W. Schlegel. I thought I was seeing his spirit. But it was only his body. The spirit is dead and the body still haunts the earth. Meanwhile it has become rather fat; there is again flesh on top of the thin spiritual legs. One could even make out a belly, above which was hanging a large number of ribbons. What used to be a fine grey head now bore a golden yellow wig. He was dressed in the latest fashion of the year in which Madame de Staël died. At the same time, he smiled with a dated sweetness, like a lady advanced in years with a piece of sugar in her mouth, yet he moved as youthfully as a coquettish child. It was truly an odd sort of rejuvenation that had taken place in him; he was experiencing a comical second edition of his youth, as it were. He seemed to be entirely in bloom again, and I even suspected that the redness of his cheeks was not make-up, but rather a healthy irony of nature.

At that moment, it was as if I saw the late Molière standing at the window, smiling down at me, pointing to that cheerful yet melancholy apparition. Suddenly, all of its absurdity struck me. I grasped the entire depth and fullness of the joke contained in it. I saw clearly the comedic nature of that fabulously ridiculous character, who, unfortunately, had not found a great comedian to use it properly on the stage. Molière alone would have been the man who could have adapted such a figure for the Théâtre Français, he alone had the necessary talent. – And this Mr. A. W. Schlegel understood early on, and he hated Molière for the same reason that Napoleon hated Tacitus. As Napoleon Bonaparte, the French Caesar, well sensed that the republican historian would also not have portrayed him in rosy colors, so Mr. A. W. Schlegel, the German Osiris, had long sensed that he would never have escaped Molière, the great comedic author, had the latter still lived. And Napoleon says of Tacitus that he slandered Tiberius, and Mr. A. W. Schlegel says of Molière that he was no poet, but only a buffoon.

Mr. A. W. Schlegel left Paris soon afterwards, following his decoration by His Majesty, Louis Phillip I, King of the French, with the Order of the Foreign Legion. The *Moniteur* has, until now, delayed an appropriate report of this event, but Thalia, the muse of comedy, recorded it hastily in her laughing notebook.⁹²

⁹² The event occurred in 1831; the *Moniteur universel* was the official organ of the government.

II

After the Schlegels, Mr. Ludwig Tieck was one of the most active writers of the romantic school, for which he fought and poeticized.⁹³ He was a poet, a name which neither of the two Schlegels merits. He was a true son of Phoebus Apollo, and like his eternally youthful father he not only played the lyre but also carried a bow with a quiver full of hissing arrows.⁹⁴ He was drunk with lyrical pleasure and critical cruelty, like the Delphic God. And like the latter, after flaying alive some literary Marsyas, he plucked the golden strings of his lyre with bloody fingers and sang a joyful love song.

The poetic polemic that Mr. Tieck carried on in dramatic form against the opponents of the school is among the most extraordinary manifestations of our literature. These satirical dramas are usually compared to the comedies of Aristophanes. But they are about as different from these as a tragedy by Sophocles differs from one by Shakespeare. In particular, just as ancient comedy possesses in full the unified construction, the strict sequencing, and the most elegantly cultivated metrical language of ancient tragedy, and thus may be regarded as its parody, so the dramatic satires of Mr. Tieck are as fantastically assembled, as English-irregular, and as arbitrarily metrical as the tragedies of Shakespeare. Was this form a new invention of Mr. Tieck? No, it existed already among the people, specifically, among the people of Italy. Whoever understands Italian can arrive at a fairly accurate notion of those Tieckian dramas by dreaming a little German moonlight into the colorfully bizarre, Venetian-fantastic fairy-tale comedies of Gozzi.⁹⁵ Mr. Tieck even took most of his characters from this cheerful child of the Lagunas. Following his example, many other German poets also took advantage of this form and wrote comedies whose comedic effect was produced not by a moody character or a funny intrigue, but which rather place us, as it were, immediately into a comical world, into a world where animals speak and act like people, and where chance and caprice have entered into the place of the natural

⁹³ The works of Ludwig Tieck here discussed are: *The Story of Mr. William Lovell* (1796), "Blond Eckbert" (1797), *Puss in Boots* (1797), *Franz Sternbald's Wanderings* (1798), *The Life and Death of St. Genevieve* (1800), *The Emperor Octavian* (1804), "Rune Mountain" (1804), *Fortunatus* (1816), *Tom Thumb* (1816), *Dramaturgical Papers* (1826); the *Outpourings from the Heart of an Art-loving Monk* (1797), co-authored with Wackenroder; the translation of *Don Quixote* (1801).

⁹⁴ Phoebus Apollo, Greek God of the Arts and Archery. Marsyas, a satyr, challenged him to a flute-playing contest; as punishment for losing, Marsyas was flayed alive.

⁹⁵ Carlo Gozzi (1720–1806), wrote comedies in the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*.

order of things. We find this also in Aristophanes, but the latter author has chosen this form to reveal his profound worldviews to us, as, for example, in the *Birds*, where the most lunatic endeavors of humanity, its obsession with building the most magnificent castles in empty air, its defiance of the eternal gods, and its joy in imagined victory, are shown by means of the drollest antics. Aristophanes is so great for this very reason, since his worldview was so great, because it was greater, more tragic than the tragedian's itself, because his comedies were really "joking tragedies." For example, Pisthetairos is not shown, as say a modern poet would, in his ridiculous nullity, but rather he wins Basileia, the beautiful, wondrously powerful Basileia; he ascends with this heavenly wife into his city in the air; the Gods are forced to obey his will; foolishness celebrates its wedding with power; and the play ends with joyful songs to Hymenaios.⁹⁶ Is there anything more horribly tragic for a rational human being than this victory and triumph of fools? Our German Aristophaneses have not had such high presumptions; they abstained from any higher worldview. With great modesty, they kept quiet about the two most important aspects of the human condition, the political and the religious. They dared only treat the theme discussed by Aristophanes in the *Frogs*; thus they chose as chief object of their dramatic satire the theater itself, and they satirized with more or less humor the flaws of our stage.

But one also has to take into account the politically unfree condition of Germany. Our comedians have to abstain from all insinuations with regard to actual princes, and they compensate for this restriction at the expense of the kings of the theater and the princes of the stage. We who had almost no theoretical political journals were thus all the more blessed with an enormous number of aesthetic newspapers, containing nothing but pointless fairy-tales and theater critiques, so that whoever saw these papers was almost forced to conclude that the entire German nation consisted only of garrulous nannies and theater critics. But this opinion would have done us a serious injustice. How little we were satisfied by such miserable rubbish was demonstrated after the July Revolution, when it seemed finally that one could speak a free word also in our dear fatherland. Suddenly, there were newspapers reviewing the good or bad plays of real kings; and some of these, who had forgotten their roles, were booed in their own capital cities. Our literary Scheherazades, who had lulled the

⁹⁶ The Greek god of weddings.

public, the plump Sultan, to sleep with their short novellas, were forced into silence; and our actors saw with amazement how empty the theater was, no matter how well they acted. Even the shooting position of the much feared city critic very often went unoccupied. Earlier, the good heroes of the boards had always complained that they, and only they, had to serve as the public object of conversation, and that even their domestic virtues were revealed in the newspapers. What an unpleasant shock they had when it seemed that no one was going to talk about them any more!

In fact, when the revolution broke out in Germany, theater and theater criticism did end, and the horrified novella authors, actors, and theater reviewers were justifiably afraid that “art would be destroyed.” But our fatherland was happily spared that terrible fate through the wisdom and power of the Frankfurt parliament.⁹⁷ One hopes that no revolution will break out in Germany; we are protected from the guillotine and all the terrors of press freedom; even the Chambers of Deputies, whose competition was so harmful to the theaters licensed before it, was done away with; and art is saved. Everything possible is now done for art in Germany, especially in Prussia. Museums shine in inventive plays of color, orchestral sound rings out, dancers leap their sweetest *Entrechats*, the public is delighted with a thousand and one novellas – and again theater criticism is blooming.

Justin relates in his histories:⁹⁸ When Cyrus had silenced the revolts of the Lydians, the only way he could restrain their stubborn, freedom-loving spirit was by commanding them to take up the fine arts and other enjoyable things. Since then, no one has heard of Lydian uprisings, but they are now quite famous for their tavern-keepers, brothel-owners, and artists.

We now have peace in Germany. Theater criticism and the novella are again the most important things. And since Mr. Tieck excels in both of these fields, all the friends of art bestow proper admiration upon him. He is, in fact, the best novelist in Germany, although his narrative products are neither all of the same genre nor of the same value. As with painters, one can distinguish several styles in Mr. Tieck. His first style belongs

⁹⁷ Censorship laws passed in the early 1830s, which, in particular, made it difficult for Heine to publish in Germany.

⁹⁸ The Roman historian Marcus Junianus Justinus (third century AD); the following passage concerns Persian history.

entirely to the earlier old school. At that time, he wrote only at the behest, and at the order, of a bookseller, who was none other than the late Nicolai himself – the most stubborn champion of enlightenment and humanity, the great enemy of superstition, mysticism, and romanticism. Nicolai was a poor writer, a prosaic wig, and he often made himself look ridiculous because of his obsession with the Jesuits. But we, who are born later, we must still confess that old Nicolai was a basically honorable man, that he meant well with the German people, and that, out of love for the holy matter of truth, he was not afraid of even the most terrible martyrdom, namely, being ridiculed. As I was told in Berlin, Mr. Tieck earlier lived in the house of this man; he lived one floor higher than Nicolai, and the new times already trampled over the head of the old ones.

