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Edited by Ninian Smart, John Clayton, Steven Katz and Patrick Sherry

Excerpt

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## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

On both sides of the Atlantic and on both sides of the Channel, there has been in recent years a renewed interest in nineteenth-century religious thought. Reasons for this by now widespread revival of interest need not be rehearsed. It is perhaps sufficient to recall that several issues which dominated discussion in the decades following the European Enlightenment remain central in contemporary debate within the academic study of religion and within the theological community, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic or Jewish. In order to make this point, one need only call to mind such recently debated issues as hermeneutics and tradition, faith and history, projectionist and other reductionist accounts of religion, the limits of historical relativism and the nature of rationality, the possibility of a purely 'scientific' study of religion and the legitimacy of theological studies within the university, as well as such religiously intramural concerns as the place of myth in christology or the nature of Jewishness. Each of these problems was either initially raised or significantly recast during the nineteenth century.

Whilst taking care not to underestimate the distance between their world and our own, one must nonetheless allow that greater understanding of these and other contemporary issues can often be gained by attending to those thinkers who in the main have determined the direction of modern religious thought in the West. Theirs was a revolutionary time when the older theistic world-view, already under attack since the Renaissance and throughout the Enlightenment, gave way to a new, more variegated, more complex circumstance for religious thought. Under the pressure first of Kant's radical break with traditional metaphysics and of his attempt to develop a theology centred in morality, followed by Schleiermacher's efforts to generate theology from reflection on the religious self-consciousness alone, and then by Hegel's response in the direction of an absolute Idealism centred in the world-historical process whereby spirit becomes conscious of itself as

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spirit, the nineteenth century in the West became a laboratory of fresh ideas and new hermeneutical techniques in religious thought. Whether one sees these developments as monuments to human genius or regards them with Karl Barth as perverse deviations from the theologian's proper task, there is no denying the extent to which even contemporary religious thought bears the mark of their influence. Whatever may obtain elsewhere, twentieth-century religious thought is very much the child of the nineteenth.

The nineteenth century tells no single story; nor can it be done justice by a single story teller. Its more successful narrators in recent years have almost without exception confined themselves to a single religious or national tradition, such as French Catholicism; or to a single school or movement, such as Romanticism; or to a single issue, such as historicism. Even though no single story is told in the religious thought of the nineteenth century, the individual story-lines do intertwine in various ways, such that none in isolation tells the whole story. Successful wider-ranging studies there most surely have been, but it would be unreasonable nonetheless to expect a single scholar to give an adequate account of the main developments in Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish religious thought, together with the leading options available within the philosophy of religion and the emergence of the various branches of the academic study of religion. In order for such an account to be convincing, a team of scholars would almost certainly be required.

Twenty-nine scholars from five countries have collaborated in an attempt to trace in three volumes the course taken in the nineteenth century by religious thought and its critique in the West. The volumes are not intended to be an anthology of articles merely summarizing historical and exegetical details; they are intended, rather, to engage the thinkers covered in a rigorous manner in order to see what they said and why they said it, and also to explore what is of lasting value in their work. It is hoped that contributions to *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West* will be found sufficiently clear to be of use to students of religion, theology and cognate subjects, but also to have enough depth to be of more than introductory value. The short bibliographical essays appended to each contribution give guidance to further reading, with especial attention having been given to texts and studies in English. Whilst every effort has been made to make the subject matter accessible to the interested reader, no attempt has been made artificially to 'simplify' the thought of those men who have both stimulated and challenged the best minds of their own and successive generations.

A glance at the contents of the three volumes will show that the range of topics covered is wide and varied. We have aimed throughout to strike a

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reasonable balance in respect to the main national groups, religious communities, and academic disciplines which contributed significantly to Western religious thought and its critique in the nineteenth century. Many of the contributions deal with the work of important individual figures, such as Coleridge or Strauss, focusing critically on particular aspects of their work whilst at the same time developing wider generalizations about their significance for the subject, their influence and their place in the period as a whole. Other articles, including those dealing with the criticism of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, survey key developments within an important area of study; or trace the emergence of largely new areas of study, such as the anthropological, sociological or comparative study of religion. Some contributions, including those having to do with science and religion or with British Agnosticism, may bring into focus an issue widely disputed in the nineteenth century; whilst others, such as those concerning the Roman Catholic Tübingen school and the British Idealists, isolate for special attention certain influential movements of thought which cannot easily be identified with a single leading figure.

