

Was Schleiermacher a Christian Platonist?

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Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834) is both the fulcrum of modern Plato scholarship and the founder of modern systematic theology. His translation of Plato is, almost two centuries later, a standard work in German, and he is widely regarded as having almost single-handedly determined the parameters of Platonic scholarship. It was Schleiermacher who emphatically laid to rest the largely theological and allegorical Plato of the previous century through his insistence on the importance of the dialogue form for the appreciation of Plato's thought.¹ This intellectual giant is, via Dilthey and Heidegger, a continuing influence in the hermeneutical tradition of philosophy, and, of course, not least, the founder of modern systematic theology. It is a natural question to ask whether the most influential Plato scholar of the modern period was a Christian Platonist as a theologian?

This seems, at first sight, a rather redundant question. Schleiermacher wrote speeches to the cultured despisers of Christianity. Was he not like Justin, Clement, or Augustine, who used the weapons of heathen philosophy in the service of Christian apologetics? Was he not a Christian Platonist who wrote a theological version of the *Symposium* in his *Christmas Eve*? We wish to suggest that, despite his evident affinity with Plato as a writer, Schleiermacher is opposed to the general apologetic strategy of Christian Platonism. In fact, he bequeathed to modern theology a hostility to the Platonic tradition of 'natural theology' which marks the thought of Ritschl, Harnack, and Barth, and which has dominated the last century.

Let us compare Schleiermacher with Hegel, whose lectures on the philosophy of religion have the "same purpose as the earlier type of metaphysical science, which was called *theologia naturalis*."² The term 'natural theology' was introduced by Varro to give an account of the philosophical explanation of matters divine. The original distinction is not between natural and revealed theology but between mythical and civil theology, on the one hand,

1. F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Über die Philosophie Platons*, ed. P. Steiner (Hamburg: 1996).

2. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* vol. I, Introduction and the Concept of Religion (Berkeley: 1995) 83.

and natural on the other. Whereas mythical theology is the product of poetic imagination, and civil theology the product of conventions and requirements of state, natural theology alone lays claims to a rational and comprehensive theory of nature, including the divine nature, as in John Scot Eriugena's *De Divisione Naturae*.

Such a systematic natural theology is clearly established by Plato in the tenth book of his *Laws*. God is the good and transcendent source of nature, who controls this realm of becoming through his providence, and judges the soul according to its desert. The Neoplatonists explicate Plato's often elusive philosophy as a unified metaphysical structure evincing this structure of procession from the supreme principle and return, and it is commonplace that the medieval *summa* retained this systematic form.

'Christian Platonism' is best thought of as a 'True Intellectual System of the Universe' which is grounded in an Absolute, an ultimate principle, from which all reality proceeds and returns. This is to use the term 'Absolute' to mean the transcendent source of all being, a mode of speaking about God which is rooted in Nicholas of Cusa. Hence Hegel argues that theology is not "just religious piety ... but rather the *comprehension* of religious content."³ Hegel praises medieval Catholic theologians such as Meister Eckhart, who says "The eye with which God sees me is the eye with which I see him; my eye and his eye are one and the same."⁴ Furthermore, Hegel sees the spirit of Christianity as profoundly formed by those church fathers themselves "steeped" in "Neopythagorean, Neoplatonic, and Neoaristotelian philosophy."⁵ And it is clearly arguable that, despite the robust and vigorous efforts of Porphyry, Proclus, and the Emperor Julian, the Christian Church became the effective heir to Platonic metaphysics. The Church consciously appealed to an attic Moses preaching monotheism to the Greeks in analogy to Jeremiah or Isaiah exhorting the Israelites. And looked back to Augustine's admission in *Confessions* VII, 9, that the only truth he did not find in the "Platonists" was the incarnation.⁶

The twentieth-century debates between (Tübingen) proponents of the esoteric Platonic "unwritten doctrines" and those who interpret Plato exclusively on the basis of the exoteric dialogues clearly represent the collapse of the older Plato natural theology. Schleiermacher, however, was not the first

3. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* vol. I, 347.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.* 153.

6. There is much which is highly contentious here. See the debate between H. Dörrie, "Was ist 'Spätantiker Platonismus?'" *Theologische Rundschau* 36 (1972): 285–302, esp. 301; Cornelia J. de Vogel, "Platonism and Christianity: A Mere Antagonism or a Profound Common Ground?" *Vigiliae Christianae* 39 (1985): 1–65, esp. 27ff.

to challenge the Neoplatonic vision of Plato: Mosheim, the *Encyclopédie*, Brucker, Tiedemann, and Tennemann had already done much to discredit the Neoplatonic reading which essentially allegorised Plato.⁷ Christian Platonism was primarily a metaphysical theology, a philosophy of religion. Schleiermacher's division between Dialectic and Christian Theology *per se* marks a new era. Hegel marks the final expression of Christian Platonism. It is as if the collapse of this living tradition of Platonism and the arrival of modern Platonic philology coincide. This was not because Schleiermacher was contemptuous of the Neoplatonists; he was not. Moreover, Hegel was just as adamant as Schleiermacher that Plato should be understood in terms of the dialogues.

However if we view Christian Platonism as a metaphysic which seeks to explain reality as founded upon a transcendent principle to which all being returns, Hegel is clearly a continuation, Schleiermacher a cautious repudiation of this tradition. For Hegel, theology is not a part of metaphysics; rather theology as the genuine possibility of knowledge of the Divine constitutes the necessary basis of real philosophy. The strong division between philosophy and theology, sometimes the antagonism of the two, finds strident expression in Ritschl, Harnack, and Barth, and most recently in conservative postmodern theology, which perpetuates hostility to natural theology by means of a fusion of postmodern anti-foundationalism, medieval apophaticism, Barthian theological positivism, and the Heideggerian critique of 'Onto-theology.' This anti-Hegelian, anti-Platonic subversion of theological metaphysics among writers such as Jean Luc Marion and John Milbank in favour of some form of Christian 'Church Dogmatics' has a peculiar ancestor in the "Winckelmann of Greek Philosophy," F.D.E. Schleiermacher.⁸

The title of Schleiermacher's major work is highly significant: *Der Christliche Glaube* or *Die Glaubenslehre*. The word 'Glaube' means both 'faith' and 'belief' and was a controversial concept in the formative period of the intellectual constellation of German Idealism. 'Glaube' was the word which F.H. Jacobi used to denote his position in opposition to the rationalism of the Kantians and the Spinozists among his contemporaries. De Wette saw

7. E.N. Tigerstedt, *The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato, An Outline and Some Observations* (Helsinki: 1974).

