

## Chapter 2: Strauß Who? What? Why Does It Matter?

### Chapter Overview

The chapter examines the sources for the concept of 'myth' in biblical scholarship that Strauß employs and demonstrates that there was nothing revolutionary in his application of it, other than the exhaustiveness of his application to all of the narratives of the gospels. Strauß was convinced that myth and science were compatible, not antitheses. The landscape of gospel scholarship in the face of modern science of the time was divided between the 'Supernaturalist' reading that denied 'science' and the Rationalist reading that distorted the text to preserve 'science' in the text. Strauß presents the 'Supernaturalist' and the 'Rationalist' reading for each gospel narrative followed by the 'Mythic' reading as a third option that embraces 'science' and preserves the text as it appears. In the *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, Strauß utilized the Hegelian 'scientific' epistemology of perceptible representations (*Form*) and concealed 'ideas' (*Inhalt*) to defend (!) the Christian Doctrine of Incarnation. In the *LJ* the ultimate, concealed meaning preserved by the gospel texts is recognized in the logic of the Double Negation dialectic of the Hegelian meta-narrative of Absolute Spirit becoming conscious of Itself in the God/Man. The unstated agenda of the 'Mythic' reading, though, is that, when it comes to the reading of the scriptures, what is at stake is not the historical evidence of the text that determines exegesis (and the Christian faith) but the theology that the gospel authors employed to generate their texts and the reader's theology that governs her/his eisegesis of understanding the text.

### Strauß' Sources for Application of the Concept 'Myth' to the Bible

Just as Strauß in the *LJ* employed Hegel's *pre-figured* epistemology of content (idea) and representations (form) in order to distinguish between the 'kernel' (historical fact, philosophical/theological idea, and/or poetic symbol) and the 'husk' (the literal biblical narrative) and just as he employed Hegel's Second Negation of the meta-narrative of Absolute Spirit to formulate his own universal, *inclusive* Christology, so, too, his '*genetic mythical principle*' was *pre-figured* by the work of others (especially Wilhelm Krug and the author of the anonymous article, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten in welchen und für welche der Biograph Jesu arbeiten kann"<sup>1</sup> ["The Different Aspects with which and for which a Biographer of Jesus can work"]).

By no means the creator of the "mythic" interpretation of the Jewish-Christian scriptures, there is no name more readily associated with this hermeneutic strategy than David Friedrich Strauß. However, an examination of those who influenced his understanding of myth helps our understanding of what he was really trying to accomplish with his gospel exegesis. His aim was surely not to destroy the historical basis of the gospels.

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1. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten in welchen und für welche der Biograph Jesu arbeiten kann" ["The Different Perspectives in which and for which the Biographer of Jesus can work"] in *Kritisches Journal der neuesten theologischen Literatur* 5 [1816]: 225–245

Strauß himself readily acknowledges his indebtedness to what is called the "Mythic School" of biblical scholarship that was centered in Göttingen, Germany, not Tübingen, and which began in the 18<sup>th</sup> C, more than a generation before Strauß. It's most well-known representatives were the "Old" Testament scholars Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827) and Johann Philipp Gabler (1753–1826), who first applied to the "Old" Testament Christian Gottlob Heyne's (1729–1812) insights into the "mythical" as a "necessary developmental stage of human consciousness."<sup>2</sup> However, others played a crucial role in Strauß' use of the '*genetic mythical principle*,' which Wilhelm Krug formulated in his article "An Attempt with Respect to the Genetic or Formal Manner of Explaining Miracles"<sup>3</sup> of 1803.

Yet, Horton Harris proposes that as late as 1832, when Strauß formulated his plans for a project in gospel criticism,<sup>4</sup> "[...] the remarkable thing [...] is the complete absence of the mythical interpretation [...] He [Strauß] recognized only the presence of individual myths in the Gospels, [*sic.*] but had not yet discovered the [genetic,] mythical principle."<sup>5</sup> Harris attributes Strauß' development after 1832 of his "most original mythical principle,"<sup>6</sup> which "[...] derived the Gospel stories from the Old Testament narratives by means of an unconscious mythologizing process,"<sup>7</sup> to his reading of four authors (although Harris actually discusses eight<sup>8</sup>) who advocated the mythical viewpoint "if only in a still undeveloped form."<sup>9</sup> This 'viewpoint' is not that the bible consists of falsehoods but that the stories in the bible are the product of a process by which past expectations with respect to a biblical theme shaped the understanding and text of the later evangelical authors:

- I) "E.F."s (an anonymous author) 1796 "Contributions to the Clarification of the first two Chapters in Matthew and Luke,"<sup>10</sup> claimed that the story of the virgin

2. See Chapter II of Hartlich and Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes*.

3. See the discussion of Krug: 40, n. 16.

4. See Ziegler, I: 123–124.

5. Horton Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 46.

6. To be sure, hardly original!

7. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 263. Although clearly, this 'mythical principle' comes from Wilhelm Krug some 30 years before Strauß wrote the *LJ*.

8. Harris gives no documentation to justify his cherry picking of these four/eight authors as the source of Strauß' reflections on myth. I have provided references to the authors in the first and fourth editions of the *LJ* where the author is actually cited. Strauß, though, is clearly indebted to many author predecessors for his understanding of myth as he acknowledges in §§s 8–12 of the first edition of the *LJ* and §§s 8–14 of the fourth edition. Just why Harris chooses to discuss only these four/eight authors is unclear.

9. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 265–266. The only thing left 'undeveloped' was a detailed, systematic application of the genetic mythical principle to the four gospels.

10. E.F. (Anonymous), "Beiträge zur Aufklärung über die beiden ersten Kapitel im Mattäus und Lucas" in *Magazin für Religionsphilosophie, Exegese und Kirchengeschichte*, V (1796): 146–181. Strauß cites this article in the first edition of *LJ*: 43, n. 2 and the fourth edition: 59, n. 2. Strauß points out that E.F. has not clearly distinguished among "natural explanations," "the historical-mythical," and

birth was derived from Isaiah 7:14 "[...] because it was the common belief at the time of Jesus that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. 'So then, this text also must refer to Jesus; if he were the Messiah, then he must have been born of a virgin.'" <sup>11</sup>

- II) An anonymous book, *Revelation and Mythology*<sup>12</sup> claimed that the idea of what the Messiah should be [...] was in fact actually present before Jesus appeared. The hopes, desires and longings of the poor, the suffering, the blind and the lame stretched out towards the arrival of their deliverer and his appearance could not be otherwise than the picture painted in the stories which preceded him. "A helper will come out of Judah: the exact portrayal of this helper was sketched before he came."<sup>13</sup>

"This man had to be the Christ [...] whom they had previously seen in the Old Testament prophecies. He must and would do everything that they wanted him to do."<sup>14</sup>

- III) Georg Lorenz Bauer, *Hebrew Mythology of the Old and New Testament with Parallels from the Mythology of Other Peoples, Primarily the Greeks and Romans*.<sup>15</sup>

Harris inserts four additional authors influenced by G. L. Bauer:

Wilhelm Krug "An Attempt with Respect to the Genetic or Formal Manner of Explaining Miracles"<sup>16</sup> in which *Krug distinguished between the genetic explanation of the way in which miracle stories arose from the 'natural' or 'rationalistic' explanation*. These stories were not intended to deceive but obtained accruals through oral transmission until written down by the evangelists.<sup>17</sup>

Georg Conrad Horst (in his "On the first two Chapters of Luke"<sup>18</sup> referred to the

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"philosophical mythi" (first edition of the *LJ*: 45; fourth edition of the *LJ*: 61 – more clearly formulated by "other authors" (see first edition of the *LJ*: 29–30; fourth edition of the *LJ*: 53.

11. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 266. Strauß refers to this article in the first edition of the *LJ*: 43, n. 2; in the fourth edition: 59, n. 2.

12. Anonymous, *Über Offenbarung und Mythologie* (Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Akademie der Kunst und Buchhandlung, 1799). I find no reference to this text in Strauß' *LJ*.

13. Anonymous, *Über Offenbarung und Mythologie*: 98. From Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 267 and n. 21.

14. Anonymous, *Über Offenbarung und Mythologie*: 103. From Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 267.

15. Georg Lorenz Bauer, *Hebräische Mythologie des alten und neuen Testaments mit Parallelen aus der Mythologie anderer Völker, vornehmlich der Griechen und Römer*, 2 Vols. (Leipzig: Weygand, 1802). Cited frequently by Strauß beginning in §8 of both the first and fourth editions of the *LJ*.

16. Wilhelm Krug, "Versuch über die genetische oder formelle Erklärungsart der Wunder." From Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 267.

17. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 267–268.