Whatever the precise scope of the chapter, contributors have in every case sought to direct attention towards the most important critical and conceptual issues raised in the period. Except where demanded by the subject, such as in the case of the American Transcendentalists or of Nietzsche, biographical and other background information has been kept to a minimum. Authors have also been asked to pin-point wherever possible the relevance of the figure or topic or movement to twentieth-century religious thought.

Within even three volumes of moderate size, it has not been possible to cover all important aspects of nineteenth-century religious thought. Each author has had to write within strict word limits, the exact length having been varied from topic to topic, so that he has not always been able to say all that he might like to have said about his assigned subject. The editors have likewise been limited in respect to the number of topics which could be realistically covered. For instance, it soon became clear that it would not be possible, as one might have liked, also to survey developments in non-Western religious thought. Readers who wish to learn more about the likes of Rāmakrishna and Vivekananda will have to turn elsewhere for help. Even restricting ourselves just to Western religious thought, the selection of subject-matter still proved difficult in view of the many competing claims. No attempt has been made to cover major doctrinal and ecclesiastical developments. Some names which one would certainly expect to find mentioned in any history of, say, specifically Roman Catholic or Protestant theology have also had to be overlooked in an effort to give a more balanced survey of nineteenth-century religious thought. It has been necessary to deal

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less directly than hoped with non-intellectual factors – whether social, economic or political – which conditioned the course of religious (and other) thought in the nineteenth century. A social history of religious thought would be a worthwhile project, but a nonetheless separate exercise from that which has been undertaken here. Where appropriate, however, as in the case of the Catholic Tübingen School and of British Agnosticism, contributors have sometimes called the readers' attention to such factors. The editors, in addition, have taken care to ensure coverage of those thinkers – such as Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Troeltsch – who have made our own century aware of the social and economic constraints on religious thought and its history.

In making their final choice of topics, the editors were guided by the following criteria: (i) the intrinsic merit of the writer's or the movement's contribution to Western religious thought or its critique; (ii) the appearance of the individual's or group's major work having been after the ascendancy of Kant's critical philosophy and before the outbreak of the First World War; (iii) the influence and continuing importance of the writer or movement in the twentieth century; (iv) the relevance of the individual or group to the growth of the study of religion as an academic discipline.

The authors of the twenty-seven chapters which make up this three-volume symposium have their own individual tales to tell about the course of Western religious thought in the nineteenth century. Their stories are so many and so varied that it would be hardly feasible to summarize them here. Since the contributors will want to speak for themselves, to anticipate what they each have to say would also serve no useful purpose. Even so, their separate story-lines do overlap and intertwine in various ways. The authors themselves have drawn attention where appropriate to some links between their own and other contributions. The editors want in addition to identify certain key issues which throughout the nineteenth century attracted the interests of its best minds. We would single out the following three clusters of issues as having been determinative: (i) the limits of reason and the nature of rationality; (ii) the idea of 'true humanity' and the question of human nature; (iii) the problems of history and the effects of 'historicism'. These three themes, themselves closely interconnected, constitute together the century's *Leitmotiv* of which all other themes are merely variations.

*Reason and rationality*

Immanuel Kant, strictly speaking, does not belong to the nineteenth century. Having died in 1804 only months before his eightieth birthday,

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Kant belongs more properly to the eighteenth century and to its world of thought, so that a general introduction to his philosophy would be out of place in a survey of nineteenth-century religious thought. His influence of the century following his death was nonetheless determinative, with the result that some account of his significance is required. Kant helped shape the period's religious thought in two main ways. On the one hand, his critical philosophy – challenging as it did many of the fundamental assumptions of traditional theology and metaphysics – can be seen in retrospect to have set the agenda for the whole of the nineteenth century, as well as for much of the twentieth. On the other hand, Kant's own attempt to find a new and firmer foundation for religion by grounding it in moral self-consciousness or 'practical reason' pointed a way forward which belongs more genuinely to the nineteenth than to the eighteenth century. The chapter on Kant concentrates, therefore, on issues relating to the relationship in his thought between religion and morality.