The works which Mr. Tieck wrote in his first style, mainly stories and large, long novels, of which *William Lovell* is the best, are very unimportant, even devoid of poetry. It is as though this poetically rich being was greedy in its youth and was saving up all of its spiritual riches for a later time. Or was Mr. Tieck himself unaware of the riches of his own breast, and the Schlegels had to find them first with a divining rod? As soon as Mr. Tieck came into contact with the Schlegels, all the treasures of his imagination, his soul, and his humor were revealed. The diamonds gleamed, the clearest pearls emerged, and above all, the ruby⁹⁹ sparkled there, that fabulous gem of which the romantic poets spoke and sang so much at that time. This rich breast was the actual treasury from which the Schlegels extracted the war-costs for their literary campaigns. Mr. Tieck had to write the above mentioned satirical comedies for the school and, at the same time, produce a multitude of poetic products of all genres. That is now the second style of Mr. Ludwig Tieck. His best dramatic products in this style are *Emperor Octavian*, *Saint Genevieve*, and *Fortunatus*, three dramas which are modeled after chapbooks of the same name. The poet clothed these old sagas, which the German people still preserve, in new precious garments. But, in all candor, I like them more in the old, naïve, and simple form. As beautiful as Tieck's *Genevieve* is, I strongly prefer the old chapbook, very badly printed in Cologne on the Rhine, with its bad woodcuts, movingly depicting how the poor, naked Countess Palatine has only her long hair to cover her chastely, and how she suckles her small *Schmerzenreich*¹⁰⁰ on the udder of a sympathetic doe.

⁹⁹ Ger., *Karfunkel*.

¹⁰⁰ Full-of-Grief, her son.

Much more valuable than these dramas are the novellas which Mr. Tieck wrote in his second style. These are also mostly modeled on old folk tales. The best are "Blond Eckbert" and the "Rune Mountain." These works are governed by a secret inwardness, a peculiar understanding with nature, especially with the vegetable and mineral realms. The reader feels as if he is in an enchanted forest; he hears underground springs murmuring melodically; from time to time, he thinks he hears his own name in the whispering of the trees; his feet occasionally get tangled eerily in the wide-leaved creepers; strange and wondrous wildflowers look at him with colorful, yearning eyes; invisible lips kiss his cheeks with teasing tenderness; tall mushrooms, like golden bells, shoot up, tinkling, at the feet of trees; great silent birds balance on branches and nod downwards with their long, wise beaks; everything breathes, everything listens, everything shivers with anticipation; – then suddenly the sound of a soft hunting horn, and a beautiful woman ambles by on a white horse, feathers fluttering on her cap, a hawk on her fist. And this young lady is so beautiful, so blond, so violet-eyed, so friendly, and yet at the same time so serious, so true and at the same time so ironic, so chaste and at the same time so much in languor; just like the imagination of our excellent Ludwig Tieck. Yes, his imagination is a lovely maiden knight who hunts for magic animals in the enchanted forest, maybe even for the rare unicorn who can only be captured by a pure virgin.

But now a remarkable change happens to Mr. Tieck, and it is revealed in his third style. After he remained quiet for a long time following the fall of the Schlegels, he again appears publicly, in a manner which was the least expected of him. The former enthusiast, who once sat in the bosom of the Catholic Church with fanatic zeal, who once fought so powerfully against enlightenment and Protestantism, who breathed only the Middle Ages, the feudal Middle Ages, who loved art only as naïve *Outpourings of the Heart*, this very Mr. Tieck now appeared as the opponent of fanaticism, as the portrayer of modern bourgeois life, as an artist, who demanded the most clear self-consciousness in art, in short, as a man of reason. We see him thus in a series of new novellas of which a few are also well known in France. A close study of Goethe is visible in them, and, in general, Mr. Tieck in his third style appears as a true pupil of Goethe. The same artistic clarity, cheerfulness, calmness, and irony. Earlier, the school of the Schlegels did not succeed in attracting Goethe; now, we see how the school itself goes over to Goethe. This reminds me of a Muslem legend.

The Prophet had said to the mountain: "Mountain, come to me." But the mountain did not move. And look! The greater miracle happened; the Prophet went to the mountain.

Mr. Tieck was born in Berlin on May 31, 1773. For a number of years, he has resided in Dresden where he often works with the theater; and the same man who, in his earlier writings, constantly made fun of Privy Councilors as the epitome of ridiculousness, has himself now become a royal Saxon Privy Councilor. God, apparently, is still a greater ironist than Mr. Tieck.

At present, a strange disproportion has entered in between the understanding and the imagination of this writer. The former, the Tieckian understanding, is an upright, sober bourgeois, who worships the system of utility and wants nothing to do with fanaticism; the latter, though, the Tieckian imagination, is still the maiden knight with fluttering feathers on her cap, with a hawk on her fist. The two of them have a curious marriage, and it is sometimes distressing to witness how the poor noble wife is supposed to help out the dull bourgeois husband in his household or even in his cheese shop. Sometimes, though, in the middle of the night, when her husband is snoring peacefully in his woolen nightcap, the noble lady escapes from her marital bed, mounts her white steed, and again hunts happily, as before, in the romantic enchanted forest.

I cannot avoid mentioning that the Tieckian faculty of understanding has become even more morose in his latest novellas, and that at the same time his imagination is losing ever more of its romantic nature, even staying put in the marriage bed on cool nights, yawning comfortably and joining company with the gaunt husband, almost with affection.

Mr. Tieck is, however, still a great poet, for he can create figures, and from his heart words emerge which move our own hearts. But there has always, not only recently been a certain timidity, something indecisive, uncertain, some weakness observable in him. This lack of decisive force can be found all too easily in everything he did and wrote. At the very least, no independence is revealed in anything he wrote. His first style shows him as nothing at all; his second style shows him a loyal squire of the Schlegels; his third style shows him an imitator of Goethe. The most original thing he has produced is still his theater criticism, which he has collected under the title *Dramaturgical Papers*. But they are theater reviews.

To portray Hamlet as a total weakling, Shakespeare also makes him look like a good theater critic in his conversation with the players.

Mr. Tieck was never especially concerned with the serious disciplines. He studied modern languages and the older documents of the poetry of our fatherland. As a true romantic, he is said to have always avoided classical studies. Never did he work as a philosopher, indeed, philosophy seemed to have been repugnant to him. In the fields of science, Mr. Tieck plucked only flowers and thin sticks; the first to regale his friends' noses, the second to regale the backs of his opponents. He never spent time studying agriculture. His writings are bouquets and twig bundles, never sheaves of grain.

Besides Goethe, Mr. Tieck has imitated Cervantes the most. The humoristic irony – I could also say the ironic humor – of these two modern poets can be scented in the novellas from Mr. Tieck's third style as well. Irony and humor are so integrated there that they seem to be one and the same. This humoristic irony is much discussed by us Germans. The Goethean school of art praises it as an outstanding characteristic of its master and it now plays a great role in German literature. But it is merely a sign of our lack of political freedom; just as Cervantes, at the time of the Inquisition, had to find refuge in humoristic irony in order to express his thoughts without giving the familiars of the Holy Office a concrete target, so Goethe would say with humoristic irony what he, as state minister and courtier, did not dare to express frankly. Goethe never hid the truth, but where he could not show it nakedly, he clothed it in humor and irony. Writers languishing under censorship and spiritual constraint of all kinds yet unable to deny their heartfelt opinions are especially dependent on ironic and humoristic forms. It is the only means of escape with integrity, and in humoristic ironic disguise this integrity shows itself in the most touching way. This again reminds me of that strange Prince of Denmark. Hamlet is the most honest fellow in the world. His disguise serves only to maintain appearances; he is strange because strangeness disturbs court etiquette less than an open declaration of blows. In all of his humoristic ironic jokes he makes intentionally transparent that he is only disguising himself; in everything he does and says, his true opinion is completely visible for all those who know how to see, even for the king to whom he indeed cannot tell the truth (he is too weak for this), but from whom he by no means wants to conceal it. Hamlet is honest through and through; only the most honest person could say: "We are all deceivers." By pretending

to be insane, he also does not intend to deceive us; he knows inside that he really is insane.

I must additionally praise two more works of Mr. Tieck, which especially earned him the thankfulness of the German public. These are his translations of a series of pre-Shakespearian English dramas and his translation of *Don Quixote*. He especially succeeded in the latter. No one besides our excellent Tieck understood as well and reproduced as faithfully the mad grandeur of the ingenious Hidalgo of La Mancha.

It is rather amusing that the romantic school itself gave us the best translation of the book in which its own madness was raked over the coals in the most delightful way. Indeed, this school was caught up in the same insanity which inspired the noble La Mancha to all of his follies. They too wanted to restore medieval chivalry; they too wanted to call a dead past back to life. Or did Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, in his heroic fool's epic, also want to mock other knights, namely, all people who fight and suffer for some idea? Did he want his tall, thin knight to be a parody of any idealistic enthusiasm and his fat squire to be a parody of pragmatic reason? In any case, the latter has the more ridiculous role; for pragmatic reason, with all of his traditional and useful sayings, must nevertheless trot around on its calm donkey following behind enthusiasm. Despite his better insight, he and his donkey must share all the misfortunes which befall the noble knight. Indeed, idealistic enthusiasm is so powerfully thrilling that material understanding, along with its donkeys, must always involuntary follow it.