18. Strauß refers to and cites Georg Conrad Horst's "Über die beiden ersten Kapitel des Lukas" in *Henke's Museum für Religionswissenschaft*, 1/4 (1803): 693 ff. in the first edition of the *LJ*: 36–37 and n.

Lucan narratives "as a work of fiction and constantly referred to the author as 'the poet.'"<sup>19</sup>

J.C. Greiling's<sup>20</sup> "Psychological experiment on the psychological cure of the raving Gerasene Demoniac" rejected Krug's genetic/formal distinction to claim that the narratives should be understood psychologically.

Johann Philipp Gabler's review of G. L. Bauer's *Hebrew Mythology*<sup>21</sup> recommended distinguishing between historical and philosophical myths.<sup>22</sup>

- IV) Most significantly, though, was the anonymous article, "The different Perspectives with which and for which a biographer of Jesus can work" that was published in 1816.<sup>23</sup>

This last article is cited twice in the "Introduction" to the *LJ*.<sup>24</sup> It is a remarkable document and rewards closer attention, especially for grasping its influence on Strauß but also for anticipating much gospel scholarship that followed. The author proposes four considerations when it comes to work on a biography of Jesus:

- A. One must consider the differences between kinds of reading with some concerned for history, others for doctrine.<sup>25</sup>
- B. One must consider differences in perspective, which over the 2000 year history of Christianity have moved among wisdom, justice, healing, and salvation.<sup>26</sup>
- C. One must consider differences in method: history, myth, and a mixture of both.<sup>27</sup>

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14, and he refers to Horst in the fourth edition: 56 with no citation to a work. Strauß also refers to and cites G.K. Horst's "Ideen über Mythologie" in *Henke's neuem Magazin*, 6: 454 in the first edition of the *LJ*: 40 and n. 4, but the references don't appear in the fourth edition. Strauß cites: "According to Horst, Christianity is mystical in its original nature, i.e. it moves only in inner feelings and ideas; but already Christianity's original founders, and still more subsequently, related these ideas to certain objects and facts, and as soon as mysticism transfers its thoughts and feelings out of itself and to external objects, it is mythology." *LJ* (first edition): 40.

19. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 268.

20. J.C. Greiling, "Psychologischer Versuch über die psychische Kur des tobsüchtigen Gergaseners". Cited by Harris from Krug's "Versuch über die genetische [...]" 620–654. Cited in the first edition of the *LJ*: 55, 56, and n. 7; fourth edition of *LJ*: 67–68.

21. Gabler's review appeared as "Hebräische Mythologie des alten und neuen Testaments," von G.L. Bauer. Erster und zweiter Band" in the *Journal für auserlesene theologische Literatur*, II/1 (1805): 39–59. Bauer's *Hebräische Mythologie des alten und neuen Testaments*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Weygandschen Buchhandlung, 1802) is cited several times in the *LJ*.

22. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 268.

23. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten in welchen und für welche der Biograph Jesu arbeiten kann" ["The different Perspectives with which and for which a biographer of Jesus can work"] in *Kritisches Journal der neuesten theologischen Literatur* 5 [1816]: 225–245.

24. See Strauß, *LJ*; 57, n. 10 and 61, n. 7.

25. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 226–228.

26. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 229.

27. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 230.

D. One must consider the enthusiasm for the creative process represented by myth.<sup>28</sup>

Here is a summary of the autonomous author's observations and conclusions with respect to these four themes:

### **A: On the different kinds of reading of the gospels as history or doctrine:**

Christ is not only a teacher who lived and taught at a particular point in chronological history, but he was also the object of teaching as ultimate grounding of Christian claims.<sup>29</sup> "[...] Christianity consists [...] not only of moral principles but also of propositions that serve as the basis for those moral principles."<sup>30</sup> As teacher and the object of teaching interest in the Christ is twofold:

#### **1) A purely historical interest:**

The focus is merely on the teacher, his personality and deeds, and presents the history of a man who achieved something at a particular time, at a particular place, under particular circumstances that posterity admired as great and good.<sup>31</sup>

Particularly important for Strauß' Hegelianism in the *LJ*: "The purely historical perspective leaves to a broader philosophical discussion whether what occurred was miraculous or natural and is satisfied to know what actually happened."<sup>32</sup>

#### **2) A dogmatic interest:**

The highest aim is not his (Jesus') teaching but he himself. Jesus' teaching is "only instruction on how we should reach the salvation that he offered."<sup>33</sup>

Important for Strauß, here the author proposes that the text, dogmatically, is structured by an "external" husk and an "internal" kernel: For pious faith, "History is only external husk, only the shell, of a more beautiful fruit."<sup>34</sup> (228)

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28. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 244–245.

29. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 226.

30. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 226.

31. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 227.

32. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 227–228.

33. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 228.

34. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 228.

## B. Classification of the unlimited variety of readers of the gospels:

The anonymous author distinguishes here between readers 1) according to the extent of their education and 2) their sense of religion:

With respect to education, the author distinguishes among 'academics' and 'non-academics.' He includes under 'academics' α) Theologians, who are further divided between academic researchers and populist teachers, and β) non-Theologians.

Non-Academics can be educated (reflecting) and uneducated (coarse) adults or children.<sup>35</sup>

With respect to their sense of religion, the author distinguishes between a) Believers who can be either α) Enthusiastic/rapturous (*schwärmerische*) and hyper-Orthodox or β) Scrutinizing or b) Non-believers who can be doubters or despisers of religion.<sup>36</sup>

For each of these groups the presentation of history is, obviously, going to be different.

## C. On the differences in basic perspectives (*Gesichtspunkte*)

Here the author distinguishes among three perspective: [1] true, pure history; [2] myth; or [3] a mixture of true history and myth.<sup>37</sup>

[1] True, pure history takes there to be an alternative between treating the miraculous as factual history or explaining them naturally.<sup>38</sup>

As miraculous [*wunderbare*], the entire biblical account is taken to be a literal documentation of a miracle because the hero of the story is a miracle.<sup>39</sup> The author recognizes that "[a] very venerable succession of scholars and believers, equipped with a most significant apparatus of erudition and acumen, contend for them"<sup>40</sup> as literal accounts of factual events.

When it comes to treating the gospel narratives as a natural history, we encounter the reading of the Rationalists. This reading :

[...] sees everywhere only actions following the ordinary course of events; which is why it partly *excludes the incomprehensible and partly makes it comprehensible through conjectures and additions*. The obscurities and apparent miracles fall, thereby, to the wayside, accountable from unfamiliarity with the time, people, country, and language of the age – if one doesn't want to indict the short-sightedness or the fidelity of the writers. If this natural history is to be carried out consistently, then it must inevitably, with a lot of arbitrariness,

35. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 229.

36. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 229–230.

37. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 230.

38. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 230.

39. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 230.

40. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 231.

strip the sacred and divine, and degrade itself to a vain entertainment reading, which only usurps the name of history.<sup>41</sup> (emphasis added)

Opposed to this natural history approach to the biography of Jesus is  $\alpha$ ) an entirely unhistorical approach, "which takes the liberty of supplementing original records with conjectures and takes speculations literally"<sup>42</sup> with history and literature standing in open conflict.<sup>43</sup> This conflict results in an often highly forced dogmatic reading that is always an inexplicable effort to portray naturally what the documents have presented as a miracle. Such a reading "reaches its culmination in [the Heidelberg biblical scholar Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob] Paulus's *Commentary*."<sup>44</sup>

In his *LJ*, Strauß takes Paulus as the paradigmatic example of Rationalist exegesis. Strauß agrees with the anonymous author that: "[...] it appears to be far more natural to cover the fact with a mythic husk rather than want to make [rationally] graspable the clear [miraculous] text of the evangelists."<sup>45</sup> Strauß further agrees with the anonymous author that:

It is a serious deception if one thinks that the dignity of the Bible and religiousness are served [...] [by such an unhistorical approach]. On the contrary, nothing has been more detrimental to the dignity of the Bible and the respect due to it than this very arbitrariness with which it has been treated.<sup>46]</sup>

The anonymous author concludes his discussion of the text as 'pure history': "In a word, how can there be respect for a book [the bible] in which one may capriciously jump around with the text, its authors, and its contents as one pleases?"<sup>47</sup>

[2] The anonymous author then turns to address the mythic perspective: "[...]the stories are left as they are. One doesn't attempt to twist or transform them but views them entirely not as true history but takes them to be sacred legends."<sup>48</sup> [This is exactly the position that Strauß takes!]

Here the anonymous author refers to Gabler's distinction between historical and philosophical myths, but our anonymous author distances himself from the implicit, infinite regress that Gabler's 'middle way' implies:

This view does not deny that most of the reports may be based on something that really happened; but it does not want to strip what is real of the mythical garment in which it is wrapped by doubting how much belongs to this and how much to that. Even *the middle*

41. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 231.

42. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 231.

43. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 232.

44. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 232.

45. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 233.

46. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 234.

47. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 234.

48. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 235.



way proposed by Gabler in the *New Theological Journal* (7. B. p. 386 ff.), according to which this astute scholar applied a prehistory to the history of the N.T., as well, that consisted of a division into historical and philosophical myths (i.e. which are based on either a fact or an idea) (235/236). T. (235/236) does not seem necessary to us here because we consider it more advisable to abstain completely from any judgment about the origin of the individual myths<sup>49</sup> for the attempts to explain them must necessarily be just as unstable and uncertain [...] <sup>50</sup> (emphasis added)

The anonymous author calls for the application to the 'New Testament' of the 'mythic perspective' that had been applied to the First Testament by Gabler, de Wette, and others.<sup>51</sup> [No one accomplished this task more rigorously than Strauß' with the writing of his *LJ*.]

The anonymous author draws an analogy with the entirety of the political and religious spheres in the Ancient World and asks: "If now it can be proven that the stories of N.T. are as similar to the myths of profane and sacred antiquity as one eye is to another, should we not be justified in considering them myths as well?"<sup>52</sup> (emphasis added) In the absence of 'proof' that the conclusion is justified, the anonymous author writes:

[...] we only draw attention to some similarities in which profane and Old Testament myth strikingly coincides with the evangelical story. If Jesus is born of a virgin, without the help of a man, who does not find there Hercules, the Disocuri [Castor and Polydeukes, sons of Zeus], Romulus, Alexander etc.? Who does not remember that virgin in the middle tower of the temple of Belus [in Babylon] who, according to Herodotus, gave birth to the Babylonian priests? Who should not remember that also the OT lets strange men always be born by such mothers who would not have given birth according to the natural course of things; e.g. Isaac, Samson, Samuel, John? The prophets of the OT are in many respects to be compared with Jesus, true types, which the evangelical history has copied. Especially between Elisha and Jesus there are many striking similarities, which, if it is a myth for Elisha, must also be a myth for Jesus. Elisha awakens the son of Sunamitan (2 Kings 4); Jesus the young man of Nain, Jairus's daughter, and Lazarus. Elisha feeds 100 men with little bread and blesses the widow's jar of flour; Jesus feeds 500 men (2 Kings R. coll. John 6 and Mark 8). Elisha and Jesus heal from leprosy; both pass through water (2 Kings 2. Coll. Matth. 14, 25 [...]) [B]oth [Elisha and Jesus] know to blind those sent against them (2 Kings 6, 18. Coll. Joh. 18, 6); both have a multitude of invisible protectors (2 Kings 67, 17. Coll. Matth. 26, 53. 4, 11. Luc. 22, 43). Another prophet Elijah is elevated alive to heaven, Elisha watches; so with Jesus and his apostles (2 Kings 2, 12. Coll. Act. 1, 9. 10). Who fails to recognize the same spirit! Jesus should not be inferior to the miraculous men of the OT. In the same spirit, the legends of Christian antiquity are connected to myths of foundation by attributing all miraculous deeds and events of evangelical history also to the saints. Yes, just as one adds more and more to later stories that follow, so also the legends let not only Mary (like earlier Enoch, Elias, Jesus,

49. Strauß, as well, does not attempt to explain the origin of the individual mythic prototypes. The genetic mythical principle begins with the prototype without seeking to explain its origin.

50. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 235–236.

51. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 236.

52. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 237.



*Romulus) go to heaven alive (see Jacob de Varagine, The Golden Legend), but even let her little house be carried to Loretto by the angels; and let not only the persons, but also the things (relics) responsible for them perform miracles. In such manner sacred legend extends to all times down to toothpicks used to treat toothache, which were made from Luther's deathbed, and the rags from his often-repaired cloak, which were sold to heal epilepsy.<sup>53</sup> (238–239) (emphasis added)*

[Clearly, Strauß has a predecessor here for his 'genetic, mythical principle!']

Our anonymous author then points out that the 'mythic' reading of the text is untouchable by criticism. He lists such 'historical' issues as the dating of Easter, harmonizing the Synoptics with the Gospel of John, the frequent reference to the 'higher nature' of Christ are unique to Revelation, and, although s/he clearly takes the Griesbach hypotheses that claims Matthew to have been the first to author a gospel to mean that Mark has no significance, s/he concludes that these 'historical' issues are all irrelevant from the mythic perspective.<sup>54</sup> Our author asks rhetorically and ironically: *"If the narratives are so [literally] transparent, why these ['historical'] differences?"<sup>55</sup> "All that is offensive in Jesus' life is resolved when one removes the mythic husk [...]"<sup>56</sup>*

Furthermore, the anonymous author finds it incomprehensible that Jesus could speak of the secrets of the Kingdom of God without accepting the popular belief in devil possession/demons.<sup>57</sup> *Strauß points out that demon possession is a phenomenon that emerges only in the Intertestamental Period between the First and Second Testament.<sup>58</sup>* The anonymous author writes:

I readily admit that, in my opinion, the popular belief in the possession of devils and other delusions was so deeply rooted that it would have been unwise, even impossible, to really fight it in popular discourse; but that Jesus should not have given a hint about it to those who were destined to know the secrets of the kingdom of God (Matth. 13, 11) [...] is incomprehensible to me [...] It would be treason against mankind if Jesus himself had better insights, and the evangelists tell simply a mere story [...] Should the one who came into the world to spread truth, who would rather die than act against his convictions, have accepted so eagerly such a highly unwise (*sit venia verbo* [excuse the expression]) doctrine? Certainly not.<sup>59</sup>

53. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 238–239.

54. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 239.

55. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 240.

56. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 241.

57. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 241.

58. See Strauß, *LJEGP*: 426, 446, and 454–455.

59. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 241.

Our author then asks: "[W]ould we rather let Jesus himself be ignorant, or unwise hide the truth,<sup>60</sup> than to admit that the whole demonology of the N.T. was not in Jesus, but in his later mythical biographers?"<sup>61</sup>

[McG: Strauß, of course, doesn't attribute the demonology stories to the capricious construction of the gospel authors. He takes them to arise out of the general application of the 'genetic mythical principle' in the Early Church Just as the gospel authors gleaned the First Testament for miracle stories that their 'Lord' had to have outperformed, so, too, Jesus had to have been sovereign over the new 'popularly believed' dominion of demons.]

When it comes to the absence of reference to Jesus of Nazareth among the 'profane' authors of his day, the anonymous author is not surprised. Profane authors were unaware of Jesus because they didn't and couldn't know anyone as he is portrayed in the gospels: "[...] [P]rofane historians didn't know Jesus, I [the anonymous author] add, because he never existed as the gospel narratives (the holy legend) present him."<sup>62</sup>

[3] The anonymous author then turns to the third perspective of the 'mixed' version of history and myth.<sup>63</sup> This mixed version is either a mixture of the historical-mythic or the mythic-historical depending upon whether history or myth prevails.<sup>64</sup> Unwilling to surrender all history, "[...] both parties believe they can unite [history and myth] by this middle way – a smug effort that the strict Supernaturalist would declare heretical and over which the Rationalist would laugh."<sup>65</sup>

Because these mediators would like to make comprehensible whatever is possible, they incur all the reproaches that are rightly made against them by natural history. However, because they also give space to myth, the complaint of inconsistency hits them with all its severity and weighs all the more heavily because this reproach is the worst that can be made against a scholar. It asserts a contradiction of the author with himself. Moreover, the procedure of these eclectics is the most arbitrary because they often decide on entirely subjective grounds what belongs to myth and what to history [...]<sup>66</sup>

60. Strauß points out in the *Christ of Faith and Jesus of History* of 1865 that Schleiermacher chose to invoke Plato's 'Noble Lie' to avoid the issue. The disciples didn't ask so that Jesus wasn't obligated to deny. See Strauß' discussion of Schleiermacher's 'middle ground' between objectively false and subjectively true: 316.

Schleiermacher's translation of the *Republic* 414b-c is 'untadeligen und heilsamen Täuschungen' ('blameless and wholesome deceptions'), by means of which 'es sei löblich, durch Täuschung zu überreden' ('it is praiseworthy to persuade by deception').

61. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 241–242.

62. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 243.

63. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 243.

64. See Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 245.

65. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 243.

66. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 243–244.