Although a general introduction to Kant's critical philosophy does not come within our brief, it must be clear to all that the lasting effects of his so-called 'Copernican revolution' in philosophy echo loudly in most of the individual contributions to these volumes. Kant's relentless effort to chart the bounds of sense has been perceived by many to have undermined not only school metaphysics, but also any philosophical theology done in the style of Descartes or of Leibniz and Wolff. Reaction to the Kantian critique of rational theology has varied greatly within the main religious traditions of the West. It was not uncommon for Protestant theologians to welcome Kant's demolition of any possible edifice erected upon natural theology. Whilst rejecting vehemently his insistence on ethical autonomy, some Protestant theologians early in the century saw in Kant's critique of metaphysics a means of strengthening their own appeal to the authority of biblical revelation as the only secure foundation for theological reflection (a foundation which seemed increasingly less secure as the century wore on). By the time of Ritschl and his school, however, Kant was widely proclaimed as 'the philosopher of Protestantism' for his emphasis upon ethics as well as for his critique of metaphysics. Although the leading Jewish philosopher of the Enlightenment era, Moses Mendelssohn, conceded late in life that his own religious philosophy had been undercut by Kant, Hermann Cohen felt able by the beginning of the twentieth century to use Kant as the basis for a Jewish philosophy of religion. Roman Catholic theologians, despite a short flirtation with Kantianism early in the nineteenth century, tended to move with the times either toward the transcendentalism of Fichte or toward the more outright Romanticism of Schelling. Many, and not only amongst

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Roman Catholics, thought that Romanticism – with its repudiation of dualism and its promise of immediacy – offered a certain way round the most difficult epistemological problems raised for religious thought by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Schleiermacher in Germany, Coleridge in England, and Emerson in America are just some of the spokesmen for this new sensibility which made Romanticism one of the last great international movements of thought in the modern period. More or less independently of these, John Henry Newman stigmatized the previous century, the great age of 'evidences', as 'a time when love was cold': even if the proofs for God's existence were valid, Newman reckoned, they would give us no more than was available to Socrates and would tell us nothing of the love, justice, mercy and faithfulness of God. Within the French- and English-speaking worlds especially, the great scientific advances of the century sharpened the original Kantian critique of metaphysics: in the natural sciences, it seemed, there was a sure method of reaching truth and resolving disagreements – not to mention their practical fruitfulness; but metaphysics, it could be argued, was a battleground of useless theories, in which little agreement and no practical gains had been achieved after two thousand years of speculation. It was this general methodological consideration which, perhaps, underlay the view that there was a conflict between science and religion, as much as any particular disputes about geology, evolution and Genesis. The notion of 'truth' as practical efficacy gave rise within philosophy, including the philosophy of religion, to the Pragmatism of William James.

The limits of reason and the nature of rationality were tested even more radically in the nineteenth century. Marx's claim that the dominant ideas of a society are the ideas of its dominant classes, the French ethnographers' discovery of the 'social fact' of *l'âme collective* and interest in *la mentalité primitive*, and the growing concern in Germany about the relativizing consequences of *Historismus* gave enormous impetus in the latter part of the nineteenth century to a recognition of the social determinants of human reason and rationality. An indication of the extent to which the period's confidence in reason had been shaken by the Kantian critique is suggested additionally by the skeptical and voluntaristic tendencies of such thinkers as Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

However much metaphysics had suffered at the hands of its critics, some of the century's liveliest minds continued to profess its virtues and to practise its craft. 'To understand Kant is to transcend Kant', they proclaimed. It is no slight to the likes of Bradley in England and Royce in America to acknowledge, as one must, that Hegel's philosophical synthesis was the most sustained and the most impressive attempt to transcend the



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limits imposed on human understanding by Kant. Hegel's influence, like Kant's, varied widely within and without the three main Western religious traditions. Within Roman Catholic theology, it would seem that Hegel was perceived as a greater threat to Christian belief than had been Kant: no Roman Catholic theologian of significance in the nineteenth century was in fact tempted by the Hegelian alternative. Elsewhere, however, Hegel's influence was keenly felt. In addition to his more orthodox pupils of the 'right' and their opponents amongst the Young Hegelians of the 'left', the master's influence permeated progressive Protestant thought through Tübingen professor F. C. Baur and Reform Judaism through Frankfurt Rabbi Samuel Hirsch. The persistence of transcendent metaphysics in (and beyond) the nineteenth century – whether on the Continent, in Britain, or in America – is as noteworthy as is the widespread suspicion of its claims. By the end of the century, however, the call was away from the uncharted depths of speculative metaphysics and 'back to Kant'.