Or did the profound Spaniard want to mock human nature at an even deeper level? Did he perhaps allegorize our spirit in the figure of Don Quixote and our body in the figure of Sancho Panza, the whole poem then being simply a great Mystery in which the question of spirit and matter is discussed in ghastliest authenticity? This is what I see in this book: poor, material Sancho is forced to suffer much for spiritual quixotism; he often receives the most ignoble beating for the noblest intentions of his lord; and he is always more sensible than his high-flown master. For he knows that beatings leave a bad taste, whereas the sausages of an Olla Potrida leave a good one.¹⁰¹ Really, the body seems often to have more insight than the spirit, and thinking with one's back and belly is often far more correct than thinking with one's head.

¹⁰¹ Spanish: olla-potrida is a type of stew.

III

Among the crazy ideas of the romantic school in Germany, the incessant praise and acclaim of Jakob Böhme deserves special mention. This name was, as it were, a shibboleth for these people. When they said the name Jakob Böhme, they had the most profound looks on their faces. Was it serious or in jest?

This Jakob Böhme was a shoe-maker, born in Görlitz in Upper Lusatia in the year 1575, who left behind a large number of theosophical writings. They were written in German and hence all the more accessible to our romantics. I cannot tell all too exactly if that strange shoe-maker was as excellent a philosopher as many German mystics claim, since I have never read him. I am convinced, though, that he never made a boot as well as Mr. Sakoski.¹⁰² Shoe-makers, in general, play a role in our literature; Hans Sachs, a shoe-maker, born in Nuremberg in 1494 where he spent his life, was praised by the romantic school as one of our best poets. I have read him, and I must confess that I doubt whether Mr. Sakoski ever made such good verses as our old, excellent Hans Sachs.

I have already hinted at the influence of Mr. Schelling on the romantic school. Since he will be my subject later, I will spare myself an extensive evaluation here. In any case, though, this man merits our greatest attention. For, earlier, he caused a great revolution in the German intellectual world, and more lately, he has changed so much, that if beginners confuse the earlier Schelling with the present one, they might wind up with the most erroneous ideas. The earlier Schelling was a bold Protestant, who protested against Fichtean idealism. This idealism was a strange system which must seem especially alien to a Frenchman since, in France, the philosophy which had come into fashion made the spirit into body, as it were; it recognized spirit only as a mode of being of matter. In short, whereas here in France materialism became dominant, in Germany a philosophy emerged which, entirely in opposition, accepted only the spirit as something real, which explained all matter as being solely a modification of the spirit, which even denied the existence of matter. It almost seemed as if spirit sought revenge on the other side of the Rhine for the insult which it experienced on this side of the Rhine. When, here in France, spirit was denied, it emigrated, as it were, to Germany and there denied matter. Fichte, in this respect, can be regarded as the Duke of Brunswick

¹⁰² Sakowsky (1752–1840), a well-known Parisian shoe-maker.

of spiritualism, and his idealistic philosophy is nothing but a manifesto against French materialism.¹⁰³ But Fichte's philosophy, which is truly the acme of spiritualism, was as difficult to maintain as the crass materialism of the French, and Mr. Schelling was the one who emerged with the doctrine that matter, or, as he called it, nature, exists not only in our spirit, but also in reality, and that our intuition of things is identical with the things themselves. This is Schelling's doctrine of identity, or, as it is also called, *Naturphilosophie*.

This all happened at the beginning of the century. Mr. Schelling was a great man, then. Meanwhile, though, Hegel appeared on the philosophical scene. Mr. Schelling, who in recent times has written almost nothing, was cast into shadow. Indeed, he was gradually forgotten and retained only literary-historical importance. Hegelian philosophy became dominant; Hegel became sovereign in the realm of spirits, and poor Schelling, a down-and-out, demoted philosopher strolled around gloomily among the other mediatized gentlemen in Munich.¹⁰⁴ I once saw him and could almost have shed tears at his miserable appearance. And what he said was the most miserable of all. It was an envious tirade against Hegel, who had supplanted him. As one shoe-maker speaks of another whom he has accused of stealing his leather and making boots out of it, so Mr. Schelling seemed to me, when by accident I once saw him speak about Hegel. About Hegel who "took his ideas"; and "my ideas are the ones he took"; and again "my ideas" was the constant refrain of the poor man. Truly, if the shoe-maker Jakob Böhme once spoke as a philosopher, so the philosopher Schelling speaks now like a shoe-maker.

Nothing is more ridiculous than complaining about the property rights of ideas. Certainly, Hegel used many of Schelling's ideas in his philosophy; but Mr. Schelling never knew what to do with these ideas anyway. He always just philosophized but never could produce a philosophy. In addition, it can well be maintained that Mr. Schelling borrowed more from Spinoza than Hegel from him. If, some day, Spinoza is freed of his rigid, old Cartesian, mathematical form and made more accessible to the general public, then perhaps it will be clear that he more than any other has the right to complain about the theft of ideas. All of our contemporary

¹⁰³ The Duke of Brunswick, in 1792, published a manifesto warning of war if any injury were done to the royal family of Louis XVI.

¹⁰⁴ The term mediatized refers to the loss of statehood of many small German states in Napoleonic times.

philosophers, perhaps often without knowing it, see through the lenses ground by Baruch Spinoza.

Resentment and envy have brought angels to the fall, and unfortunately it is only too true that annoyance at the ever-increasing reputation of Hegel has brought the poor Mr. Schelling to where we see him now, namely, in the snares of Catholic propaganda, headquartered in Munich. Mr. Schelling betrayed philosophy to the Catholic religion. All reports agree in this point; for a long time it was clear that it would come to this. From the mouths of a few of those in power in Munich I had heard so often that faith must be connected to knowledge. This phrase was as innocent as a flower, but behind it lurked the snake. Now I know what you all wanted. Mr. Schelling now has to do his part to justify the Catholic religion with all the powers of his spirit, and everything he now teaches under the name of philosophy is merely a justification of Catholicism. On the side, one was also speculating that the celebrated name would lure the German youth, thirsting for wisdom, to Munich and that the Jesuitical lie would delude them all the more easily disguised in the clothing of philosophy. This youth kneels reverently before the man whom they consider to be the High Priest of truth, and they receive from his hands unsuspectingly the poisoned host.

[. . .]¹⁰⁵

Since I have spoken here about German philosophers, I must correct a mistaken impression which I find all too common here in France. Ever since a few French writers examined the philosophy of Schelling and Hegel, communicating in French the results of their studies and also applying them to the conditions in France, the friends of clear thought and freedom have complained that the most senseless sophisms and flights of imagination from Germany were being introduced in order to confuse minds and to give every lie and every sort of despotism the appearance of truth and right. In a word, these noble people concerned with the interests of liberalism bemoan the harmful influence of German philosophy in France. But, this is unfair to poor German philosophy. First, it is not German philosophy which has been presented to the French under this name, in particular, by Mr. Victor Cousin.¹⁰⁶ Mr. Cousin has presented a whole lot of wish-wash, but no German philosophy. Second, true German

¹⁰⁵ Here, Heine discusses critically two disciples of Schelling, Heinrik Steffens and Joseph Görres.

¹⁰⁶ Victor Cousin (1792–1867) attempted to bring German philosophy to France.

philosophy is the one which emerged directly from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and, preserving the character of its source, concerns itself little with political or religious circumstances, but rather all the more with the ultimate sources of all knowledge.

It is true that the metaphysical systems of most German philosophers are far too much like mere cobwebs. But what damage is done by this? Jesuitism cannot use such cobwebs for its net of lies, nor can despotism spin its snares out of it to tie up minds. Only after Schelling did German philosophy lose this thin but harmless character. Since then, our philosophers no longer write critiques about the ultimate principles of knowledge and being, they no longer hover in idealistic abstractions, but rather seek out grounds to validate what exists; they become justifiers of what is. While our early philosophers, poor and self-denying, brooded over their systems while squatting in miserable attic rooms, our contemporary philosophers are arrayed in the brilliant livery of power; they have become state philosophers by inventing philosophical justifications of the interests of the state in whose employ they found themselves. For example, Hegel, professor in Protestant Berlin accepted all of Protestant dogmatics into his system; and Mr. Schelling, professor in Catholic Munich, now justifies even the most extravagant teachings of the Roman-Catholic-Apostolic Church in his lectures.

Indeed, as once Alexandrian philosophers offered up all of their astuteness in allegorical interpretation in order to save the sinking religion of Jupiter from complete destruction, now our German philosophers do the same for the religion of Christ.¹⁰⁷ It is of no importance to us to examine if these philosophers act from selfless motives; if we see them in alliance with the party of the priests whose material interests are tied to the preservation of Catholicism, we call them Jesuits. They should not have the arrogance to think that we are confusing them with the older Jesuits. The latter were great and powerful, full of wisdom and force of will. Oh, the feeble dwarves who think that they could conquer the difficulties which defeated even those black giants. Never had the human spirit invented greater combinations of thought than in the attempts of the old Jesuits to preserve Catholicism. But they were not successful, because they were inspired only by the preservation of Catholicism and by not Catholicism itself. Fundamentally, they did not have too much

¹⁰⁷ Here, Heine refers to the neo-Platonists of late antiquity.

invested in the latter. For this reason, they profaned the Catholic principle itself once in a while in order to bring it to power; they made arrangements with paganism, with the powerful of the earth, aided them in their desires, became murderers and merchants, and when it was really important, even atheists. But it was in vain that they granted their confessors the friendliest absolutions and courted their casuists with every vice and crime. In vain, they competed in art and science with the laity, in order to use both as means for their cause. Here, their weakness became completely clear. They envied all of the great scholars and artists, yet could not discover or make anything extraordinary. They wrote pious hymns and built cathedrals, but no free spirit blows through their poems; there is just the sigh of trembling obedience to the superiors of their order. And even in their architecture, one sees only anxious unfreedom, stony submissiveness, sublimity on command. Barrault once said, correctly, "The Jesuits cannot raise the earth to heaven, so they pulled heaven down to earth."¹⁰⁸ All of their deeds and works were fruitless. No life can bloom out of a lie, and God cannot be saved by means of the devil.