**D. The anonymous author concludes by expressing respect for the creative energy that the gospels have unleashed having clearly expressed her/his preference for the mythic character of the text:**

The last consideration, in and for which the story of Jesus can be treated [...] is, namely, the great diversity of formal presentation that this very modest material allows. There is almost no form of presentation that has not been tried on this subject that one can't apply to it. Poets, orators, ascetics, historians, pedagogues, all have in their own way mastered the material and added their own. Thus, not only several ancients, e.g., Virgilius Christianus. but also among the moderns, Klopstock and v. Halem, worked the heroic material into real epic poems; Ramler and others sang about individual parts of the life of Jesus in cantatas; others dramatized it. The homily writers found here the most beautiful texts for edifying reflections. Hess and Greiling narrate rationally, only from different points of view and for different readers, the former broadly, the latter in ornamented presentation. Feddersen and Wilmsen, as well as the picture-bibles and biblical stories, written for children, either for edification, as preparation for religious instruction, or even just for useful entertainment; each in his own way. Thus, the diversity of form has no less a share in the ever-renewed treatment of a subject, which already with respect to its subject matter has so much appeal.<sup>67</sup>

The anonymous author presciently celebrates the yet unrealized significance of the '*genetic mythical principle*' as an expression of the creativity that is '*threefold mimesis*.' What s/he overlooks with this engine of innovation is its implicit 'is'/'ought' fallacy. Are all readings of the text acceptable? Are there criteria for valuing a reading over another? One can take the anonymous author's conclusion to be an embracing of uncritical tolerance that 'lets a million flowers bloom' as all of equal worth.

Although the anonymous author *pre-figures* the 'genetic, mythical principle,' Horton Harris claims that

[...] Strauss' [...] exposition of the mythical principle [...] was quite distinct [...] [T]he mythical school of Heyne and his successors was concerned with individual myths (where myths are equated with fables) and not, as was Strauß, with the mythical principle. Strauss' theory differs significantly from all previous mythical interpretations in that the mythical principle which he employed [*sic*.] derived the Gospel stories from the Old Testament narratives by means of an unconscious mythologizing process.<sup>68</sup>

This is a problematic formulation. Strauß did not take the '*genetic mythical principle*' to be an unconscious, but precisely, a *conscious* mythologizing process, and the anonymous author of "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten" ("The different Perspectives with which and for which a biographer of Jesus can work") in welchen und für welche der Biograph Jesu arbeiten kann") is thinking far more broadly than individual mythic narratives as s/he addresses the gospels as a whole.

67. Anonymous, "Die verschiedenen Rücksichten:" 244–245.

68. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 265.

Harris also claims that Strauß' mythic reading of the gospels didn't occur until after 1832,<sup>69</sup> but he had already engaged Christian Gottlob Heyne's understanding of myth and the congruence between Greek, other ancient myths, and the First Testament as sagas in his school days in Blaubeuren under Prof. Friedrich Heinrich Kern,<sup>70</sup> who moved to Tübingen along with Ferdinand Christian Bauer to be Strauß' professors there. Harris' own sources for his thesis as well as Strauß' account in the *LJ* contradict soundly Harris' claim that Strauß didn't engage the issue of the 'mythic' until 1832.

What is extraordinary, though, when it comes to Strauß' *LJ* is the rigor and breadth with which he demonstrated the *genetic mythical principle* as, clearly, providing the most congruent accounting for the development of the gospel stories concerning Jesus' ministry and his status as the God/Man.

Rather than insist as does Traditional Personal Theism that the text be reduced to *a source of historical information* about God's actions in history or *factual, historical information* about Jesus of Nazareth, Strauß' *Life of Jesus Critically Examined (LJ)* of 1835 portrayed the *creative, religious character* of the scriptures' authors. An appreciation of this "poetic" (creative) character of the text recognizes that the bible's significance and power consists not to the extent that it is "historically factual" but far more because the text is a classic example of the power of the imagination for constructing narratives of understanding and explanation that preserve and communicate crucial insights into the human condition – not that the scriptures are merely concerned with whether humanity is incapable (or capable) of being a moral creature. Strauß clearly is a forerunner of Norman Perrin's notion of gospel literary criticism based on the evangelist as author.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, we need not insist that the text is entirely historical or to employ a fine fish net to cull out the tiny tidbits of historical "truth" in the text from which we retroactively *construct and argue for Jesus as a religious leader* (as Political or Religious Messiah, a poor man's Socrates, a Stoic, a Cynic, a vehicle to personal divinization, a solution to the Augustinian problem of original sin, etc.).

Horton Harris is surely correct when he points out that in the *LJ* Strauß' criticism of the gospels was *not* purely destructive<sup>72</sup> although it is difficult to imagine how Harris sees anything positive in Strauß when he writes: "Strauss' *Life of Jesus* was the most intellectually reasoned attack [*sic.*] which has ever been mounted against Christianity."<sup>73</sup> Harris maintains that Strauß substituted for the presuppositions of

69. See Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 46, 265, 270.

70. See Ziegler I: 22–23.

71. See Perrin, "The Evangelist as Author: 5–18. Perrin's literary criticism emphasizes the theological agenda of the author. It is not the literary criticism of so-called 'synchronic,' reader response criticism in contrast to 'diachronic,' historical critical criticism.

72. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 276.

73. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 281–182.

Personal Theism the presuppositions of Hegelianism along with the corollary that "[...]the world was regarded as a closed system of natural laws."<sup>74</sup> However, he is wrong with his claim that Strauß merely "[...] was more a practical thinker; he thought logically rather than in a deeply reflective way [...]" [H]e had little interest in complex epistemological problems which [*sic.*] had little relevance for his life."<sup>75</sup>

Although, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, Horton Harris follows Hartlich/Sachs in the claim that "[...] *the mythical principle is entirely independent of Hegelian philosophy*,"<sup>76</sup> Harris proposes that Strauß' 'attack on Christianity' "[...] replaced one presupposition [God is a personal deity] by its direct antithesis [God is no personal but an immanent deity] [...]"<sup>77</sup> It is difficult to imagine how an 'attack on Christianity' can occur on the basis of 'the mythical principle' by someone who has 'replaced one presupposition of God by its direct antithesis' on the basis of Hegelian philosophy *and simultaneously declare that 'the mythical principle is entirely independent of Hegelian philosophy.'*

Yet Harris, as the case with Christian Hartlich, appears to have his own response to Strauß' theistic dichotomy. Harris takes this theistic dichotomy to underscore the capriciousness of theological presuppositions to justify questioning "whether a presuppositionless investigation is possible at all?"<sup>78</sup> His implication is that there is no adjudicating among presuppositions so that Personal Theism's personal deity remains somehow a 'rational' option.<sup>79</sup>

All Strauss' historical judgments were determined in advance by the philosophical presupposition that miracles do not and cannot occur, which in turn was derived from the prior presupposition that there is no transcendent personal God. This assumption [...] was only one of two possibilities. Either there is such a God (as has always been held by the traditional Christian faith), or there is not. If not, then any supernatural intervention of God in the world is also impossible<sup>80</sup> [...] What may be criticized in Strauss' methodology

74. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 277.

75. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 277. As if 'complex epistemological problems' have 'little relevance' for life? This charge against Strauß sounds more like a Nietzschean clever dismissal of Strauß. Perhaps the only criticism of Strauß by Nietzsche that is correct, is his observation that he never carefully studied Kant. See Friedrich Nietzsche, "David Strauß. Der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller:" 164. If not echoing Nietzsche, though, Harris' criticism applies more to the 'impatience' and 'laziness' of contemporary theology today than it does Strauß.

76. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 270. See Chapter 1: "Methodology:" 143 ff.

77. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 284.

78. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 284.

79. Not all presuppositions are equal. Some are merely speculative, whereas others are required for us to be able to experience, understanding, and responsibly exercise our agency (for example, the conviction that causal systems are governed by imperceptible lawfulness and the capacities of transcendental consciousness that allow us to add things not given directly with the phenomena of experience).

80. This is a superficial alternative and treats the metaphor 'supernatural' as a univocal sign. God's presence in the world is either that of a 'Personal Deity,' who is capable of capriciously violating the laws or nature, or it is not. There are, of course, other theological alternatives that include Spinozian

is that the presupposition that there is no God was simply taken for granted as proved and not held tentatively as one of two valid possibilities.<sup>81</sup>

The 'assumption' that Strauß denies the existence of God is patently absurd. Harris is assuming that the denial of a 'Personal God' is a blanket denial of any and all conception of God.