*Humanity and human nature*

Several not always commensurable trends in nineteenth-century thought led to changes in the doctrine of man. Three areas of change had special importance for religious thought: the precise relationship between the mental process of 'thinking', 'willing' and 'feeling' was much disputed; the assumption that human nature is fixed was increasingly questioned; and the concept of 'humanity', rooted in Enlightenment soil, came to be cultivated in numerous hybrid forms. In addition, and following largely from these three trends, the individual 'sciences of man' came of age in the course of the nineteenth century. Concern about religion was not infrequently a key factor in all these developments.

Reaction against what many had come to believe was the Enlightenment's inflated confidence in reason and unwarranted vaunting of the intellect led in some cases to a new emphasis upon the will and in others, the affect. Either move clearly had implications for the locus of religion in human experience and its role in the formation of human character.

The relationship of morality and religion preoccupied many nineteenth-century writers. Poets and novelists, no less than theologians and philosophers, were much concerned with 'the voice of conscience', a voice which called many to reject and others to accept the claims of religion. An ethical critique of especially the Christian religion featured centrally not only in the writings of Nietzsche, but also in those of such 'left-wing' British agnostics as T. H. Huxley and Leslie Stephen.<sup>1</sup> Others, most notably Newman and

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Kant, sought to replace the by then discredited traditional arguments for God's existence with some type of moral argument. Whatever differences may exist in detail, they both attempted to do so by distinguishing sharply between that knowledge available to sense experience and that yielded in obedience to moral experience. The voice of conscience, Newman reckoned, has its own absolute authority which can not be shaken by evidence of the senses alone. Although he would have been perplexed by Newman's assent to ecclesiastical authority and astonished by Newman's confidence that conscience establishes the traditional doctrines of Catholic Christianity, Kant himself has through the years both perplexed and astonished many with his own argument that it is necessary to postulate the existence of God, the freedom of the will, and the immortality of the individual soul in order to make sense of the categorical imperative given in moral experience. Both Kant and Newman, however, left their mark on religious ethics. Newman's influence was not decisively felt until the twentieth century, when his significance was belatedly acknowledged. He may nonetheless have influenced individuals such as Tyrrell, for whom conscience was a central ethical notion. Kant's influence on nineteenth-century religious ethics can be seen within Protestant Liberalism, especially in its Ritschlian form, and in the writings of the critical idealists, whose resurgence in the latter part of the century is reported both in the chapter on British Idealism and in that on Jewish thought. Hermann Cohen, adapting characteristically Kantian arguments, attempted to show that the sense of duty which originates in man is identical with the law given by God, so that it is as free moral agent that man takes upon himself the 'yoke of the commandments'. During the period under discussion, many others asserted the primacy of the will, not the least of whom were Schopenhauer (who claimed to be the only true Kantian) and Nietzsche (whose philosophy owes more to Schopenhauer than to Kant). The role of the will in matters religious was stressed also by such diverse figures as Kierkegaard and William James, for both of whom religious belief is grounded in an act of will, rather than in an act of thought.

This revolt against the rule of thought took also another form. The influence of Romanticism on religious sensibility shows itself in part through the rediscovery of feeling as a religiously significant dimension of human nature. Coleridge, for instance, maintained that profound thought was capable of being attained only by one capable of profound feeling. It is the heart, not the head, which was regarded by Coleridge as the centre of faith: the substitution of speculative systems of dogma for that centre, whereby 'religion became a science of shadows under the name of theology', was reckoned to be 'the true and first apostasy'. Coleridge's sharp distinction