8. See W.J. Hankey, "Theoria versus Poesis: Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and John Zizoulas," *Modern Theology* 15:4 (Oct. 1999): 387–415; and my article "Should Divinity Overcome Metaphysics? Reflections on John Milbank's Theology Beyond Secular Reason and Confessions of a Cambridge Platonist," *Journal of Religion* (forthcoming in April 2000).

Schleiermacher as one of those thinkers akin to Jacobi or Fries.⁹ Hegel entitled an early work *Glauben und Wissen*. Hegel came to dismiss the thought of both Jacobi and Schleiermacher as mistaken for the same reason: an irrational fideism which elevates faith (*Glauben*) in place of reason (*Vernunft*).¹⁰

The hostility between Hegel and Schleiermacher is notorious. Yet the role of Schelling is perhaps even more important. Süskind has argued that Schleiermacher's revisions to his *Speeches* in the second edition, whereby he drops the reference to "intuition,"¹¹ are motivated by a desire to distance his own project from Schelling's speculative theology. The fact that Schelling used the concept of 'intuition' to express, like Plato, the highest level of philosophical comprehension seemed to encourage Schleiermacher to drop the concept throughout.¹²

ROMANTIC PLATONISM?

The terminological change reflects the increasing distance between the Romantic Schleiermacher and the Idealists Hegel and Schelling. Though even in 1799 Schleiermacher is concerned to stress the autonomy of religion and its immunity from philosophical critique, he defines the essence of Christianity in rather idealistic terms as the reconciliation of the finite with the infinite. By the time of the *Glaubenslehre* the essence of Christianity is understood in more historical terms as the belief in the uniqueness of the founder of the Christian religion, and the transmission of the feeling of absolute dependence moves into the centre of his account. Hence the new assertion of the historical facticity of Christianity tends to reinforce Schleiermacher's abiding concern to limit the scope of philosophy in theology, and to distinguish sharply dogmatic theology from philosophy.¹³

The motivation of Schleiermacher's opposition to the speculative theology of the German Idealists and his own espousal of a moderate fideism which renounced the use of metaphysics in the domain of faith, was forged, at least in part, by divergent perceptions of the theologically momentous legacy of Platonic metaphysics for theology.

The initiative for Schleiermacher's single-handed Plato translation came from the genial but unreliable Friedrich Schlegel who in his influential work

9. J. Rohls, "Frömmigkeit," in *Internationaler Schleiermacher-Kongress*, ed. Kurt-Victor Selge (Berlin: 1984) vol. I, 242.

10. Reinhard Heede, *Die göttliche Idee und ihre Erscheinung in der Religion. Untersuchungen zum Verhältnis von Logik und Religionsphilosophie* (Berlin: 1972) 11–16; 20–26.

11. Rohls, "Frömmigkeit" 222.

12. H. Süskind, *Der Einfluß Schellings auf die Entwicklung von Schleiermacher's System* (Tübingen: 1909/rep. Aalen: 1983).

13. Cf. B. Gerrish, "Friedrich Schleiermacher," *Nineteenth-Century Religious Thought in the West*, eds. Smart, Clayton, Sherry, and Katz (Cambridge: 1985) 140–41.

Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie (1795–97) asked whether Plato's dialogues were philosophical poetry or poetic philosophy. The beginning of Schleiermacher's intensive Plato work coincides with the writing of the *Speeches to the Cultured Despisers* (1799). Its roots lie in the Hellenism of Winckelmann and in the Platonism of the Age of Sensibility, the legacy of Lord Shaftesbury, Hemsterhuis, and Rousseau, and the objections to the contemporary sterile French classicism.¹⁴ For the Romantics Plato seems the paradigm of the artist-philosopher. These were the factors in the cultural and intellectual *sensorium* which led Schleiermacher, as Bubner observes,

through Herculean labours, in the spirit of renunciation of the Protestant ministry, to give the Germans their own Plato. The majesty of the result, in its continuing impact, can be compared to the undiminished vitality of the naturalisation of Shakespeare into the German idiom by A.W. Schlegel and Tieck. Both, indeed, are momentous and truly Romantic achievements.¹⁵

Another scholar notes:

With the shift of interest from the obscure later dialogues of Plato to his earlier 'Socratic' dialogues there comes a revival of the aesthetic side of Platonic philosophy, which makes perfect sense in the age of Rococo and Sensibility. The topic of 'beauty' was no longer an issue of cosmological speculation, but a 'moral' topic, that is to say a topic concerning human relations. It was only on the basis of this metaphysical deflation of Platonic philosophy that the presuppositions required for the appearance of Schleiermacher's Philosopher-artist were in fact delivered.¹⁶

The metaphysical deflation of Platonism, reinforced by Kant's critique of theoretical metaphysics, was combined with the immunisation of Christian theology by removing it from philosophical critique: 'to deny *knowledge*, in

14. Cf. E. Behler, *Studien zur Romantik und zur idealistischen Philosophie* (Paderborn: 1988).

15. "... durch Herkulesarbeit im entsagungsvollen Pfarramt den Deutschen einen eigenen Platon zu schenken. Das in seiner Würde bleibende Resultat vergleicht sich durchaus der unvermindert lebendigen Einbürgerung Shakespeares ins deutsche Idiom durch A.W. Schlegel und Tieck. Biede sind wahrhaft romantische Großtaten." Rüdiger Bubner, *Innovationen des Idealismus* (Göttingen: 1995) 34.