If God is dead, or if he never existed, then Strauss' arguments must be conceded. But [*sic.*] if there is a personal God who created the universe, then his power to break into history and to suspend his physical laws for the sake of higher spiritual laws<sup>82</sup> must be conceded.<sup>83</sup>

Harris measures the significance of Strauß in terms of Strauß' confronting the theological world only with a simplistic alternative: Personal Theism or the Death of God. He presumes that theology neither prior, nor subsequent, to Strauß has involved other options for thinking about God than Personal Theism. This is an astonishing claim. Especially, in the *generation before Strauß*, the Kantian 'Copernican Turn,' offers a theological alternative not only to Personal Theism and Pantheism but also to all other theological options, and Kant acknowledges the 'reality' of God without literal anthropomorphism (even leaving open the issue of 'Personal Theism'). All other theological options (animism, polytheism, henotheism, monotheism, pantheism, dipolar theism's pan-*en*-theism, and mysticism), which also includes Personal Theism, involve the anthropomorphic elevation of humanity onto the 'throne of God.'<sup>84</sup>

Strauß wrestled deeply with Hegel. Whereas the *LJ* was shaped by Hegelian epistemology and metaphysics, within a few years of the *LJ*, he left most of Hegel behind.<sup>85</sup> In the *LJ*, not only is his understanding of myth anchored in Hegelian epistemology, but also he is convinced that Hegel's logic of Double Negation is grounded in the Absolute Knowledge of Spirit's Self-awareness occurring in human consciousness, which avoids requiring belief in miracles (as in the case of Personal Theism) and/or either distorting of the text or deception on the part of Jesus and his disciples (as

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'immanentism,' Process Theology's 'dipolar theism,' and, not least, Kant's theology of a non-literal anthropomorphic, yet required, ultimate cause to the universe.

81. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 283. Harris repeats that theology is reducible to two options: "either there is a transcendent personal God, [*sic.*] or there is not." Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 284.

82. This is Scholastic 'Occasionalism'/'Voluntarism' based on Aristotelianism's placing God's 'will' before 'thought' in contrast to Scholastic 'Intellectualism' based on Platonic ideas. Harris completely ignores the literal anthropomorphism involved in these arguments for God much less recognizes that there are other theological alternatives than merely these two or acknowledges Kant's 'symbolic' anthropomorphic theism.

83. Harris, *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 284.

84. This 'throne' itself is based on an anthropomorphic analogy, of course.

85. A glaring exception is Strauß' remaining consistently shaped by Hegel's "The Moral View of the World" from the *Phenomenology*, which takes moral duty to be ethically unachievable. See the "Preface:" 51, n. 47.



in the case of Rationalism). Rather, and in agreement with the Anonymous Author of "The Different Perspectives in which and for which the Biographer of Jesus can work,"<sup>86</sup> *Strauß' Hegelianism in the LJ allows the text to be exactly what it is because it is merely the perceptible representations* (the husks of stories) *of imperceptible truths* (the kernels of a historical fact, a philosophical idea, and/or a poetic enhancement). Strauß' methodology involves far more than a theistic presupposition in opposition to Traditional (anthropomorphic) Theism.

However, not only are there grounds for concluding that few if any of either Strauß' opponents *or supporters* (!) actually read him.<sup>87</sup> There is also little evidence that his work on Christian doctrine, the *Glaubenslehre*, has ever been seriously engaged. For example, there is no English translation of it. However, even when it comes to the *LJ*, almost all of the references by his readers and commentators are limited to engagement of the "Conclusion" in its various editions. Few refer to the "Introduction," where Strauß presents the theory of "myth;" especially his claim that myths consist of narratives with an "historical," "philosophical," or "poetic" kernel. Many of his defenders take him to be claiming that, by definition, a myth is 'false.'

Furthermore, I know of no reader of Strauß who has examined the accuracy/validity of the *pre-figured* Kant that he received in the form of Hegelian anti-Kantianism and anti-Enlightenment. For example, Neither Hartlich/Sachs nor Harris raises the issue.

In point of fact, rather than reject theology as Harris claims, an examination of Strauß' *LJ* requires recovery of *the priority of theology over biblical exegesis* because what is at stake in the reading of the text is the assumptions that the evangelist author, the lay reader, and the scholar brings to the text, not simply the words of the text. *Texts read us rather than we merely reading texts*, and, more radically, the texts themselves are the product of the extraordinary (certainly, in degree) capacity of humanity intentionally to bring about things – in this case, the text – that nature, on its own, could never cause as well as the capacity of transcendental consciousness to understand things not given directly in perception. Yet, precisely to the degree

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86. Strauß, *LJ*: 56–57. See above: 181.

87. Strauß expresses his frustration over his teachers, student-day colleagues, and the theological guild, generally, in the opening paragraph of his dedication written to his brother in *LJEGP* of 1864: vii. In his *Streitschriften* of 1837, he even gives the page number (462 of 730) where Carl August von Eschenmayer stopped reading the first volume. See "Die Herren Eschenmayer und Menzel" (1837) in *Streitschriften* II: 87 after emphasizing that Eschenmayer only had access to the first volume for the writing of his damning criticism addresses only the first volume of Strauß' *LJ* because Eschenmayer's *Der Ischariothismus unserer Tage: Eine Zugabe zu dem jüngsten erscheinungen Werke: Das Leben Jesu, von Strauß, 1. Thl.* (Tübingen: L.F. Fues, 1835) appeared before the publication of Strauß' second volume. See Strauß, "Die Herren Eschenmayer und Manzel" in *Streitschriften* II: 65.

However, Strauß expresses appreciation, yet in 1864, for his beloved professor, Ferdinand Christian Baur, with whom he studied in Blaubeuren and in Tübingen, and those "who continue to research in conformity with his spirit" – although he emphasizes that he is not entirely in agreement with their conclusions. See *LJEGP*: xvi.



that these transcendental, *a priori* capacities are necessary, even if imperceptible, the assumptions illuminated by the Copernican Turn of Critical Idealism are not (!) capricious or merely subjectively relative.

Strauß offers an important lesson that we cannot limit understanding to the establishment of 'congruence' and 'plenitude' in contrast to a poor reading as 'narrow' and 'far-fetched' – as insightful as Ricoeur's hermeneutical principle is.<sup>88</sup> Even a reading that is 'congruent' and a 'plenitude' can be trapped in the 'is'/'ought' fallacy: that simply because things 'are' taken to be in a certain manner does not mean that they 'ought' to be so taken. Logical coherence alone is no guarantee of truth. Logical coherence is only a canon of rules to govern abstractions that is incapable of addressing what 'ought to be.' In addition to 'congruence' and 'plenitude,' I propose in Volume II of the present work that one needs a commitment to the structures of transcendental consciousness, with its capacity of *a priori* synthetic judgment that is committed to the lawfulness of causal systems of theoretical and practical reason. Precisely because the theme of Kant's practical reason had been so discredited in the *con-figured* Kant generated by the anti-Enlightenment and anti-Kantian diatribe of Hegel and those who wanted to believe that Hegel was 'correct,'<sup>89</sup> Kant was never a serious option for Strauß.

## Mythic Epistemology is no Denial of Historical Factuality

Given the lack of a grasp of the meaning of 'mythic' exegesis,<sup>90</sup> the usual dismissive representations of Strauß' project, which can be found in the "con-"pamphlets and letters in The Historical Reader of Volume I of this project, accuse him: 1) of "destroying" or "stealing from them" the Christian faith because he concludes that the gospels are a collection of myths, not history; 2) lacking an appreciation for pastoral ministry's concerns for the anxieties and sufferings of the laity; 3) embracing an "elitist," esoteric, scholarly theology (Hegelianism); that results in his leaving 4) the theologian with little option but to step away from the pulpit and university lectern. The latter is required, in the judgment of Strauß' opponents 5) because a Straußian inspired theol-

88. See Ricoeur's distinction between a "good" reading ("coherent and plenitude") and a "bad" reading ("narrow and farfetched") in Paul Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics," *New Literary History* VI, no. 1 (Autumn 1974): 104.

89. See, especially, Hegel, "Glauben und Wissen" GW II; 287–333.

90. Is it not strange that although Strauß explicitly acknowledges that there are three kinds of myths (historical, philosophical, and poetic), almost universally, the charge is leveled against Strauß that his notion of myth confronts us with a simple alternative: the text is either factual history or fiction. I will show in the next chapter that this is Ferdinand Christian Baur's take on the *LJ*. It is the simple alternative for Hartlich and Sachs (see *Der Ursprung*: 133 and 128), and it is the simple alternative for Harris (see *David Friedrich Strauss and His Theology*: 282–284).

ogy purportedly cannot escape "hypocrisy" in that it employs the biblical stories but does not accept them as history, which results in a "deception" of the congregation or students who are too unsophisticated to appreciate metaphors. Finally, 6) we get the criticism of Strauß by Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus, the "Rationalist," whom Strauß had so carefully examined and rejected along with the "Supernaturalists" in *The Life of Jesus* of 1835, who complains that Strauß, having paid attention to the breadth and depth of meticulous details, should now "*narrow* his position" "without holding himself bound to that which he has already questioned" to present Christianity as the desire for "an inward religiosity" "in harmony with the divine will."<sup>91</sup> Paulus' *narrow* theology of harmony with the divine will stands in contrast to Strauß' Hegelianism of 1835 with which Strauß *broadens the Christological event (divinization) to the entire species, not to a particular individual at a particular point in time in Palestine*. I have encountered no record of Paulus' evaluation of Strauß on the history of Church Doctrine.