Mr. Schelling was born on January 27, 1775, in Württemberg.

IV

I have only been able to give a few indications about the relationship between Mr. Schelling and the romantic school. His influence was mainly of a personal kind. Since *Naturphilosophie* began to flourish because of Schelling, nature has been understood by the poets to be much more full of meaning. Some poets immersed themselves with all of their human feelings into nature; others memorized a few magic formulas which could cause something human to peer and speak out of nature. The first were the real mystics, akin in many ways to the Indian monks who devote themselves to nature and finally begin to feel in communion with it. The others were more like conjurers; they even intentionally summoned the hostile spirits of nature. They were like the Arabian magician who could animate every stone and petrify any life as he wished. The best example of the first group is Novalis; of the second group, Hoffmann.¹⁰⁹ Everywhere Novalis looked, he saw miracles, delightful ones. He overheard plants conversing,

¹⁰⁸ Emile Barrault (1799–1869), a Saint-Simonian.

¹⁰⁹ Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg; 1772–1801); Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (1776–1822), *Fantasy Pieces* (1814–1815).

he knew the secret of every young rose, finally, he identified himself with nature as a whole; and when it was autumn and the leaves fell off, he died. Hoffmann, on the other hand, saw everywhere only ghosts. They nodded to him out of every Chinese teapot and every Berlin wig; he was a magician who turned people into beasts and even beasts into royal Prussian privy councilors.¹¹⁰ He could call the dead out of graves, but life itself cast him aside as a dim specter. He felt that. He felt that he had himself become a spirit; all of nature now became for him a falsely ground mirror in which, distorted a thousand times, he saw only his own death mask. His works are simply a horrible cry of anguish in twenty volumes.

Hoffmann does not belong to the romantic school. He had no contact with the Schlegels and far less with their views. I mention him here only in opposition to Novalis, who is quite definitely a poet of that school. Novalis is less known here than Hoffmann, who was presented to the French public by Loeve-Weimars in such excellent dress, and has thus gained a great reputation in France.¹¹¹ Here, in Germany, Hoffmann is by no means in fashion, but he was earlier. In his time, he was much read, but only by people whose nerves were too strong or too weak to be affected by gentle tones. The truly spiritual and the poetically inclined did not want to have anything to do with him. To them, Novalis was much preferred. But, to be honest, as a poet, Hoffmann was far more important than Novalis. Novalis always hovers in the blue sky with his idealistic creations, whereas Hoffmann, with all of his bizarre caricatures, is always securely attached to earthly reality. Just as the giant Anteus remained strong and unconquerable as long as he was touching mother earth with his foot, but lost his strength as soon as Hercules lifted him up, so the poet is strong and forceful when he does not leave the ground of reality, but loses his power as soon as he begins to float as a visionary in the blue sky.

The great similarity of these two poets doubtless rests on the fact that their poetry was actually a disease. In this respect, it has been said that the judgment of their works is not the business of the critic, but of the doctor. The rosy shine in the literary works of Novalis is not the color of health, but of consumption; the purple glow in Hoffmann's *Fantasy Pieces* is not the flame of genius, but of fever.

¹¹⁰ A reference to the book *Master Flea* (1822) in which Hoffmann mocks Prussian officials.

¹¹¹ François-Adolphe Loeve-Weimars (1801–1854).

But do we have the right to make such comments, we ourselves who are not overly blessed with health? Especially now when literature looks like a giant hospital? Or is poetry itself perhaps a human illness, like the pearl, which is really only the material of the illness from which the poor oyster suffers?

Novalis was born on May 2, 1772. His real name is Hardenberg. He loved a young lady who suffered, and died, from consumption. This sad story can be felt in everything he wrote; his own life was only a dreamy and long death; and he died of consumption in the year 1801, before he completed his twenty-ninth year of life and his novel. This novel in its current form is only a fragment of a great allegorical poem which, like Dante's *Divine Comedy* was to celebrate all earthly and heavenly things. Heinrich von Ofterdingen, the famous poet, is the novel's hero. We see him as a youth in Eisenach, the charming little city which lies at the foot of the old Wartburg, scene of greatest and most idiotic events. Luther, namely, translated his Bible here, and a few silly Germanophiles burned the gendarmerie codex of Mr. Kamptz.¹¹² In this fortress, too, that battle of the bards was once waged, the most dangerous contest in the poetic arts preserved in the Manesse Collection,¹¹³ at which, among other poets, Heinrich von Ofterdingen also sang against Klingsohr of Hungary. The head of the loser was to fall to the executioner, and the Landgrave of Thuringia was the judge. Now, in the novel by Novalis, the Wartburg, the scene of the hero's later fame, rises meaningfully over his cradle, and the beginning shows him, as stated, in the paternal house in Eisenach. "His parents are already in bed, sleeping. The clock on the wall strikes its monotonous rhythm. The wind whistles in front of the rattling windows. Shimmering moonlight lights the room now and again.

The boy lay in bed, restless, thinking of the stranger and his stories. 'It is not the jewels which have wakened such an inexpressible longing in me,' he said to himself, 'Greed of any sort lies far from me; but I long to see the blue flower. It lies in my mind, incessantly, and I can think of and imagine nothing else. I have never felt this way before. It is as if before I had been dreaming, or I have passed away in my sleep into a different world. For in the world in which I used to live, who would have concerned

¹¹² Karl Albert Christoph Heinrich von Kamptz (1769–1849), Director of the Police Ministry in Berlin; Opponent of the Burschenschaften.

¹¹³ The Codex Manesse, a fourteenth-century manuscript.

himself with flowers; and I never heard before of such a strange passion for a flower.””

With such words *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* begins, and the blue flower illuminates and scents everything in this novel. Strangely and meaningfully, even the most fabulous characters in this book seem so familiar to us, as if in earlier times we had lived in great intimacy with them. Old memories awaken, even Sophia has such familiar features; whole avenues of beech trees where we went back and forth with her, happily conversing, come to mind. But all of that lies so dimly behind us like a half-forgotten dream.

Novalis's muse was a thin, white maiden with serious blue eyes, golden hyacinth curls, smiling lips, and a small red birthmark on the left side of her chin. I am actually seeing the muse of Novalis's poetry as the very same maiden who first acquainted me with him, when I saw in her beautiful hands the red volume in Moroccan leather with gilt edging which contained *Ofterdingen*. She always wore a blue dress and was named Sophia. She lived a few stations away from Göttingen with her sister, the postmistress, a cheerful, heavy, red-cheeked woman with a high bosom which looked like a fortress behind its rigid, pointed silk laces. This fortress was unconquerable; the woman was a Gibraltar of virtue. She was an active, economical, and practical woman, and yet her only source of pleasure consisted in reading Hoffmann's novels. In Hoffmann, she found the man who understood how to rattle her sturdy nature and set it in pleasant motion. On the other hand, her pale, delicate sister had the most unpleasant feeling even catching sight of a book by Hoffmann, and if she were suddenly touched by one, she would start. She was as delicate as a mimosa, and her words were so gossamer and so pure in sound that putting them together made verses. I wrote down some of what she said, and they are strange poems, entirely in the manner of Novalis, only more ephemeral and more quickly dying away. I am especially fond of one of the poems she told to me when I took my leave of her to travel to Italy. In an autumnal garden, which earlier had been illuminated, one hears the conversation between the last small light, the last rose, and a wild swan. The morning fog begins to pour up, the last light is extinguished, the rose has lost its petals, and the swan unfolds its white wings and flies south.

You see, in the area of Hanover, there are many wild swans which, in the fall, migrate to the warmer south and, in the summer, return to us. They probably spend the winter in Africa. Once, we found an arrow in

the breast of a dead swan which Professor Blumenbach recognized as African.¹¹⁴ The poor bird, with the arrow in its breast, still came back to its northern nest to die there. Many a swan, though, hit by such an arrow, might be unable to complete its journey and might perhaps remain behind, devoid of strength, in a burning desert; or perhaps that swan sits now with exhausted wings on some Egyptian pyramid, looking yearningly to the north, toward the cool summer nests in the land of Hanover.

When, in late fall 1828, I returned from the south (indeed with a burning arrow in my breast),¹¹⁵ my way took me in the vicinity of Göttingen, and I alighted to change horses at the post-house of my heavy friend. I had not seen her for many years, and the good woman seemed to have changed considerably. Her bosom was still, as always, like a fortress, but now a razed one; the bastions were down, the two main towers only hanging ruins, no sentry manned the entrance, and the heart, the citadel was broken. As I found out from the postillion Pieper, she had even lost her enjoyment of Hoffman's novels and instead every night before sleeping she drank ever more brandy. That is also much easier; people always have brandy at home, Hoffmann's novels, on the other hand, have to be delivered from Deuerlich's reading library in Göttingen, four hours away. The postillion Pieper was a small man, who always appeared as sour as if he had drunk vinegar and it had shrunk him. When I asked this man about the postmistress's sister, he answered, "Mademoiselle Sophia is soon to die and is already an angel." How excellent a being must be if even sour Pieper says, she is an angel! And he said this while chasing away the cackling and fluttering poultry with his high-booted foot. The post-house, once a laughing white, had changed just as much as its landlady; it had turned a sickly yellow, and the walls had gotten deep wrinkles. In the courtyard, there were smashed-up wagons, and next to the manure heap on a pole a soaked, scarlet red postillion coat was hanging to dry. Mademoiselle Sophia stood upstairs at the window, reading, and when I went up to her, I found again in her hands a book with red Moroccan leather binding with gilt edging, and it was again the *Offerdingen* of Novalis. She had read again and again in this book, and she had read herself into consumption from it and looked like a shining shadow. But she was now of a spiritual beauty whose sight moved me in

¹¹⁴ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840), zoologist in Göttingen.