16. "Mit dieser Verlagerung des Interesses von den dunklen Spätdialogen Platons zu seinen früheren 'sokratischen' Dialogen geht einher die Wiederbelebung der 'ästhetischen' Seite der Platonischen Philosophie, die sich dem Zeitalter des Rokoko und der Empfindsamkeit einleuchtender machen ließ. Nur war das Thema 'Schönheit' nun nicht mehr ein Gegenstand kosmologischer Spekulation, sondern ein 'moralisches' Thema, also ein Thema des Umgangs von Menschen untereinander. Erst durch diese metaphysische Depotenzenierung der Platonischen Philosophie waren die Voraussetzungen geschaffen für den Auftritt des 'philosophischen Künstlers' bei Schleiermacher," M. Franz, *Schellings Tübinger Platon-Studien* (Göttingen: 1996) 46.

order to make faith.¹⁷

If the Romantic Prussians Schlegel and Schleiermacher discovered the 'German Plato' in the late 1790s, the speculative Schwabians had already found intimations of their own metaphysics in their studies on Plato in the Tübinger Stift, and in the Plato transmitted by the sixteenth-century Florentine Academy and the Cambridge metaphysicians of the seventeenth century. Cudworth rather than Shaftesbury sets the tone: the metaphysical-theological Platonism of the Master of Clare and Christ's rather than the sentimental-aesthetic Platonic-Stoicism of Shaftesbury. At the same time, the German Idealists were reviving speculative theology. The Spinozistic controversy, and the euphoric atmosphere of the French Revolution, combined with the older speculative Platonist tradition led to renewed attention to the great Trinitarian problem of identity and difference, the relational unity of the Absolute, and the relation of the Godhead to the created realm. Nietzsche wrote:

The Protestant Minister is the Grandfather of German philosophy. Protestantism is its *peccatum originale*. The definition of Protestantism is the semi-paralysis of Christianity and reason One only need say the word Tübinger Stift in order to grasp what German Philosophy is: a cunning and deceitful theology.¹⁸

One should not be misled by the famous hostility of Luther to Aristotelianism. 'Lutheranism' itself was perhaps more deeply influenced by the humanist Melancthon than by Luther himself, and radical Protestantism conveyed much philosophical ore through Oetinger and others. It is possible to see the roots of Hegel's mature thought as essentially theological: partly because of the general heritage of the German Enlightenment, partly because of Schelling's particular interest in a theory of the Absolute, and not least because of the theological work in Frankfurt which provided the basis for the speculative dialectic.

The state of Plato scholarship in the 1790s and the first decade of the nineteenth century gives us a clue to the theology of the German Idealists. The extraordinary regional differences in the German Empire in the late eighteenth century play a considerable role. Clerical families had an inordinately important place in the constitution and administration of

17. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. N. Kemp Smith (London: 1979) 29.

18. Nietzsche, "Der protestantische Pfarrer ist Grossvater der deutschen Philosophie, der Protestantismus selbst ihr peccatum originale. Definition des Protestantismus: die halbseitige Lähmung des Christentums und der Vernunft ... Man hat nur das Wort 'Tübinger Stift' auszusprechen, um zu begreifen, was die deutsche Philosophie im Grunde ist—: eine hinterlistige Theologie" *Der Antichrist* I, 10. Kritische Studien Ausgabe (Berlin: 1988) vol. VI, 176.

Württemberg,¹⁹ and for their training Tübingen was important. The university also had an exceptionally strong philological tradition. Its foundation lay in the South West German Renaissance, which was marked by the influence of Ficino, Erasmus, Reuchlin, and Melancthon. Perhaps even more important, its philosophy faculty was largely constituted and dominated by theologians. The Chancellor of the University was Professor Primarius of theology, and 90 per cent of the students of the philosophy faculty were young theologians. John Toews notes that

Higher education in Württemberg was virtually synonymous with theological training. Theologians were an important segment of the intellectual elite throughout Germany, but in Württemberg the clergy completely dominated the intellectual and cultural life of the society.²⁰

Hegel, Schelling and Hölderlin all read philosophy in the euphoric revolutionary spirit of the 1790s, but also in an intensely theological context.

THE PLATONIC TRINITY

Hegel observes in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* that it is “well known that the Trinity played an essential role for the Pythagoreans and Plato,”²¹ and the Plato which the young theologians at the Stift encountered was not just the Enlightenment Plato revived by Mendelssohn and Kant, but also the very syncretistic and theological Plato of Ficino and Cudworth. Michael Franz has investigated the context of Schelling’s early work on Plato, in particular his commentary on the *Timaeus*, and demonstrates convincingly the extent to which the agenda established by Cudworth, in his attempt to demonstrate the compatibility of Platonic metaphysics and Christian theology, still provided the parameters of the Plato interpretation in the Stift in the 1790s.²² In the early and mid eighteenth century the Church of England enjoyed considerable prestige amongst continental Protestants, and Cudworth’s *True Intellectual System of the Universe* of 1678 was translated and commented on by Johann Lorenz von Mosheim (1694–1755) in 1733. Mosheim’s critique of Cudworth’s fervent Christian Neoplatonism fired further consideration of the issues. Still the picture of Plato remained dominated by Patristic/Neoplatonic and/or Middle Platonic themes and ideas even though the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato was no longer dominant. Dialogues which were of particular importance for the Church Fathers

19. J.E. Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841* (Cambridge: 1980).

20. *Ibid.* 19.

21. Hegel, *Lectures on The Philosophy of Religion* III, 287.

22. M. Franz, *Schellings Tübinger Platon-Studien* (Göttingen: 1996) 99–149.

such as the *Timaeus* or *Philebus* were at the centre of any consideration of Platonic philosophy in the Stift.²³

A number of contemporaries noted similarities between the German Idealists and Neoplatonist metaphysics, and some modern scholars, notably Harald Holz and Werner Beierwaltes, have emphasized the structural affinities. Yet there is very little evidence of Schelling's or Hegel's direct contact with Neoplatonic thought in this early period, and those phrases or ideas which look like *prima facie* evidence for Neoplatonism probably came from Spinoza. Yet by considering the link between a *Theologia Platonica* and the doctrine of the Trinity forged by Cudworth and discussed via Sovereign and Mosheim up to the late eighteenth century, we can appreciate how many Neoplatonic ideas were transmitted through a discussion of Plato dominated by Patristic interests.²⁴ Thus, for reasons which have become obscure for the modern reader in the wake of Schleiermacher, both Schelling and Hegel read Plato in the light of Neoplatonic and Patristic tradition, i.e., as a metaphysician who was concerned with the nature of the Absolute One, the creation of the cosmos, and the immortality of the soul. Both Hegel and Schelling see the *Timaeus*, *Philebus*, and *Parmenides* as the heart of Plato.