Strauß' nuanced notion of myth that includes acknowledgment that there are historical elements in the text alongside the text's ability to communicate profound philosophical or theological ideas and symbols of existential relevance is either missed or intentionally ignored – across the board. Rather than grasp the difficulty involved in distinguishing between husk (representations) and kernel (content), though, it was merely assumed by his readers that, if Strauß calls the stories myths, then he must be treating them simply and merely as falsehoods or equivalent to the immoral stories of Greek mythology.<sup>92</sup>

Early Christianity attacked Greek mythology for its absurdities and immorality.<sup>93</sup> Already Paul in I Cor 10:20 condemns "pagans" for sacrificing to "daemoniai" (plural: τὰ δαιμόνια, singular: τὸ δαιμόνιον), frequently translated as "demons" but more accurately translated "gods;" although the term is also the label Socrates used for his "genius"/spirit, which told him 'what not to do' but not 'what to do'). In Pseudo-Dionysius (5<sup>th</sup> C CE), such eternal beings were "angels" mediating between God and the created world.<sup>94</sup> Particularly in early Christianity, the assumption was that Greek myths were taken to be literal stories of the activities of the gods. The unpredictable and immoral behavior of Greek gods made them easy targets for Platonists, generally, and the more prudish (ascetic) religious community like Christianity, particularly, if the stories are read literally.

The importance of Strauß' yeoman accomplishment that provides a meticulously, detailed analysis of the problems that arise when one reads the text literally (the

91. If we substitute 'reason' for 'divine will,' this is precisely what Strauß had done in his "On the Transient and Permanent in Christianity" of 1838.

92. See Strauß, *LJ* 66.

93. See the discussion of Cassirer' distinction between 'perceptual' and 'conceptual' structures of myth: 41, n. 20.

94. See Pseudo-Dionysius. "The Celestial Hierarchy" in *The Complete Works*, trans. by Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

Supernatural reading) or when taken to be written in an age that misunderstood the natural, scientific explanations of empirical events (the Rationalist reading) is totally missed when one merely focuses on the boogey-man of "myth" as absurd or immoral. As a consequence, *Strauß' constructive (not destructive) reading of the text as a collection of narratives (mythoi, stories; in contrast to logoi, rational accounts), which shifts the focus from empirical history to the theological significance of the events described, is lost on the part of both many of his supporters and all of his detractors.*

The scriptures, according to Strauß then, are not an attempt to present a collection of mere instructional stories that talk of God's 'wisdom,' actions, and/or intentions (note the anthropomorphism!) for humanity. Such an account of the biblical stories was published a decade before Strauß in Johann Peter Hebel's *Biblical Stories*<sup>95</sup> (*Biblische Geschichten*, 1824) for the purpose of religious instruction in the public schools of the state of Baden in Germany. They were quickly adopted all across Germany by Roman Catholics in addition to the Lutherans and Calvinists. However, Hebel's storytelling is entirely different from the "Mythic School's" approach to scriptural stories.

*For Hebel, the stories of the NT are true because they come from God. God is the story-teller, not the Evangelists.*

*For the "Mythic School," the stories of the bible are true because their truths are true independent of the bible.* One can say that there is an echo of Lessing in the "Mythic School's" understanding of the biblical text: the text, properly understood, is a set of shortcuts to insight into truths available, in principle, to humanity in all times and places; in other words, the truths in the text are not true simply because they are God's stories.<sup>96</sup>

Whereas the "Mythic School" outright rejected the historicity of the miraculous to focus on their 'kernels' of truth (historical, philosophical/theological, or symbolic), Hebel sought to de-emphasize the miraculous and anything that didn't readily fit into

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95. Published in volume 5 of Hebel's *Werke* (Karlsruhe: Verlag der Chr. Fr. Müller'schen Hofbuchhandlung, 1843): 3–296.

96. See Gotthold Lessing's "The Education of the Human Race" in *Lessing's Theological Writings* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967): 83. See also Lessing's famous aphorisms in "The Proof of the Spirit and of Power" in *ibid.*: "I live in the eighteenth century, in which miracles no longer happen" (52) and "*accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason*" (53) Expressed in Kantian metaphors: all re-produced judgment was once acquired/learned through reflecting judgment.

Whereas Lessing and the Hegelian Strauß of 1835 claim that miracles no longer happen, Kant (and the Kantian Strauß of 1864?) proposes that the issue is not the proof or disproof of a violation of the laws of nature but, rather, what is the consequence of the assumption (because judgments of causal explanations are necessarily assumptions, not facts) that the laws of nature can be violated? The consequence would be that all human understanding would come to a screeching halt because understanding necessarily requires an enduring order – to be sure this order is itself incapable of proof or disproof because it is inaccessible to the senses. The assumption of an enduring order is an example of a necessary *a priori* synthetic judgment not given by and in the data of perception.

his narrow narrative of divine wisdom to focus attention on the this-worldly 'wisdom' and/or theological significance of biblical stories. Yet, for Hebel the validity of the 'wisdom' of the bible (for example, ethics) is because it is found in the bible. In other words, the "ethical wisdom" from the bible, for example, the Sermon on the Mount, is valid because it comes from God and/or was taught by His divine Christ, as *objectively* given in the text. Furthermore, and unlike Strauß, who views parables not as a vehicle of objective doctrines or principles but "[...] as a kind of problem, to be solved by the reflection of the hearer [...]" (LJ 345),<sup>97</sup> Hebel treats the biblical accounts as the revelation of deity with the intent of communicating objective, "Christian doctrines" to the young ears of the children of Baden and beyond.

For example, the story of the Prodigal Son demonstrates, according to Hebel, God's intention of unconditional forgiveness of the sinner<sup>98</sup> under the assumption that the core gospel of Christianity is objective 'forgiveness' by God for sin, which, conveniently overlooked by Hebel, makes Christianity a religion of pure self-interest, with, for example, Hebel simply ignoring any significance when it comes to the reaction of the older brother to his father's celebration of his brother's return.

The editors of the 2017 edition, Karl-Josef Kuschel and Thomas Weis, excuse the editing and liberties taken by Hebel by saying that he wrote in an "age of crisis" following the surge of secularism associated with the French Revolution and its destruction of institutional religion. Secularism (science) is dangerous for Hebel.<sup>99</sup>

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97. This acknowledgement of the centrality of reflection on the part of the hearer is not unlike the reading of the parables made by Robert C. Tannehill in *The Sword of His Mouth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975. For example, Tannehill writes (45): "[...] the imaginative power of such material [as the parables] is sufficiently amplified and enriched that it challenges our preconceived perceptions of the world, activates our imaginations through the 'sympathetic vibrations' awakened in the deeper layers of the self, and so opens us to new ways of perceiving, feeling, and acting."

98. For a discussion of the significance and consequences of such divine, *vertical* forgiveness as well as an alternative, *horizontal* forgiveness, see Chapter 9: "Missing Aesthetic Judgment:" 928, n. 189. See as well, the prize winning essay in response to the essay question posed by the Forschungsinstitut für Philosophie in Hannover (2006), McGaughey, "Über die Rolle der Religion in der moralischen Entwicklung" in *Braucht Werterziehung Religion?* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2007): 101–135.

99. In addition, Kuschel and Weis speak of Hebel's commitment to "enlightenment" as a proponent of religious tolerance as reflected in his veneration of Moses Mendelssohn and, especially, in Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*. Nonetheless, Kuschel and Weis overlook that tolerance of the 'other' ought never to be blind to injustice either in the 'other' or oneself. Simply warmly embracing the other can lead to our being complicitous in her/his injustice. However, discernment of injustice requires insight into the *conditions of possibility* that make morality possible in the first place. Discernment of injustice does not arise just because a tradition claims to have received God's moral law by revelation in an objective text.

"Enlightenment" means far more than merely embracing pluralism, and it involves more than a religious instruction with respect to the "dangers" of secularism. As Kant formulated in his essay, "What is Enlightenment?," the struggle for enlightenment is between self-imposed immaturity and maturity. (See Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* (*Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*) AA VIII: 35.) Maturity is achieved by the individual as s/he gains insight into the human condition by means of the Copernican Turn from objective facts (subreption) to universal, subjective conditions of possibility for humanity to be able to experience, understand, and act responsibly in

In the *LJ*, in addition to his own version of Hegelian Christology, Strauß restricts his criticism (not 'critique' in the Kantian sense) of the gospels to two strategies for reading the gospels. The two strategies for reading the gospels, for which he substitutes his 'mythic' reading, are: 1) *the Supernaturalist*, literal reading of the text, which claims the events presented in the gospels, including the miracles, are factual events, and 2) *the Rationalist* reading, which eliminates the miraculous from the text by viewing miracles as the product of 'accommodation' to the 'level of understanding' of the age for which the stories were written.