¹¹⁵ Heine had learned of the death of his father.

the most painful way. I took both of her pale, thin hands, looked deep into her blue eyes and finally asked her, “Mademoiselle Sophia, how are you?” – “I am well,” she answered, “And soon will be even better!” and she pointed out the window to the new church cemetery, a small hill, not far from the house. On this bare hill, there was a single thin withered poplar with only a few leaves still on it, and it moved in the autumn wind not like a living tree but like the ghost of a tree.

Mademoiselle Sophia now lies under this poplar, and the memorial she left behind, the book in red Moroccan leather with gilt edging, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* by Novalis, now also lies in front of me on my desk, and I used it to write this chapter.

Book Three

[. . .]¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Book Three, omitted in this translation, contains discussions of many prominent romantic writers including Clemens Brentano (1778–1842), Achim von Arnim (1781–1831), and Ludwig Uhland (1787–1862).

From *New Poems* (1844),
“Poems of the Times”

I

Doctrine

Pound on the drum and don't be afraid
And kiss the peddler woman!
That is all of philosophy
That's what the books truly say.

Wake up the people with your drum
Drum the reveille with the force of youth,
March onward and onward, beating your drum,
That is all of philosophy.

That is Hegelian philosophy,
That's what the books truly say.
I've understood it, because I'm bright,
And because I can play the drum well.

From the *Letters about Germany* (1844)¹

We now have monks of atheism who would burn Mr. de Voltaire alive because he is a stubborn deist. I have to admit that I do not like this music, but it also does not frighten me, since I was standing behind the maestro when he composed it, in very confused and ornate symbols, to be sure, so that not everyone could decipher it – I saw how on occasion he would look around anxiously, worried that he would be understood. He was quite fond of me, since he was certain that I would not betray him; at the time, I even considered him servile. Once, when I was displeased by the phrase: “Whatever is, is rational,” he smiled in a strange way and remarked, “It could also be put: whatever is, must be.” He hastily looked around, but soon grew calm since only Heinrich Beer had heard him. I myself did not understand such figures of speech until later. Thus, it was only later that I understood why he had maintained in his philosophy of history that Christianity represented progress because it taught of a God who is dead, whereas the pagan divinities knew nothing of any death. What sort of progress it would be if God had never existed at all! We stood one evening at the window, and I poetized about the stars, the habitations of the blessed. The master mumbled to himself, “The stars are just leprous spots glowing on the sky.” – “For God’s sake,” I cried, “Is there no happy place up there to reward virtue after death?” He looked at me with mockery, “So you want a tip for doing what you were supposed to do while you were alive, caring for your sick mother, not letting your brother starve, and not poisoning your enemies?”²

¹ An uncompleted work by Heine; in the Düsseldorf edition, this passage is dated to 1844 (DHA 15, 170).

² This anecdote appears also in the *Confessions*, below. See the notes there.

From the “Afterword” to *Romanzero* (1851)¹

Lying on one's deathbed, one becomes quite soft-hearted and sentimental and wants to make peace with God and world. I admit it, I have scratched many, bitten many, and was no lamb. But believe me, those much-praised gentle lambs would have behaved less meekly if they had had the teeth and paws of a tiger. I can at least be proud that I have only seldom made use of these weapons I was born with. Now that I myself have relied upon the mercy of God, I have granted amnesty to all of my enemies; a number of beautiful poems aimed at very high and very low personages were thus not included in the current collection. Poems which contained any sort of insinuations against God Almighty, I have given over to the flames with anxious zeal. Better for the verses to burn than the versifier. Yes, I have made peace with both the Creation and the Creator, to the great annoyance of my enlightened friends who have criticized me for falling back into the old superstitions, as they have liked to call my return home to God. Others, in their intolerance used even choicer expressions. The whole High Clergy of atheism has pronounced its anathema on me, and there are fanatic priests of unbelief who would gladly put me on the rack to get me to confess my heresies. Fortunately, the only means of torture at their disposal are their writings. But I will gladly confess everything without any torture. Yes, I have returned to God like the Prodigal Son, after spending much time feeding swine for the Hegelians. Was it my misery which drove

¹ Heine published his third poetry collection, *Romanzero*, in 1851. Reproduced here is the second half of the Afterword; the first half discusses his illness, suffering, and long, slow, and, as he describes it, “boring” process of dying. This was to last from the year 1848 until his death in 1856, during which time he was confined to his so-called “grave of mattresses” in an apartment in Paris.

me back? Maybe a less miserable reason. I was overcome with heavenly homesickness; it drove me on through woods and gorges, along the most dizzying mountain paths of the dialectic. On my way, I found the God of the pantheists, but could not make use of him. This poor dreamy being, interwoven and intermingled with the world, imprisoned in it, as it were, just gapes at you; it is without will and powerless. To have a will, one must be a person; and to manifest a will, one must have one's elbows free. If you seek a God who can help you – and that is the whole point – you have to accept his personality, his transcendence, and his holy attributes, his infinite goodness, his omniscience, infinite justice, etc. The immortality of the soul, existence after death, is then automatically included in the sale, as it were, like the juicy marrowbone the butcher throws in the basket for free when he is happy with his customers. In French cooking, such a juicy marrowbone is called *la réjouissance*,² and you can cook really first-rate broths with it which are refreshing and fortifying for a poor languishing sufferer. Any person of feeling will understand that I did not refuse such a *réjouissance* but rather enjoyed it with pleasure.

I have spoken of the God of the pantheists, but I cannot avoid remarking that he is, in truth, no God, just as the pantheists are, in reality, embarrassed atheists, who are less afraid of the thing than of the shadow which it throws on the wall, the name. Most Germans played the same farce with the good Lord for fifteen years during the Restoration that the constitutional royalists, who for the most part were republicans in their hearts, played with the monarchy here. After the July Revolution, the masks have fallen on both sides of the Rhine. Since then, especially after the fall of Louis Philippe, the best monarch ever to have worn the constitutional crown of thorns, opinion has solidified that only two forms of government withstand the critique of reason or experience, absolute monarchy and the republic, and that you have to choose one of the two, since all the mixed forms in between are untrue, unsustainable, and corrupting. In the same way, the conviction emerged in Germany that you had to choose between religion and philosophy, between the revealed dogma of faith and the final result of thought, between the absolute God of the Bible and atheism.

The more resolute the mind, the easier it becomes the victim of such dilemmas. For my part, I cannot boast of any special progress in my

² French: rejoicing.

politics; I have stood by the same democratic principles which I revered in my earliest youth and which I have supported since then with ever more fire and passion. In theology, on the other hand, I must accuse myself of going backwards, since, as I have already confessed above, I have returned to the old superstition, a personal God. It is even impossible to keep it a secret, as many an enlightened and well-meaning friend has tried. In any case, though, I must expressly deny the rumor that my fallback has brought me to the threshold, or worse, into the bosom of any church. No, my religious convictions and views are free of any particular confession; no bell-ringing lured me in, no altar candle blinded me. I have not been playing with symbolism nor have I completely given up my reason. I have renounced nothing, not even my old pagan gods, from whom, it is true, I have turned away, but parting in love and friendship. It was in May 1848, on the last day I was out, when I took leave of the fair idols I had worshipped in the times of my happiness. With great effort, I dragged myself to the Louvre, almost collapsing when I entered that exalted room where the Most Blessed Goddess of Beauty, Our Dear Lady of Milo, stands on her pedestal. I lay for a long time at her feet, and I wept so intensely that even a stone would have taken pity on me. The Goddess also looked down at me with pity, but at the same time with so little consolation, as if she were saying: "I have no arms. Don't you see that I can't help you?"

I will break off here, because my tone getting is maudlin, and it might get out of hand when I think that I must also take leave of you too, dear Reader. A certain emotion comes over me at this thought; for I do not part from you gladly. An author, in the end, gets used to his public as if it were a rational being. You also seem to be sad that I have to say my farewell; you are moved, my dear Reader, and costly pearls fall from your tear-sacs. But take heart. We will see each other in a better world; and in that world, I also intend to write better books for you. That is, assuming that my health improves there and that Swedenborg did not lie.³ The latter relates with great confidence that, in the other world, we will calmly continue on with the same business in the same way which we conduct it in this world; that there, we will retain our individuality, unchanged, and that death will not produce any notable disturbance in our organic development. Swedenborg is a thorough sort; his reports about the other world, where

³ Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), Swedish scientist and mystic, published a number of accounts of his religious faith, including visions of the spiritual world. Heine freely invents most of the supposed examples he gives below.

he saw with his own eyes the people who played a role on our earth, are trustworthy. Most of these people, he says, remain just as they were and are occupied with the same things which earlier occupied them; they remained stationary, became antiquated, rococo, which at times looked rather ridiculous. Thus, for example, our dear Doctor Martin Luther progressed no farther than his doctrine of Grace, and every day in the course of three hundred years he has been writing the same moldy arguments – in the same way as the late Baron Eckstein had one and the same article printed for twenty years in the "General Newspaper," constantly rechewing the same Jesuitical leaven.⁴ But, as mentioned, not all of the persons who played a role down here were found by Swedenborg in such a fossilized state. They had developed their character amply for better or for worse in the other world, and there were some truly strange cases. Heroes and saints of this earth had sunken there to the level of rogues and good-for-nothings; while, on the other hand, the opposite occurred as well. Thus, for example, when St. Anthony discovered the enormous extent to which all of Christendom venerates and adores him, he grew so arrogant that he, who down here had withstood the most terrible temptations, became a completely impertinent rascal and dissolute rogue, trying to out-writhe his pig in the mud. Chaste Susanne was brought to a shameful fall by her arrogant pride in her morals, which she thought to be unconquerable, and she who had once so gloriously resisted the old man, succumbed to the enticements of the young Absalom, the son of David. The daughters of Lot, on the other hand, had made themselves virtuous over the course of time and, in the other world, are seen as paradigms of good behavior; the father sadly has never abandoned the wine bottle.