Much of this vision of Plato was conveyed to the young theologians by theological controversy about the doctrine of the Trinity: Cudworth's attempt to explain the harmony (in spirit if not letter) between the *Trinitas Platonica* and the orthodox Christian Trinity, Mosheim's translation and critique of Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, and the Unitarian rejection of the entire Platonic legacy. Schelling wrote a commentary on the *Timaeus* as a boy in the Stift. He used some of these materials in his Platonic dialogue on the Renaissance Neoplatonist *Bruno*. In this dialogue Bruno exclaims in a discussion concerning the absolute unity of thought and Being (*die absolute Einheit des Denkens und Seyns*)

The pure Subject-Object however, that absolute knowledge of the absolute I, the form of all forms, is the Son born of the Absolute, co-eternal, not differing in substance, but one.²⁵

The link between Plato as the metaphysician of unity or identity and the Patristic speculation concerning the Tri-une identity of the *Principium* was

23. If the argument is correct, this constitutes an important correction or at least revision of Tigerstedt's view that the Neoplatonic Plato was effectively extinct by the late eighteenth century.

24. Michael J.B. Allen, "Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity," *Renaissance Quarterly* 37 (1984): 555–84.

25. "Das reine Subjekt-Objekt aber, jenes absolute Erkennen das absolute Ich, die Form aller Formen, ist der dem Absoluten eingeborne Sohn, gleich ewig mit ihm, nicht verschieden von seinem Wesen, sondern eins." Schelling, *Schriften von 1801–1804* (Darmstadt: 1988) 223.

perfectly intelligible for Schelling who wanted to develop a philosophy of the *Absolute Ich*.²⁶ Hegel is adamant:

God is *spirit*, that which we call the *triune* God, a purely speculative content, i.e., the *mystery* of God. God is spirit, absolute activity, *actus purus*, i.e. subjectivity, infinite personality, infinite distinction of himself from himself.²⁷

For both Schelling and Hegel the Trinity is an essential link between philosophy and theology. They consider the essence of Christianity to be reconciliation, and the dogma of the essential and economic Tri-unity as the expression of the reconciliation of the finite and infinite. In a sense Hegel's entire philosophy is Trinitarian. It is a reflection upon absolute Spirit as a triadic unity, and the "whole of philosophy is nothing else but a study of the definition of *unity*."²⁸ Schelling in his Munich Lectures of 1827–28 made a point of criticising Schleiermacher's relative neglect of the doctrine of the Trinity.²⁹ Coleridge's remark that he was a Trinitarian *ad normam Platonis* before he came to the belief in the Christian Trinity is an interesting reflection of this tradition.

The dogma of the Trinity, for Schleiermacher, looks like an appendix to his *Glaubenslehre*. He writes:

We only deal with the consciousness of the Divine, which is presented in conjunction with consciousness of the world, within the domain of our selfconsciousness. Hence we have no formula for God's being *per se* as distinguished from the being of God in the world. This would be to borrow from the realm of the speculative, and to betray the nature of our discipline.³⁰

Gerrish notes that Schleiermacher was criticising the Orthodox Trinitarian dogma and thereby following the anti-trinitarian wing of the Reformation known as Socinianism.³¹ This is not to claim that the Trinity is without significance for Schleiermacher. It can be argued the place of the Trinity within his dogmatics follows from his attempt to base the doctrine upon the historical revelation of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit, and as such is quite genuinely the coping stone (*Schlußstein*) of his dogmatics. However, this is not just a critique of the Orthodox doctrine. It is emphatically a rejection of the metaphysical construal of the doctrine which is the hallmark of

26. E. Coreth, *Trinitätsdenken in neuzeitlicher Philosophie* (Salzburg: 1986).

27. Hegel, *Lectures on The Philosophy of Religion* III, 79.

28. *Lectures* I, 379.

29. Schelling, *System der Weltalter. Münchener Vorlesung 1827/28 in einer Nachschrift von Ernst von Lasaulx* (Frankfurt: 1990) 189–90.

30. *Der christliche Glaube: Nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange Dargestellt*, ed. M Redeker, 2 vols (Berlin: 1960) II, 470 [my translation].

31. See Gerrish, "Friedrich Schleiermacher" 140.

Christian Platonists from Augustine, Eriugena, Bonaventura, Cusa, Cudworth, and Hegel.

Hegel says the philology of Schleiermacher is “quite irrelevant for philosophy and belongs to the excessively critical spirit of the age.”³² The dialogue form is rather a weakness of Plato: “the Spirit does not appear (in Plato) in the form which we require. Plato’s philosophical training was not sufficiently developed.”³³ Let us try to pursue what Hegel means here by the contemplation of the Idea.