In contrast to the Supernaturalist and Rationalist readings, Strauß' husk/kernel structure of myths dramatically shifts the focus of biblical scholarship from objective facts to imperceptible meaning. 'Meaning' can include 'historical facts,' but 'meaning' can and does extend beyond empirical facts as soon as one is concerned with a theological/philosophical idea and/or a religious symbol.

Rather than a search for facts for which the biblical scholar, for example, the Rationalist Paulus, or populist author, like Hebel, provide an account of their 'true,' objective meaning, *the biblical text is taken by Strauß in 1835 to be a collection of stories that, in some cases, preserve facts but are more richly read as creative narratives* (preserved orally in the Christian community or shaped by the evangelist author) *as a product of the 'genetic mythical principle' in order to communicate the theological agenda of the God/Man necessary for the salvation of humanity.* In contrast to Supernaturalist Christology, the Rationalist Christology, and the various Hegelian Christological options, Jesus is not an exclusive or only partially inclusive God/Man but 'represents' all of humanity's inward identification with God in Spirit. For Strauß in 1835, God's Spirit is the Hegelian Spirit that drives a logical meta-narrative of Double Negation.

In other words, *the theological concern for the "early" Strauß was the Christ as the key to humanity's spiritual deification.* The Christ is the actual (*wirkliche, Reelle*) 'representation' (*Form*) of the unity of God, who is the true (*Ideelle*) 'content' (*Inhalt*) united with humanity in an 'actual' representation. Christ as the God/Man is the

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the world. The subjective condition of autonomous freedom (the capacity intentionally to initiate sequences of events that nature cannot initiate on its own) constitutes, as well, the ground of universal, *human dignity* just as it constitutes the condition for humanity being able to (but also to be free not to) assume responsibility for its decisions and actions unlike any other species to our knowledge. One learns to *respect the other* not on the basis of an *objective*, anthropomorphic claim (subreption) that "God has made us in His image" but on the basis of the degree to which the individual adheres to the lawfulness, grasped as universal, *subjective* conditions, that is the crucial condition of theoretical reason (understanding of nature by physical laws) and practical reason (guiding one's actions by moral laws). *Dignity is owed universally. Respect is conditional.* Yet, self-imposed immaturity involves submission to heteronomous authorities (that is, God, religion, the state, friends, our friends, and fellow citizens) with the consequence that they assume responsibility for us. However, we overcome subreption, which is knowledge built on the sands of ignored skepticism with respect to so-called objective facts, by recognizing the necessary, universal, transcendental, conditions of possibility that make for experience in the world with the consequence that those radically internal and necessary conditions alone make the assumption of responsibility possible, in the first place.

‘point of indifference’ as the point of transition from material determination and finite knowledge of difference to the Absolute Unity, Absolute Freedom, and Absolute Knowledge of Absolute Spirit. Strauß’ *mythic* reading of the Gospels and *inclusive* Christology in the *LJ*, are *entirely dependent upon Hegelian epistemology and meta-narrative*.

## Mythic Embracing of the Text and Church Dogmatics?!

Just what did David Friedrich Strauß do in his "controversial" book *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*? The conceptualization is incredibly ambitious, but the actual execution at the age of 27 is stunning. Strauß was not satisfied with the examination simply of a single story-cycle within a single gospel or even shared among the gospels. On the contrary, he examines, compares, and contrasts from three different perspectives (Supernaturalist, Rationalist, and Mythic) the entire narrative contents of all four, canonical Christian gospels – without the aid of a gospel parallels! In short, *Strauß sought to free Christian theology from the tyranny and speculations that insists it is grounded in treating texts as historical facts – as if understanding was the consequence of "merely opening one's eyes" to see/read properly. Far from seeking the destruction of the text or Christianity, Strauß intended to ground Christian dogmatics in 'science.'*

Strauß employed a three-step methodology in his criticism of the gospels according to three different sets of assumptions in conformity with the following principle:

[...] that any understanding is impossible between those who start from different principles [...] However, the tenability of the standpoint I have chosen must be proven by the fact that a number of difficulties in gospel history can be solved more easily from this standpoint than from any other."<sup>100</sup> The ‘Supernaturalist’ and the ‘Rationalist’ were each driven by *theologically dogmatic assumptions* that were required for their reading the text to work whereas the early Strauß was convinced that the *mythic assumptions* were based on the truth of Hegelian ‘science.’ Hegelian ‘science.’<sup>101</sup>

Strauß demonstrates that *the ‘Supernaturalist’ reading* of the text requires clinging "[...] with childlike fondness to the empty husk of historical semblance, though void of divine significance, and estimates it higher than the most valuable kernel divested of its [mythic] variegated covering."<sup>102</sup> The Supernaturalist reading inescapably results

100. See Strauß, "Herr Dr. Steudel oder die Selbsttäuschungen des verständigen Supranaturalismus unserer Tage" in *Streitschriften* I: 78.

101. In 1835, he took what in fact is a set of Hegelian assumptions to be ‘objective science’. As I stress continuously, though, he quickly realized that there were serious problems with his Hegelian assumptions, and within four years of the publishing of the *LJ*, he recognized the gnostic dogmatism of Hegelianism.

102. Strauß, *LJ*: 66.



in a conflict between religion and science because it denies the epistemological assumptions (of the relatedness of the imperceptible idea/law to its many perceptible manifestations) necessary for the natural scientific understanding of nature. This is most clear by the Supernaturalist's assumption that the coherence of physical laws events in nature can and may be interrupted by God.<sup>103</sup>

Strauß was well aware that the determination of historical facts is the "most difficult" task of critical reflection. He agrees with Usteri that "[a] certain measure of *probability* respecting the preponderance of the historical in one legend, and of the symbolical in another, is the ultimate point to which criticism can now attain."<sup>104</sup> "The boundary line [...] between the historical and the unhistorical, in which as in our Gospels this latter element is incorporated, will ever remain fluctuating and unsusceptible of precise attainment."<sup>105</sup> In other words, Strauß fully recognized that *historical claims are always subject to skepticism because of the nature of an historical claim: although its truth is anchored in an imperceptible, lawful order, it is dependent upon perceptual data, and the observer never has direct access to anything but the appearances of events and agents, not direct access to the imperceptible laws, events, and agents themselves.*<sup>106</sup>

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103. Strauß observes: "[...] no just notion of the true nature of history is possible, without a perception of the inviolability of the chain of finite causes, and of the impossibility of miracles. This perception which is wanting to so many minds of our own day was still more deficient in Palestine, and indeed throughout the Roman empire. And to a mind still open to the reception of the miraculous, if it be once carried away by the tide of religious enthusiasm, all things will appear credible, and should this enthusiasm lay hold of a yet wider circle, it will awaken a new creative vigour, even in a decayed people. To account for such an enthusiasm it is by no means necessary to presuppose the gospel miracles as the existing cause. This may be found in the known religious dearth of that period, a dearth so great that the cravings of the mind after some religious belief excited a relish for the most extravagant forms of worship; secondly in the deep religious satisfaction [McGaughey: self-interest] which was afforded by the belief in the resurrection of the deceased Messiah, and by the essential principles of the doctrine of Jesus." Strauß, *LJ*: 74–75. Again, at *LJ* 78: "Our modern world [...] after many centuries of tedious research, has attained a conviction, that all things are linked together by a chain of causes and effects, which suffers no interruption [...] the totality of finite things forms a vast circle, except that it owes its existence and laws to a superior power, suffers no intrusion from without." See as well Strauß' comment in the "Concluding Dissertation:": "[...] to admit an interruption of the order of nature, and of the development of humanity, would be to renounce all rational thought [...] and] in order to be sure that certain results have not proceeded from the powers of nature and the faculties of the human mind, a perfect knowledge of the resources of both would be required, and of such a knowledge man is not possessed." (766) "[...] we have outgrown the notion, that the divine omnipotence is more completely manifested in the interruption of the order of nature, than in its preservation" (781) – taken by Strauß from Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*. See Strauß, *LJ*: 781, n. 9.