As foolish as they sound, these tidings are as meaningful as they are astute. The great Scandinavian seer understood the unity and indivisibility of our existence, just as he recognized the inalienable human right to individuality. For him, existence after death is not an idealistic masquerade where we put on new jackets and a new humanity; both person and dress stay the same with him. In Swedenborg's other world, even those poor Greenlanders will feel at home who once asked the Danish missionaries trying to convert them if there were also seals in the Christian heaven. When they heard the negative answer, they responded gloomily

⁴ Ferdinand, Baron von Eckstein (1790–1861) was a Catholic convert who wrote for the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung*; leaven is a biblical reference, from 1 Corinthians 5:7–8.

that in that case Christian heaven was not for them since they could not live without seals.

How our soul fights the thought of the end of our individuality, of eternal annihilation! The *horror vacui*⁵ which we ascribe to nature is rather much more innate to the human spirit. Take comfort, dear reader, there is existence after death, and in the other world we too will again find our seals.

And now: fare thee well! And if I owe you anything, just send me the bill –

Written in Paris on September 30, 1851.

Heinrich Heine

⁵ Latin: abhorrence of the vacuum, a principle of Aristotelian physics.

From *Confessions* (1854)

A clever Frenchman – a few years ago the expression would have been redundant – once called me a *romantic défroqué*.¹ I have a weakness for everything clever, and as malicious as this name was, it nonetheless delighted me greatly. It hit the mark. Despite my exterminatory campaigns against romanticism, I myself remained a romantic, and was to a much greater degree than I suspected. After I had delivered the most mortal blows to the appreciation of romantic poetry in Germany, an infinite longing for the blue flower in the dreamland of romanticism crept over me, and I seized the enchanted lute and sang a song in which I abandoned myself to all of the lovely exaggerations, all the moonlight drunkenness, all of the blossoming nightingale madness of that once so-loved fashion.² I know, it was “the last free forest song of romanticism,” and I am its last poet: with me the old lyrical school of the Germans ends, while at the same time the new school, modern German poetry, begins with me. German literary historians attribute this double importance to me. It is unseemly for me to go on too long about this, but I may say with ample justification that I deserve great mention in the history of German romanticism. For this reason, I really ought to have provided a discussion of my own self in the book *De l'Allemagne*, where I attempted to portray the history of the romantic school as completely as possible. Because I refrained, a lacuna developed which is not easy to fill.

[. . .]³

¹ French: defrocked romantic. ² A reference to Heine's “humoristic epic” *Atta Troll* (1847).

³ The omitted passages contain discussions of Madame de Staël, the general topic of confessional writings, and a brief description of the process by means of which he wrote the articles which would come to make up *De l'Allemagne* (the French version of *The History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* and *The Romantic School*).

As regards German philosophy, I had openly let out the school secret which, wrapped up in scholastic formulas, was known only to initiates of the first class. My revelations aroused the greatest amazement here in France, and I remember that very important French thinkers naively admitted to me that they had always thought that German philosophy was a kind of mystical fog which concealed divinity as in a holy cloud fortress, and that German philosophers were ecstatic seers, who breathed devoutness and the fear of god. It is not my fault that this was never the case, that German philosophy is just the opposite of what we have up to now called devoutness and the fear of god, and that our most modern philosophers proclaim the most complete atheism as the last word of our German philosophy. Mercilessly, and with bacchantic zest for life, they rip the blue curtain from the German sky and call out: "Look, all the gods have fled, and above there remains only an old virgin with leaden hands and a sad heart: necessity."

Alas! What sounded so strange at the time is now preached from the rooftops on the other side of the Rhine, and the fanatic zeal of some of these preachers is horrible! We now have fanatic monks of atheism, grand inquisitors of unbelief, who would have burned Mr. de Voltaire at the stake, because he was in his heart a stubborn deist. As long as such doctrines remained the secret property of an aristocracy of intellectuals and were discussed in an elegant secret language which was incomprehensible to the servants who stood at attention behind us while we blasphemed during our private philosophical dinners – for that long I also belonged to the reckless *Esprits forts*,⁴ who for the most part were like those liberal grandseigneurs who tried to chase away the boredom of their idle lives at court with the new ideas of revolution. But when I noted that the coarse plebeians, the working Joes, also began to discuss the same themes in their dirty symposia, where only tallow lights and paraffin lamps were burning instead of wax candles and candelabras; when I saw that dirty apprentice shoe-makers and tailors had the audacity to deny the existence of God in the crude language of their lodges – when atheism began to reek strongly of cheese, brandy, and tobacco; suddenly my eyes were opened, and what I had not understood with my reason, I now understood with my sense of smell, with the feelings of nausea, and my atheism, God be praised!, was at an end.

⁴ French: freethinkers.

To be truthful, it was probably not only nausea which dampened my enthusiasm for the principles of the godless and caused me to retreat. Here, too, a certain worldly worry was at play which I could not overcome. I saw, namely, that atheism had formed a more or less secret alliance with the most dreadfully naked, most fig-leaf-less communal communism. My dread of the latter has, to be sure, nothing in common with the fear of the fortunate, who are afraid for their capital, or with the dismay of prosperous tradespeople, who are afraid of being limited in their business of exploitation; no, I was seized much more by the secret fear of the artist and the scholar, we who see our entire modern civilization, the arduous achievements of so many centuries, the fruit of the most noble works of our predecessors threatened by the victory of communism.

[. . .]⁵

I do not deserve too much praise for having long ago, in my book *De l'Allemagne*, predicted these horrible phenomena which occurred only later.⁶ It was easy to prophesy which songs were going to be whistled and chirped in Germany some day, since I saw the birds incubating which were later to take up the new melodies. I saw how Hegel, the mother-hen, sat on the disastrous eggs with his almost comically serious face, and I heard his cackling. In truth, I seldom understood him, and only through later reflection did I arrive at an understanding of his words. I thought he did not want to be understood at all, hence his qualified method of presentation and also perhaps his preference for people whom he knew did not understand him, and to whom he all the more willingly gave the honor of his intimate acquaintance. Everyone in Berlin was surprised at the intimate friendship between the profound Hegel and the late Heinrich Beer, a brother of the well-known and much-famed Giacomo Meyerbeer, celebrated by the most intelligent journalists.⁷ The former Beer, Heinrich, was a completely daft fellow, who later was actually declared mentally incompetent and placed under guardianship by his family; for instead of making a name for himself in art or science by means of his great fortune, he squandered his riches on silly trivialities and for example one day bought walking sticks for six thousand *Talers*. This poor man, who wanted to be neither a great tragic poet, nor a great star-watcher, nor a musical genius

⁵ The omitted passage contains a discussion of Wilhelm Weitling (1808–1871), a utopian communist.

⁶ See the end of Part III of *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, above.

⁷ The Beer family consisted of Heinrich (1794–1850), the playwright Michael (1800–1833), the astronomer Wilhelm (1797–1850), and the famous composer Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791–1864).

crowned with laurel, but rather to spend all his money on walking sticks – this sort of Beer was the one who enjoyed the most intimate acquaintance of Hegel; he was the confidant of the philosopher, his Pylades, and accompanied him everywhere like his shadow. The equally witty and talented Felix Mendelssohn once sought to explain this phenomenon by claiming: Hegel does not understand Heinrich Beer.⁸ But I now think that the true basis of that intimate relationship was Hegel's belief that Heinrich Beer did not understand anything of what he heard spoken, and thus, in his presence, he could allow himself at any moment to say whatever was on his mind without embarrassment. In general, conversation with Hegel was a sort of monologue, sighed forth spasmodically with a toneless voice. The baroque nature of his expressions frequently astounded me, and many of these remain in my memory. One beautiful starry evening, we stood, the two of us, at a window, and I, a young person of twenty-two, having just eaten well and drunken coffee, spoke rapturously about the stars, calling them the habitations of the blessed. The master, however, mumbled to himself, "The stars, ho! hum! the stars are just leprous spots glowing on the sky." For God's sake – I cried – is there no happy place up there to reward virtue after death? Hegel just stared at me with his pale eyes and said cuttingly, "You took care of your sick mother, and you didn't poison your brother. Do you really expect to receive a tip?" – After these words, he looked around anxiously, but seemed grow calm soon afterwards when he saw that it was only Heinrich Beer approaching him to invite him to a round of whist.⁹

Only years later here in Paris did I recognize the difficulty of understanding Hegel's writings, and the ease with which one can deceive oneself into thinking that one has understood them whereas one has only learned to imitate the construction of dialectical formulas. I was attempting to translate these formulas from the abstract school-idiom into the mother tongue of healthy reason and general comprehensibility, French. The translator must know for certain what he has to say, and even the most embarrassed concepts are forced to let fall their mystical garments and show themselves naked. You see, I had resolved to present Hegelian philosophy in its entirety in generally comprehensible form, as a supplement to be absorbed into the new edition of my book *De l'Allemagne*. I worked

⁸ Felix Mendelssohn, composer (1809–1847).