Hegel believed that the genius of Plato lay in his inchoate dialectic, particularly *Parmenides*, “the masterpiece of Platonic dialectic.” The *Parmenides* was the eminent source of Plato’s theology for Proclus, and the source of much Christian Platonic Trinitarian speculation.³⁴ Hegel writes of God as “the one and only object of philosophy Thus philosophy *is* theology, and [one’s] occupation with philosophy, or rather *in* philosophy, is of itself the service of God.”³⁵ Yet this is to speak of the

speculative idea, i.e., the rational element, insofar as it is thought, the thinking of what is rational. The speculative idea is a *mustärion* for the sensible mode of consideration as well as for the understanding. In other words, *mustärion* is what the rational is; among the Neoplatonists, this expression already means simply speculative philosophy.³⁶

In contrast Schleiermacher insists that in theology we have no formula for the being of God in itself as distinct from “the being of God in the world.”³⁷ Whereas Hegel positively admires the Greek aspect of Christian thought, Schleiermacher tends to see the Greek background as an obstacle for the modern mind; in particular with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity. He writes in the first edition of the *Glaubenslehre*:

We should consider that . . . the formulas for the Trinity, which are still definitive, are derived from a time when Christianity was expanding with a heathen domain. Where talk of plurality within the Divine was normative, unconscious pagan resonances were bound to infiltrate Christianity. Hence it is not surprising that the description of plurality was continually vulnerable and open to misinterpretation. Nor was it appropriate in later periods where there was no issue of pagan interference.³⁸

32. “. . . ist für die Philosophie ganz überflüssig und gehört der Hyperkritik unserer Zeit an.” *Hegels Werke* vol. 18 (Stuttgart: 1965) 179.

33. “. . . der Geist tritt aber nicht in der bestimmten Form hervor, die wir fordern. Die philosophische Bildung Platos war dazu noch nicht reif.” *Hegels Sämtliche Werke* vol. 18 (Stuttgart: 1965, 1971) 186.

34. See Beierwaltes, “Das seiende Eine,” in *Denken des Einen* 201ff.

35. *Lectures* I, 84.

36. *Lectures* III, 280.

37. *Der christliche Glaube* II, 470.

38. *Der christliche Glaube* II, 469 [my translation].

Schleiermacher notes that as long as the doctrine of the Trinity remains in the traditional form, many feel compelled to reject it; although they themselves are entirely Christian in their piety. He argues that it is false to reject Antitrinitarianism as heretical or un-Christian. Indeed, as it increases in influence, as in the Anglo-Saxon world, this should be a stimulus for a revision of the traditional formulation of the dogma.³⁹ Schleiermacher is referring to Anglo-American Unitarianism.⁴⁰

It is clearly no accident that the evidently metaphysical Plato of the Christian Platonic tradition revered by those two eccentric modern Neoplatonists, Hegel and Schelling, the Plato who conjured over identity and difference in the *Sophist*, and the Divine triad in the *Parmenides* and *Timaeus*, was criticised by Schleiermacher. Nor is it fortuitous that Schleiermacher replaced the 'Attic Moses' with the much less speculative and more, as it were, Romantic Plato, one who believed that dialogue was the only proper way of communicating philosophical truth. Schleiermacher was the theologian who believed that "we have no formula for the being of God in itself as distinct from the being of God in the world." Schleiermacher's criticism of the arcane (Neoplatonic) Plato was linked to his rejection of the essential Trinity and the Logos speculation of the Alexandrines and Hegelians alike.

It is of particular significance that the early Schelling commentary was on the *Timaeus*, one of those few texts which has been a direct source of Platonic ideas within Christian theology from the Fathers through the School of Chartres up to the modern period, and which fired the sort of Trinitarian and cosmological speculation so congenial to the Idealists.⁴¹ Those characteristically Schellingian problems (and also perennial ones) of the relation of the Absolute to the physical cosmos, the relation of myth to rational reflection, and of an organic teleological vision of Nature can now be seen to be rooted in the adolescent Schelling's reception and interpretation of Plato, as mediated through the theological concerns of Tübingen humanism. Significantly, Schleiermacher failed to translate the *Timaeus*.⁴²

Hegel's attempt to reconcile reason with religion is based upon the same foundation as Schelling's. The modern reader finds the leap from Plato to Hegel's *Wissenschaft* "des göttlichen Begriffs" and "des göttlichen Erkennens"

39. *Der christliche Glaube* II, 471.

40. In my forthcoming book, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion. Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (Cambridge: 2000) I argue that Coleridge should be aligned with Hegel and Schelling rather than with Schleiermacher, and propose that Coleridge's negotiation with and ultimate rejection of eighteenth-century Anglophone Unitarians provides the key to his thought.

41. R. Kiblancki, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages* (London: 1939); O. Kristeller, "Renaissance Platonism" in his *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* (New York: 1979) 50–65.

42. Cf. Bubner, *Innovationen des Idealismus* (Göttingen: 1995) 21.

via the *Trinitas Platonica* difficult both because of Schleiermacher's massive philological labours and because of his rejection of Cudworth's view of Plato as forerunner of the Christian Trinity. Schleiermacher sees Plato as an artist rather than as a prophetic theologian, a conscious writer of dialogues and not an arcane mystagogue. Furthermore, Schleiermacher sees Plato's dialogues as the expression of a certain metaphysical agnosticism. This forces us to return to the issue of Schleiermacher's theology. It is not a theology of the Absolute. God is unknowable, a limit rather than an object of knowledge.

The Idealists are philosophers of the 'Absolute'; they are theologians in the strictest sense of the word. This absolute is roughly the God of Christian metaphysics; it is also a spiritual unity transcending all differences but fulfilling itself through sublimating distinction. Idealists gave up the *absolute-ness* of the Absolute according to the conventional Platonic-Thomist perspective. For this Platonic tradition the Absolute is absolutely self-sufficient plenitude, the *ipsum esse* of Boethius and Thomas Aquinas. The Idealists claim that God needs the world in order to become himself. In reconciling that which has been alienated from himself, God becomes greater. If God is the God of love, as the Christian tradition claims, He needs an object of love, and if this is true, human and divine destiny are much more closely linked than the Platonists could ever accept. Hence Hegel's speculative Good Friday—the grotesque history of the world is also God's history. It is that essence, which is the process of the maintenance of identity in its otherness. Discussing the nature of God, Hegel argues that

... as far as personality is concerned, it is the character of the person, the subject, to surrender its isolation and separateness In friendship and love I give up my abstract personality and thereby win it back as concrete. The truth of personality is found precisely in winning it back through this immersion, this being immersed in the other.⁴³

These are heretical conceptions, from the perspective of ecclesiastical and dogmatic orthodoxy, but are nevertheless profoundly Christian meditations upon the Pauline conception of "dying to live."⁴⁴

43. Hegel, *Lectures III*, 286. Compare this with the *Phenomenology of Spirit* §177 on the 'I' that is 'We' and the 'We' that is 'I,' *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: 1977) 110, or *ibid.*, 10 "the living Substance is being which is in truth *Subject*, or what is the same, is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself Only this self-restoring sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself—not an *original* or *immediate* unity as such—is the True."