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between the heart of faith and its second-order expression in doctrine and theology closely allied his independently determined stance with that of Friedrich Schleiermacher, who was arguably the greatest theologian of the nineteenth century, if not of the entire modern age. More precisely than any other religious writer of his time Schleiermacher mapped out the place of religion in the structure of human consciousness and its role in the cultivation of human capacities. The centre of religion conceived as a human capacity is 'neither a knowing nor a doing but a determination of feeling or of immediate self-consciousness'. In this appeal to immediacy the nineteenth century found one of its decisive expressions and, for at least a while, its most effective answer to the strictures on religious thought imposed by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Schleiermacher was not alone in making such an appeal. Again and again through the course of the nineteenth century thinkers and writers as diverse as Newman, Wordsworth, Arnold, Huxley, William James and Baron von Hügel appealed to an immediately present religious awareness which cannot be vitiated by philosophical critique or by ordinary experience of the way things go in the world. The primacy ascribed to immediate self-consciousness has the effect of relegating 'thinking' or 'knowing' to a second-order activity without independent authority, the sole object of which is as cogently as possible to reflect on the primary datum of immediate experience. Debate and disagreement – whether theological or philosophical – can never touch the 'self-identical essence of piety'. This type of dualism allowed for the continuation of critical reconsideration of theological norms under the impact of modern science as well as the literary and historical criticism of sacred scriptures and tradition, whilst seeming to insulate the very 'essence' of religion from all such modes of attack. For this reason Feuerbach felt justified in regarding 'feeling' as the last refuge of theology. Like Schleiermacher, one of the two giants who had drawn him to the University of Berlin, Feuerbach asserted the primacy of feeling in matters religious. He pushed 'feeling' in a different and more radical direction, however, with the result that 'the feeling of utter dependence' was transposed into 'the utter dependence of feeling'. Thus, 'the beginning, middle and end of religion' was regarded by Feuerbach as man himself.

This humanization of religion, of which Feuerbach is but one example, was a decisive turn in nineteenth-century thought. From different grounds and various motives the 'religion of humanity' became a widespread idea in the nineteenth century. One thinks not only of Feuerbach in Franconia, but Comte in France and Spencer in England. However important their differences in detail, a common denominator can be identified: the object of

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religion is humankind, not positive knowledge of a supersensible entity called 'God'. Humanity alone is thought to be worthy of the worship once given the gods. Religion, conceived anthropologically rather than theologically, is regarded by them all as a permanent element in the society of man, the cement which bonds us all together. Without religion, human beings are less than fully human.

No consensus obtained in the nineteenth century as to the role of religion in the attainment of 'true humanity'. Religion was seen by some as a constituent feature of human nature, the cultivation of which was necessary for realizing one's full potential as a human being. Even here the options were as diverse as Schleiermacher and Comte. Religion was regarded by others, including Marx, as an accidental feature of only certain social conditions, the existence of which would cease when the social conditions which generated it were themselves changed. Although religion was still regarded by many as having a useful, if somewhat conservative, role to play in human social life, it also came to be regarded by an increasing number during the nineteenth century as an instance, if not a cause, of self-alienation and as an inhibitor of man's achieving 'true humanity'. In any case, 'humanity' was regarded as a goal, as well as the name of a species.

Some leading thinkers no doubt continued to hold, as had the majority of their intellectual forebears, that human nature is universal and invariable. Others, however, were increasingly attracted to the idea, itself rooted in the Enlightenment, that man is his own creation, that human nature is not fixed but malleable. Different motives were at work here. Some writers emphasized the uniqueness of the individual person (Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky), whilst others stressed the overriding importance of the species (Feuerbach) or of the *Volk* (Hegel, following Herder) or of society (Marx) in the determination of human nature. 'Progress', 'development' and 'evolution' were words with no small effect upon how human nature came to be regarded in the nineteenth century under the impact of the historicizing of thought and of the more or less independent Darwinian revolution. Some writers in the period painted a basically optimistic picture of human nature and its perfectability through education, whilst a few began to probe the darker depths of the human spirit where, as Schelling warned, 'the demons dwell'. Dostoyevsky sought 'to find the man in man', but did not always like what he found. The disturbing implications of Darwin's theories no doubt also contributed to the sense of unease experienced by many in the latter third of the century.

Whatever differences may be noted in respect to specific points, concern about human nature is a principal theme running right the way through the