⁹ This anecdote also appears above in the excerpt from the *Letters About Germany*.

at this for two years, and only with anguish and exertion did I manage to overcome the refractory material and to present the most abstract parts in the most popular way possible. But when the work was finally complete, I was grasped by an uncanny horror when I looked at it. It seemed to me as if the manuscript was looking at me with strange, ironic, even malicious eyes. I had arrived at a strange quandary: author and work no longer fit together. For by the time, the above-mentioned resistance to atheism had already conquered my soul, and since I had to admit to myself that Hegelian philosophy gave the most formidable support to all of these forms of atheism, it became for me extremely uncomfortable and irksome. I had never possessed very much enthusiasm for this philosophy, and in no way did it ever strike me as persuasive. I was never an abstract thinker and I took on the synthesis of the Hegelian doctrine unexamined, since its consequences flattered my vanity. I was young and proud, and it was good for my arrogance when I heard from Hegel that not, as my grandmother thought, God Almighty, who lives in heaven was God Almighty, but rather I myself living here on earth. This idiotic pride did not have a corrupting influence on my feelings; rather it elevated them to the point of heroism. At the time, I made such an exertion of magnanimity and self-sacrifice that I no doubt thereby cast an extraordinary shadow over the most brilliant high deeds of those good philistines of virtue who acted only from the feeling of duty and who merely obeyed the laws of morality. For I myself was the living law of morality, the source of all right and authority. I was Original Morality; I was unable to sin, I was pureness incarnate. The most disreputable Magdalenes were purified through the cleansing and atoning power of my love's flames; and they emerged from the God's embraces immaculate as lilies and blushing like chaste roses with an entirely new virginity. I admit it; this restoration of damaged maidenheads exhausted my powers at times. But I gave, without haggling, and the fount of my charity was inexhaustible. I was entirely love and entirely free of hate. I also no longer took revenge on my enemies, since, fundamentally, I had no more enemies, or at least recognized none. For me, there were only disbelievers who doubted my divinity – every wrong which they did me was a sacrilege, and their invectives were blasphemy. Of course, I could not always let such godlessness go unpunished, but this was not human revenge but rather the punishment of God striking the sinner. In administering this higher justice, I also suppressed, at times with greater and at times lesser effort, all ordinary pity. Just as I

had no enemies, there were no friends for me either, but only believers, who believed in my magnificence, worshipped me, and praised my works, those I created in verse as well as in prose, and for this congregation of the truly pious and devout, I did much good, especially for the young females among them.

But the prestige costs of a God who does not want to do things on the cheap, sparing neither body nor wallet, are monstrous; to play such a role with honor, two things are necessary, much good money and much good health. Unfortunately, it came to pass one day – in February 1848 –that both of these requisites were lost to me, and my divinity thus came rather to a standstill.¹⁰ Fortunately, the worthy public at that time was concerned with such large, incredible, fantastic pieces of theater, that it may not have particularly remarked the changes which at that time affected my small person. Yes, they were incredible and fabulous, the events of those crazy days in February, where the wisdom of the most clever was laid low and those chosen by idiocy were raised up. The last were the first, the bottom ones were on top, things as well as thoughts had been toppled; it was truly an inverted world. – If I had been a reasonable man in those absurd, upside-down times, I certainly would have lost my reason during those events, but crazy as I was then, the opposite occurred, and, miracle of miracles! precisely in those days of general insanity, I myself came to reason. Like many other fallen gods of that topsy-turvy period, I had to abdicate in misery and return to humanity's private life. That was also the most sensible thing I could have done. I returned to the lower herd of God's creatures, and I again paid tribute to the omnipotence of a higher being who governs the destinies of this world and who from now on was to be in charge also of my own earthly affairs. These affairs, during the time when I was my own providence, had attained a state of alarming confusion, and I was happy to hand them over, as it were, to a heavenly stage director who, with his omniscience, in truth could guide them much better. Ever since, the existence of a God has not only been a source of comfort but has also relieved me of all the torturous accounting which I hate so much, and I owe the greatest economies to it. As is the case for myself, I also no longer need provide for others. Ever since I have joined the pious, I give almost nothing more for the support of those who need help; I am too modest now to continue trying to do the job

¹⁰ Heine dates his changes of fortune to the time of the 1848 Revolution in Paris.

of divine Providence. I am no longer a supporter of a congregation, no longer an imitator of god. To my former clients, I have demonstrated with pious humility that I am only a poor human creature, a sighing creature, who no longer has anything to do with the governance of the world. In the future, when in misery and despair, they have to turn to the Lord God who lives in heaven and whose budget is as inexhaustible as his goodness; whereas I, now an ex-God, even in my most divine days very often had to pull the devil by the tail, in order to satisfy my craving to do good.

*“Tirer le diable par la queue”*¹¹ is in fact one of the happiest expressions of the French language, but the thing indeed was most humbling for a God. Yes, I am glad to be rid of the glory I arrogated to myself, and no philosopher will ever again talk me into believing that I am a God! I am only a poor human being, who, in addition, is no longer very healthy, indeed, I am very sick. In this condition, it is a true blessing for me that there is someone in heaven to whom I can constantly whine my litany of sufferings, especially after midnight, when Mathilde has gone to bed, which is often necessary for her.¹² Praise God! In such hours I am not alone; I can pray and plead as much as I will, without embarrassing myself, and I can pour out my whole heart before the Most High and confide to him some things which we even tend to hide from our wives.

After reading the above confessions, the gentle reader will easily understand why my work about Hegelian philosophy no longer pleased me. I understood profoundly that printing it would be healthy neither for the public nor the author. I saw that the most meager hospital soup of Christian mercy was still better for a suffering humanity than the cooked grey cobweb of the Hegelian dialectic. – All right, I want to confess everything, all of a sudden I acquired a great fear of the eternal flames – of course, it is a superstition, but I was still afraid – and one quiet winter evening, when, as it happened, a strong fire was burning in my fireplace, I saw a fitting opportunity and threw my manuscript on Hegelian philosophy into the blazing flames. The burning pages flew upwards into the chimney with a curiously chuckling crackle.

Praise God! I was rid of them. Alas! If only everything that I once published about German philosophy could also be annihilated the same

¹¹ French: literally, to pull the devil by the tail, to live hand to mouth.

¹² Mathilde was Heine's name for his wife, née Crescence Eugénie Mirat (1815–1883), whom he married in 1841.

way! But that is impossible, and since I cannot even prevent new printings of out-of-print books, as I recently found out to my desperation, nothing is left to me but to publicly confess that my portrayal of German philosophical systems, thus primarily the first three sections of my book *De l'Allemagne*, contain the most sinful errors. I had had the above-named three parts published as a book in itself in a German version, and since the last edition of the same was out of print, and my publisher retained the right to print a new edition, I added a preface to the book which I will excerpt here, which relieves me of the sorry business of expressing myself in particular with regard to the three parts of *Allemagne* which I have mentioned. It reads as follows:

[. . .]¹³

Following the passage which I have cited here, there are confessions about the influence which my Bible-reading exerted on my later intellectual development. I owe the reawakening of my religious feeling to that holy book, and it became for me equally a source of comfort and an object of most pious admiration. Strange! After having spent my whole life knocking about every dance-floor of philosophy, giving myself over to every orgy of the intellect, flirting with every possible system without being satisfied, like Messalina after a night of dissipation – now I find myself suddenly with the same point of view as Uncle Tom, that of the Bible, and I kneel down next to that black, pious man with the same devotion –¹⁴

How humiliating! With all my knowledge, I have gotten no farther than that poor ignorant black man who has hardly learnt to spell. Poor Tom, it is true, seems to see even deeper things in the holy book than I; I, for whom especially the last part was never entirely clear. Perhaps Tom understands it better because there are more beatings in it, in particular, those incessant lashes of the whip which sometimes repulsed me in most unaesthetic manner, when I read the gospels and the apostles. Such poor black slaves read at the same time with their backs and thus understand much better than we do. On the other hand, I think I might justly flatter myself by saying that I grasped the character of Moses in the first part of the holy book much more clearly. This great figure impressed me, and

¹³ The passage quoted here is taken from the “Preface to the Second Edition” and appears above on pages 5–7.

¹⁴ Messalina was the notorious wife of the Roman Emperor Claudius; Uncle Tom is the central figure in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, published in 1852.

in no small way. What a giant figure! I cannot imagine that Og, King of Basan, was greater.¹⁵ How small Mount Sinai appears when Moses stands on it! This mountain merely forms the pedestal upon which the feet of the man are standing, while his head towers into the heavens, where he speaks to God – God forgive me for this, but it seemed to me sometimes that this Mosaic God was only the reflected glory of Moses himself, whom he so resembled, similar in wrath as in love. – It would be a great sin, it would constitute anthropomorphism, if one were to make such an identification of God and his prophet – but the similarity is striking.