44. Cf. my article "Pantheism, Trinitarian Theism and the Idea of Unity: Reflections on the Christian Concept of God," in *Religious Studies* 32: 61–77. John Caird has an illuminating discussion of this topic in his introductory book *Hegel* (London: 1909); see also J. Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Chicago: 1968) 251ff.

Hegel said, after all, that the speculative is the mystical, and though both Jacobi and Schleiermacher are often criticized as being 'mystical' this is no more than shorthand for 'irrational.' The notion of the *Werdende Gott* is at least suggested by the Christian Neoplatonist mystics from Eriugena to Eckhart, Boehme, and Angelus Silesius.⁴⁵ Hegel sees the *philosophus teutonicus* Boehme (1575–1624) as a speculative thinker, in particular because of his conception of the Godhead as not merely eternal self contemplation but also as dynamic self production. God is not just *causa prima* but also *causa sui*, primordial activity.⁴⁶ Boehme is an obdurate and obscure writer, and his influence on the German Idealists seems mediated by the Munich thinker Franz von Baader (1765–1841).⁴⁷ But he provides a link between Neoplatonic-Patristic speculation upon the nature of the Absolute and creation and the German Enlightenment. It is via the 'Spiritual Reformers,' pre-eminently Boehme, that the tradition of Eckhart or the *Theologia Germanica* could be transmitted to the Idealists. Boehme is, as it were, a link (however obscure) in the philosophical mystical tradition between Plotinus, Eckhart, Leibniz, Lessing, Schelling, and Hegel.⁴⁸

The mystical, i.e., the interior or spiritual approach to the knowledge of the Divine, is, for Western theologians, rooted in Augustine.⁴⁹ This interior or mystical method can be seen very clearly in *On the Trinity* where he attempts to develop a model for the nature of the Divine Being from the analogy of the human mind.⁵⁰ The subsequent tradition of a Western Trinitarian theology is based upon the concept of spirit which belongs to Augustine's *mens*. This was a tradition which Protestants often regarded with suspicion, but Hegel could quite happily refer to the biblical witness to such a *Geistesmetaphysik*. After all, in defence of his view of raising believing spirit to the "level of thinking" he can appeal to *Matthew* 10.20 that "It is not you who speak but the spirit within you" and Paul in *Romans* 8.26 asserts that "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities."

45. Cf. the remarks made by L. Kolakowski in *Religion* (Oxford: 1982) 146ff.

46. This would seem to be the root of Schelling's otherwise barely explicable tenet in *On Human Freedom*: "The Will is primordial being" *Wollen ist Ursein*.

47. Cf. Jan Rohls, "Subjekt, Trinität und Persönlichkeit Gottes," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 30 (1988): 59–63, esp. 48; R.F. Brown, *The Later Philosophy of Schelling. The Influence of Boehme on the Works of 1809–1815* (Lewisburg: 1977).

48. Ernst Benz, *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy* (Alison Park: 1983).

49. E. Booth, "Hegel's Conception of Self-Knowledge Seen in Conjunction with Augustine's," *Augustiniana* 30 (1980): 220–50.

50. J.B. Du Roy, *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon saint Augustin* (Paris: 1966). Also M. Smalbrugge, *La nature trinitaire de l'intelligence augustinienne de la foi* (Amsterdam: 1988).

SCHLEIERMACHER AS THE KANT OF THEOLOGY

Schleiermacher was the butt of Brunner's somewhat intemperate attack on "mysticism."⁵¹ However Brunner's use of the term "mystical" is rather polemical and rhetorical. It is true that the emphasis upon feeling and totality in Schleiermacher's theology evokes a sense of mystical romanticism. But in contrast to the Idealists, the actual links between Schleiermacher and the great German mystics proper (e.g., Eckhart, Silesius, or Boehme) are scarce and rather insubstantial.⁵² To express the matter rather paradoxically: the hostility of Ritschl and Barth towards mystical thought is by no means incompatible with their *de facto* affinity for Schleiermacher's theology. His strict limitations upon the domain of theology were intended to drive mysticism from its last refuge. The "Kant of Theology"⁵³ saw the advantages of making theology "independent of the judgement of dogmatic speculation, thereby assuring it completely against the attacks of all such opponents."⁵⁴ Yet it must be seen as a reaction against the deistic and rationalistic accounts of the Christian religion in the German Enlightenment—particularly against the attempt to fuse elements of metaphysic and ethics into the 'essence' of Christianity. The argument in the *Speeches* is that religion itself, and in particular the Christian religion, cannot be reduced to either moral or metaphysic; nor is it amenable to rational reconstruction. Hegel and Schelling, by way of contrast, were much more closely allied to the Enlightenment project of a metaphysical and moral justification of the essence of Christianity. Is Schleiermacher justified in claiming that his central ideas remained constant? He is not merely concerned to criticise the vulgar commercialism of the English and the frivolity of the French, but also the rational reconstruction of Christianity in German Idealism. This intent becomes reinforced by his conflict with Hegel in Berlin.⁵⁵

In his 'positivism,' Schleiermacher departs radically from the Christian Platonic mode of philosophy of religion. The concept of 'Feeling' of dependence upon the whence of our being becomes the key to the analysis of Christian doctrine, but it does not *explain*. Schleiermacher's apologetic strategy is to deny the need for explanation. Religion simply does not require

51. E. Brunner, "Die Mystik und Das Wort," *Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie*, ed. J. Moltmann (Munich: 1962) I, 279–89.

52. For an authentic mystical legacy in Schleiermacher see U. Frost, *Einigung des geistigen Lebens: Zur Theorie religiöser und allgemeiner Bildung bei Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Paderborn: 1991).

53. F.D. Strauss, *Charakteristiken und Kritiken* (Leipzig 1839) 205.

54. Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, ed. B. Logan (London: 1996) 138. In fact, I consider Kant himself, upon serious inspection, to be a fine example of natural theology on the foundations of 'pure practical reason,' but this is not to deny his reputation as the foremost modern critic of natural theology.

55. J.E. Toews, *Hegelianism* 56ff.

philosophical explication. This, Schleiermacher insists, is the mistake of those Kantians who wish to explain religion as an expression and extension of ethics or those theologians who see religion as essentially metaphysical. In the *Glaubenslehre* Schleiermacher insists that dogmatic theology is historical because of its given object of inquiry.⁵⁶ This is Schleiermacher's positivism. His analysis of Christian dogma is based upon facts which are not amenable to metaphysical explication. It is the description of the religious feelings of Protestant Christianity, which traces its origin back to its founder. Herein lies the autonomy of religion which he propounded in 1799 in the much more idealistically conceived *Speeches*. Hegel's desire to translate the representational language (*Vorstellung*) of Orthodox Christianity into a conceptual speculative framework (*Begriff*) represents the perennially Platonic discomfort with appeals to brute fact. The Hegelian "Odyssey of the Spirit" (H.S. Harris) is a modern *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum*, or ascent of the mind to the Divine, which takes a very dim view of Schleiermacher's preoccupation with establishing strict boundaries between dogmatic theology (*Glaubenslehre*) and metaphysical speculation (*Dialektik*).

Schleiermacher is opposed to the Hegelian confusion of philosophy and theology. Hence he is the 'Kant' of theology—the *alles-zermalmender*⁵⁷—the shatterer of the Christian Platonic legacy of systematic natural theology. Yet this is not because of an *anthropological* turn. D.F. Strauß claimed that Schleiermacher is the "Kant der protestantischen Theologie" on the grounds that he destroyed theological scholasticism and made 'feeling' the basis of dogmatics. It is true that Schleiermacher's dogmatics revolves around the concept of feeling, but, in fact, it is the concept of Divine causality which informs his whole theology.⁵⁸ Doctrines about God refer to this causal relation between God and man rather than to speculative notions of the eternal distinctions within the Divine essence. God in Himself remains inscrutable.

His is the transcendental point of view, understood as the impossibility of knowledge of the great objects of religion, which replaces these objects with the process and the only remaining object of knowledge in the domain of religion. An objective knowledge of God transcends the limits of our reason.⁵⁹

56. Gerrish, "Friedrich Schleiermacher" 129.

57. De Quincy's famous description of Kant as the 'Gog and Magog of Hunnish desolation' *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets* (London: 1985) 49.

58. On this see R.R. Williams, *Schleiermacher the Theologian: the Construction of the Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: 1978) 11ff.

59. "Er erfährt nämlich die transcendente Standpunkt, auf dem die Unmöglichkeit einer Erkenntnis der großen Gegenstände der Religiosität begriffen und so an der Stelle dieser äußeren Gegenstände der Religiosität deren Prozeß selbst als einziges Erkenntnisobjekt auf dem religiösen Gebiete zurückbleibt. Eine objektive Erkenntnis der Eigenschaften Gottes ... überschreitet die Grenzen unserer Vernunft. Dilthey, *Leben Schleiermachers* (Berlin: 1966) II, ii, 535.

Schleiermacher is the theologian who decisively criticised the old alliance of philosophy and theology which Augustine had bequeathed to the Middle Ages and which was perpetuated in the Idealism of Hegel and Schelling in their attempt to explain the dogmatic content of Christian belief in philosophical terms. Hegel was the great successor of Greek speculative rationalism and Christian theology's appropriation of this tradition, and there is a sense in which the rationalist and contemplative Hegel is closer to the spirit of Augustine than is the Romantic Schleiermacher :

Hegel's criticism of Schleiermacher is the objection of a piety which is based in the traditional manner upon knowledge of the truth as opposed to the new agnostic piety which is based upon the worship of the unknown and the unknowable. Here also we find that Hegel's is that last great attempt to preserve the ancient pride of the Christian religion; that in this religion God's nature is revealed and can be known in its final depths, and that in this sense it is the perfection and completion of the human intellectual longing.⁶⁰

If Christian Platonism be understood through the model of St Augustine, it is fairly evident that Hegel is much closer to the Christian Platonic tradition than is Schleiermacher.⁶¹ Hegel isolated the revulsion from the speculative as a specifically Protestant weakness; and indeed much of the impetus of the critique of the *Plato Christianus* in the Enlightenment between Casaubon and Mosheim came from strict Protestant aversion to paganism and a fear of the dilution of faith.

We may now look at the syncretistic theological Platonism of the German Idealists as antiquated and obscured, but it helped to ignite those radical revisions of Spinoza which led to Absolute Idealism. And it is noteworthy that Anglo-Saxon Platonism, through Coleridge, Westcott, Dean Inge, and A.H. Armstrong remained close to the theological-metaphysical tradition. A.E. Taylor, in a note criticising the German scholar Stenzel's opinion that "conscience" is a "Christian" concept of no meaning to Plato, remarks: "whereas I see Plato through a tradition shaped by Augustine, Cudworth,

60. "Hegels Kritik an Schleiermacher ist der Einspruch einer noch in alter Weise in Wahrheitserkenntnis gegründeten Frömmigkeit wider die neue agnostische Frömmigkeit, die in der Anbetung des Unerkannten und Unerkennbaren sich gründet. Auch hier wieder ist Hegel der letzte große Versuch, den alten Stolz der christlichen Religion zu wahren, daß in ihr Gottes Wesen offenbar und erkannt werde nach seinen letzten Tiefen, und daß eben darin sie Vollendung und Erfüllung des wahrheitsuchenden menschlichen Geistes sei." E. Hirsch, *Geschichte der neueren evangelischen Theologie* V, 243.