Earlier, I had no special love for Moses, probably because the Hellenic spirit reigned supreme in me, and I did not forgive the lawgiver of the Jews for his hatred of all imagery, and of sculpture. I did not recognize that Moses, despite his hostility to art, was nonetheless himself a great artist and possessed the true artistic spirit. Only in his case, as in the case of his Egyptian countrymen, the artistic spirit was aimed only at the colossal and indestructible. But, unlike the Egyptians, he did not build his works of art out of brick and granite; rather, he built human pyramids, he chiseled out human obelisks. He took a poor tribe of shepherds and made a people out of it, which was equally to defy the centuries; a great, eternal, holy people, a people of God which can serve all other peoples, or indeed all of humanity, as a prototype: he created Israel! With more right than the Roman poet, that artist, that son of Amram and the midwife Jochebet, may boast of having erected a monument more lasting than any structure of bronze.

Just as in the case of the master constructor, I have also never spoken with enough respect for his finished work, the Jews, and, indeed, again because of my Hellenic disposition, for which Jewish asceticism was repugnant. My fondness for Hellas has since then been on the decline. I now see that the Greeks were only beautiful youths, but the Jews were always men, powerful, uncompromising men, not only in the far past, but also up to the present day despite eighteen centuries of persecution and misery. In the meantime, I have learned to appreciate them more, and if it were not the case that any sense of pride in one's birth is a foolish contradiction for a warrior of the revolution and its democratic principles, the author of these pages might well be proud that his ancestors belonged to the noble house of Israel, that he is a descendant of those martyrs who

¹⁵ A biblical figure who appears in *Joshua* 12.

gave the world one God and one morality and have fought and suffered on all of the battlefields of thought.

The names of such knights of the holy spirit have seldom been entered into the daily reports of the chronicles of the Middle Ages and even of modern times, for they normally fought with visors closed. Neither the deeds of the Jews nor their true nature is known at all to the world. They are thought to be well-understood because their beards have been seen, but that was all of them that appeared and, as in the Middle Ages, they are still a wandering mystery in modern times as well. Perhaps on the day of which the prophet speaks, when, thenceforth, there will be only one shepherd and one flock, it will be revealed, and the just one, who has suffered on behalf of the salvation of humanity, will receive his glorious recognition.

You will notice that I, who used to cite Homer, now cite the Bible, like Uncle Tom. Indeed, I owe much to it. As I have said above, it reawakened my religious feeling, and this rebirth of religious feeling is sufficient for the poet who, perhaps much more easily than other mortals, can do without positive dogmas of faith. He has the Gift, and the symbolism of heaven and earth lies open to his spirit; he needs no church keys for that. The most inconsistent and idiotic rumors about me have arisen in this regard. Very pious, but not very clever men in Protestant Germany have asked me urgently, now that I have become ill and devout, whether I am attached with greater sympathy to the Lutheran Protestant faith, which up to now I have recognized only in a half-hearted official manner? No, my dear friends, in this regard nothing has changed with me, and if I belong to the Protestant faith at all, it is only because it still does not embarrass me, just as earlier it never embarrassed me all that much. I admit openly that when I was in Prussia, especially in Berlin, I would have gladly divested myself of any religious ties if the authorities there had not denied residency in Prussia and especially in Berlin to anyone who did not declare allegiance to one of the state-sanctioned positive religions.¹⁶ As Henry IV once said in jest: *Paris vaut bien une messe*, so I could justly say, *Berlin vaut bien un prêche*, and I could be content, now as before, with the very enlightened Christianity, filtered of all superstitions, which one used to find in the churches of Berlin at the time, even without the divinity of

¹⁶ Heine officially converted to Protestantism on June 28, 1825. The following French quotations mean: "Paris is worth a Mass" and "Berlin is worth a sermon."

Christ, like turtle soup without the turtle. At the time, I was myself still a God and none of the positive religions had more value for me than the other; I could wear their uniforms out of courtesy, just as, for example, the Emperor of Russia dressed up as a Prussian officer of the guards when he paid the honor of attending a military review in Potsdam to the King of Prussia.

Now that I have changed in various ways because of the reawakening of my religious feelings and my bodily suffering – now does the uniform of Lutheran belief correspond to some degree to my innermost thoughts? To what extent has the official declaration become truth? I will not reply to such a question with a direct answer, but rather use it as an occasion to illuminate the contributions which Protestantism has made to the welfare of the world, according to my present understanding. One may then judge accordingly to what extent it has won greater sympathy from my side.

Earlier, when philosophy had an overwhelming interest for me, I valued Protestantism only for the contributions it made to the conquest of the freedom of thought, which of course was the ground upon which later Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel were able to build upon – Luther, a strong man with an axe, had to precede these warriors and clear the path for them. In this regard, I have recognized the Reformation also as the beginning of German philosophy and thus justified my belligerent partisanship for Protestantism. Now, in my later and more mature days, where again religious feeling surges up dominant in me and the failed metaphysician holds tight to the Bible; now I recognize Protestantism quite especially for the contributions it made by means of its discovery and propagation of the holy book. I say the discovery of the Bible, since the Jews, who rescued it from the great fire of the Second Temple and carried it around with them in exile like a portable fatherland for the entire Middle Ages, kept this treasure carefully hidden away in their ghetto; and the German scholars, predecessors and beginners of the Reformation, stole there to learn Hebrew, to gain the key to the chest which concealed the treasure. The excellent Reuchlin was such a scholar, and his enemies, Hochstraaten and company in Cologne, who are normally portrayed as idiotic obscurantists were by no means such entirely stupid dolts, but rather were far-sighted inquisitors who well foresaw what devastation to the church would be brought by familiarity with the holy book; thus, their zeal in persecuting all Hebrew writings which they recommended for burning without exception, while at the same time they attempted to eradicate

the translators of these holy writings, the Jews, by inciting the masses.¹⁷ At present, when the motives behind those events are open to view, one sees how each one of the parties was fundamentally right. The obscurantists of Cologne thought that the salvation of the world was threatened, and hence any means, lies as well as murder seemed allowable to them, especially with regard to the Jews. The poor lower classes, the children of hereditary misery, hated the Jews already because of their accumulated treasure, and what today is, in general, called the hatred of the proletariat against the rich was called at the time hatred against the Jews. Indeed, since the Jews were excluded from any form of property and any means of earning a living through the trades, they were entirely dependent on trade and financial transactions, which the Church forbade the orthodox; thus the Jews were damned by law to be rich, hated, and murdered. In those times, to be sure, such murders also occurred under the guise of religion, and it was said, one must kill those who once killed our God. Strange! Just the people who gave the world a god and whose entire life was suffused by divine worship was denounced as deicidal! We saw the bloody parody of such insanity during the Santo Domingo Rebellion where a crowd of black people ravaging the plantations with murder and arson was led by a black fanatic bearing a monstrous crucifix and a bloodthirsty scream: The whites have killed Christ, let us kill all the whites!¹⁸

Yes, the Jews; the world owes them its God, and also his word, the Bible; the Jews saved it from the downfall of the Roman Empire and in the insane plucking time of the migrations of peoples they preserved the valuable book until Protestantism dug it up from them, translated it into the popular languages, and spread it over the world. This spreading of the Bible has produced the most beneficial fruit and has endured up until the present day. The propaganda of the Bible Society fulfills a providential mission which is more meaningful, and will have, in any case, far different results from the ones the pious gentlemen of this British shipping agency of Christianity themselves suspect.¹⁹ They think they are bringing a small and narrow dogmatism to power in order to monopolize heaven, as they do the sea, to make it into a British church domain. But watch! Without knowing it, they are promoting the downfall of all particular Protestant

¹⁷ See the discussion in the first book of *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*.

¹⁸ The uprising is the Haitian Revolution of 1791.

¹⁹ The reference is to the "British and Foreign Bible Society," founded in 1804, which distributed bibles worldwide in a variety of languages.

sects, which all live in the Bible, and which will dissolve into a general Bibledom. They are promoting the great Democracy, where every human being will be not only king but also the bishop in the castle of his own house; by spreading the Bible over all the earth, by thus helping humanity to gain access to it through mercantile tricks, smuggling, and exchange, thus delivering it up to exegesis, to the reason of the individual, they are founding the great empire of the spirit, the empire of religious feeling, of brotherly love, of purity and of true morality, which cannot be taught through dogmatic conceptual formulas, but only through image and example, as are contained in that beautiful holy lesson book for children both small and large, the Bible.

When the contemplative thinker observes the lands where, since the Reformation, the Bible has exerted its educational influence on the inhabitants, it is a wondrous drama, for it has impressed the mark of Palestinian life, manifest in both Old and New Testaments, on them in custom, manner of thinking, and sociability. In the north of Europe and America, namely in the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon lands, all through the Germanic and to a certain extent even the Celtic lands, Palestiniandom has made itself felt to such a degree that one feels there transplanted among the Jews. For example, the Protestant Scots, are they not Hebrews, with biblical names throughout, whose cant even sounds Jerusalemistic-Pharisaic, and whose religion is just a Judaism which eats pork? It is that way too with some of provinces of northern Germany and with Denmark; not to mention most of the new communities of the United States where one imitates pedantically Old Testament life. The latter appears here as in a daguerreotype; the contours are anxiously correct, but everything is grey on grey, and the melting sunny colors of the Promised Land are missing. But the caricature will vanish one day; the authentic, the unchanging, and the true, that is, the morality of ancient Judaism will bloom in the same God-pleasing manner in these countries as it did once on the Jordan and in the hills of Lebanon. One has no need of palm trees and camels to be good, and being good is better than beauty.

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