61. See W. Beierwaltes, "Differenz, Negation, Identität: Die reflexive Bewegung der Hegelschen Dialektik," in *Identität und Differenz* (Frankfurt: 1980) 241–68; idem, *Platonismus und Idealismus* (Frankfurt: 1972) 144–87. J. Splett, *Die Trinitätslehre G.W.F Hegels* (Freiburg: 1965).

Butler, Richard Price, the German author views him through a different medium.⁶² The tradition shaped by Augustine, Cudworth, and Coleridge is an unashamedly metaphysical Christian Platonism. It is no accident that Taylor was a product of Idealist Oxford, or that one of A.E. Taylor's major achievements was a commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*. His work is part of that revival of British metaphysics which is rooted in S.T. Coleridge, an admirer of Schelling, who came to Christianity through the doctrine of Trinity *ad normam Platonis*.

In fact, given that Schleiermacher's insistence upon the autonomy of theology is most evidently taken up by Ritschl, and Harnack was a pupil of Ritschl, it is interesting to speculate whether the theology of the greatest Plato scholar of the modern period was the forerunner of the twentieth-century programme of dehellensising. The basic motive of dehellensising amongst Liberal theologians was a dislike of the use of natural theology, and this was reinforced by Dialectical Theology. For all their polemic against Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Barth, in their opposition to theological metaphysics, they were continuing a theological position inaugurated by Schleiermacher rather than repudiating it. Perhaps there is a sense in which the theological anti-Platonism of the late nineteenth and twentieth century is a product of the greatest modern Plato scholar. If that is so, the irony seems stark. Yet this also says something about the protean nature of the 'Platonic Tradition.' Schleiermacher bears the marks of the apophatic tradition of Neoplatonism which places the Absolute beyond reason. The conflict is not merely one between 'philosophy' and 'theology.' Hegel is perhaps the most famous philosopher of the nineteenth century; F.D.E. Schleiermacher perhaps the most famous theologian: they were both colleagues at the University of Berlin in the 1820s where they seemed to have loathed each other. Schleiermacher's increasing stress upon the historical facticity of Christianity in the *Glaubenslehre* seems to be based upon the reaction to Hegel's aggrandizement of philosophy and subordination of Christianity. One thinks here of Hegel's remark that if a feeling of dependence is the criterion of true religion, a dog must be more pious than his master.

THE AMBIGUITIES OF THE PLATONIC LEGACY

Although the antagonisms of the two Berlin professors seems to reflect the classic modern antagonism of philosophy and theology, if we look at the theology of the nineteenth century we can see that most of the great movements in theology were largely motivated by Hegel. With Hegel we must associate the biblical criticism and Church history of the Tübingen school,

62. A.E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist* (London: 1930) I, 61.

the relationship of myth to reason, Christianity's relation to classical antiquity and its role in the formation of the modern world, the projectivism of Feuerbach, the development of interest in other religions. Most of these interests were rather alien to Schleiermacher, whose more Christocentric approach was taken up only really at the end of the century by that renegade Hegelian Ritschl. If we really scrutinise the period we find that it is the *philosopher* Hegel who exerted the most powerful influence upon *theology* in the nineteenth century!

Hegel's real philosophical influence in Germany was cut short by his relatively early death, and the shift to the pragmatic and rather worldly interests of the prosperous Germany in the late nineteenth century. Anglo-American Hegelianism was severely affected by the return to Empiricism after the Great War. Schleiermacher's philosophical influence, however, was perpetuated via Dilthey to Heidegger and Gadamer. *Being and Time* was largely formed in Marburg where Heidegger was in close proximity to the Schleiermacher scholar Rudolf Otto. Heidegger's objection to Husserl's Cartesianism is very close to Schleiermacher's critique of Hegel: the failure of a conceptual rational philosophy to capture the facticity of life.⁶³ One might read Gadamer's *Grundzüge einer Theorie der hermeneutischen Erfahrung* in *Truth and Method* to gain a sense of Gadamer's conscious awareness of his own thought as in the tradition of Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger. If *Being and Time* and *Truth and Method* are the classic works of German and perhaps continental European philosophy this century, there is at least a case for seeing the *theologian* Schleiermacher as at the font if not the father of modern German philosophy in its explicit opposition to Hegel.

He also bequeathed, through these followers, a philosophical basis for a critique of the speculative onto-theological component in Western thought. Both Heidegger and Gadamer were influenced by 'Platonism' of some kind, but the 'existential ontology' of *Being and Time* and the 'hermeneutical' philosophy of *Truth and Method* are conceived in resolute opposition to the (Neo) Platonic-Hegelian vision of a systematic speculative natural theology. Heidegger's early fascination for Augustine and Schleiermacher which was so significant for the formation of *Being and Time* lay at the heart of his later critique of Western metaphysics explored by the French *avant-garde*.⁶⁴ And Gadamer's vision of philosophy as essentially interpretation of the great dead philosophers has much in common with the late Antique Platonic view of philosophy as exegesis, but without its metaphysics. In this way, the polemic against Platonic natural theology which has formed such an important part

63. M. Trowitzsch, *Zeit zur Ewigkeit* (München: 1976) 115ff on the dependence of Heidegger upon Schleiermacher for the concept of 'Befindlichkeit.'

64. T. Kiesel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: 1995) 89ff.

of European thought from Heidegger to the Poststructuralists is, itself, also parasitic upon 'Platonism.'

Hegel is particularly scathing about such a temper of mind "which calls itself philosophy and while mouthing Plato, betrays a utter ignorance of the nature of speculative thought: i.e., the contemplation of the Idea."⁶⁵ For Hegel, natural theology was the key to authentic Platonism, and he saw himself as the heir to its traditions. Schleiermacher, for all his debts to Plato, was driving modern theology into an opposed direction, one which Barth and, more recently, the Post-modern theologians have perpetuated and intensified.

65. "...wo dasjenige, was sich Philosophie nennt und wohl den Plato immer im Munde führt, und auch keine Ahnung von dem hat, was die Natur des spekulativen Denkens, der Betrachtung der Idee, ist." *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. H. Glockner (Stuttgart: 1968) vol. xx, 27.