104. Strauß, *LJ*: 61.

105. Strauß, *LJ*: 91.

106. Stated negatively: "[...] to admit an interruption of the order of nature, and of the development of humanity, would be to renounce all rational thought [...] and] in order to be sure that certain results have not proceeded from the powers of nature and the faculties of the human mind, a perfect knowledge of the resources of both would be required, and of such a knowledge man is not possessed." (*LJ*: 766)



In contrast to the ‘*Supernaturalist*, and motivated by the aim of avoiding a conflict between religion and science, the ‘*Rationalist*’ reading, sought to provide a “naturalist” explanation of the miracles in the gospels, not because it believed that the viewers and authors of the text were engaged in deception by the relating of their stories, as Reimarus proposed,<sup>107</sup> but because in their age there was no understanding of the role of imperceptible, ideas and physical laws governing events. However, the valiant attempts on the part of the Rationalists to provide natural, material explanations to the miracle stories led them to do violence to the text,<sup>108</sup> by having to employ “conjectures to supply the deficiencies of the record.”<sup>109</sup>

Strauß’ ‘spiritual’ restauration of both the text and Church Doctrine not only examined the gospels in terms of the assumptions of the coherence of natural laws that govern events, but he also employed the assumptions of Hegelian Theology (speculative *dogmatics*) as the larger framework for understanding the ultimate, spiritual significance of biblical Christology.<sup>110</sup>

Strauß engages in literary criticism for his mythic reading of the text in 1835 by analyzing the gospel narratives by means of 1) an exegetical strategy that employs the husk/kernel analogy not, as did Paulus, the Rationalist, in order to distinguish between “fact” and “meaning,” but to seek out the historical, philosophical, or poetic kernel/content of the story/*mythos* as it is now preserved in the gospels (*the Hegelian ‘husk’/‘kernel’ epistemology*). He, then, 2) applies the ‘*genetic mythical principle*’ to demonstrate how a textual narrative developed primarily stimulated by First Testament materials.

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107. See Reimarus, *Fragments from Reimarus, Vol. I*, ed. Charles Voysey, G.E. Lessing trans. (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1879: 73–74. On-line at [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Hermann\\_Samuel\\_Reimarus](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Hermann_Samuel_Reimarus) (May 11, 2021).

108. Speaking of Krug’s “Versuch über die genetische oder formelle Erklärungsart der Wunder” in Henke’s *Museum der Religionswissenschaft*, I/3 (1803): 410 ff, Strauß writes: “It is this [...] difference between the natural and mythical modes of interpretation which Krug intends to point out, referring particularly to the histories of the miracles, when he distinguishes the physical or material from the genetic or formal, mode of explaining them. Following the former move [...] the inquiry is: how can the miracle [*wundervolle Ereignis*] here related have possibly taken place with all its details by natural means and according to natural laws? Whereas, following the latter, the question is: whence arose the narrative of the miracle [*Wunderereignis*]?” The former explains the natural possibility of the thing related (*the substance* of the narrative); the latter traces the origin of the existing record (*the form* of the narrative). Krug considers attempts of the former kind to be fruitless, [*sic.*] because they produce interpretations yet more miraculous [*wunderbarer*] than the fact itself; far preferable is the other mode, since [*sic.*] it leads to results which throw light upon miraculous histories collectively. He gives the preference to the exegetist, because in his explanation of the text he is not obliged to do violence to it, but may accept it altogether literally as the author intended, even though the thing related is impossible; whereas *the interpreter, who follows the material or physical explanation, is driven to ingenious subtleties which make him lose sight of the original meaning of the authors, and substitute something quite different which they neither could nor would have said.*” (emphasis added) Strauß, *LJ*: 56.

109. Strauß, *LJ*: 56.

110. See Strauß, “Hegel’s Perspective on the Historical Value of Gospel History” [“Hegel’s Ansicht über den historischen Werth der evangelischen Geschichte”] in *Streitschriften* III: 77.

Strauß' Hegelian Speculative Theology of 1835 claims that it neither requires nor insists on changes to the scriptural record nor does it result in any conflict between science and religion because science and religion share the same strategy of Hegelian epistemology for understanding phenomena: imperceptible ideas (true 'content') are manifested by and in physical phenomena (actual 'representations'). On the part of the sciences, human consciousness is capable of understanding physical phenomena, the *husks/representations* that are perception because it is able to bring imperceptible ideas and mathematics (*logoi*), the *kernel/content* of understanding, to the phenomena. On the part of religion, the mythic stories of scripture are analogous to the scientific understanding: stories (*mythi*) are the perceptible *husk/representations* that are used to preserve the significance of historical events and to communicate imperceptible ideas, their *kernel/content*.

Nonetheless, as he approached the end of his career, Strauß' shift in dogmatics from his Hegelian Speculative Theology to an adaptation to a degree of Kant's Philosophical Theology of practical reason is all the more significant because Kant's Philosophical Theology acknowledges the limits to reason while illuminating the capacities that are necessary for us to draw any understanding whatsoever, including skeptical understanding, as well as to take decisions and to assume responsibility for our agency.<sup>111</sup>

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111. The history of the reception of Kant's description of "pure" religion is both complex and rich and, at times, unsurprisingly, distorted by the interests of the interpreter. It is important to say here that that reception was by no means limited to Goethe's letter to Johann Gottfried Herder June 7, 1793: "It took a long lifetime for Kant to wash his philosophical cloak of many stains and prejudices. But now [in his Religion book] he has wantonly slobbered on it with the stain of radical evil, just so that Christians, too, might be enticed to kiss its hem." (McGaughey trans.) of the German from <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Goethe,+Johann+Wolfgang/Briefe/1793> (25 November 2017)]. It is also not limited to the conception that Kant's theological reflections are caught up in "conundrums," which emerge only when the reader assumed that "religion" must be a literal sign for Christianity (for example, see Wolterstorff, Nicholas P. "Conundrums in Kant's Rational Religion." In *Kant's Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, edited by Philip J. Rossi and Michael Wreen [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991]. Kant by no means must be read as a recovering Fundamentalist seeking to preserve as much of the Pietism of his youth as possible (for example, see. Edward Kanterian, *Kant, God and Metaphysics: The Secret Thorn*. [Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2018]). Already within three years of the publication of *Religion*, Christian Wilhelm Flüge published the first volume of his two volume work *Versuch einer historisch-kritischen Darstellung des bisherigen Einflusses der Kantischen Philosophie auf alle Zweige der wissenschaftlichen und praktischen Theologie* (*Attempt at a Historical-Critical Presentation of the Influence on all Branches of Scientific and Practical Theology to Date of the Kantian Philosophy*), 2 vols. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1982) in which he provided an amazingly nuanced reading of the Kant reception already at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> C that is far more insightful than what followed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. It is not unreasonable, but incapable of proof, of course, that Strauß was familiar with Flüge's work if not directly than through his conversations with colleagues.

## Myth and Science are Compatible

In our age, when one says, "That's just a myth," one uses the term "myth" to mean false or wishful thinking. A popular television program is called "MythBusters." The premise of the show was to expose *erroneous opinion* by means of scientific investigation of the *true facts* of the matter in question. In other words, myth is contrasted with science. If we take this to be the definition of myth, then we misunderstand Strauß from the very beginning.

As I've said, Strauß claimed that, far from rejecting science, myth was compatible with science. Myth picks up where the limits of natural, causal explanation are reached. However, this does not mean that myth offers an objective, augmented, causal explanation to events independent of and/or contrary to the causal explanations of the natural sciences. Rather, for Strauß, when it comes to explanation of events, natural causes are the basis for all proper understanding. It is precisely for this reason that the gospels must not be read literally because a literal reading would mean that the physical laws of nature could be capriciously violated, which would undermine all human understanding. Rather than the mythical view constituting a threat to human understanding by introducing a divine, eminent, efficient causality to supplement nature's formal, efficient causality,<sup>112</sup> Strauß echoes the anonymous author who wrote: "[...] if the mythical view be [...] admitted, the innumerable, and never otherwise to harmonized, discrepancies and chronological contradictions in the gospel histories disappear, as it were, at one stroke."<sup>113</sup>

The Rationalists took a half-step with respect to physical, causal explanation of the events in the gospels. They took the events to be reports by eyewitnesses who misunderstood what they experienced to be the result of supernatural causes because they did not possess the understanding of natural causes as 19<sup>th</sup> C science did. The Rationalist naturalists offered natural, causal explanations for what, otherwise, would be miracles. We will see shortly how the naturalist reading violates the text by forcing the text to say things that aren't there or suggesting that the agents in the gospel narratives were lying. *Whereas the Supernaturalist, literal account violates science in order to protect the text, the Rationalist, naturalist account violates the text in order to protect science.*

Consequently, Strauß was as dissatisfied by the Rationalist, naturalist account of the gospel narratives as he was by the Supernaturalist account. He claimed, though, that, if one doesn't read the text for either a Supernaturalist or Naturalist, causal explanation of events, one can both defend science and accept the texts exactly for what they are: stories. Nonetheless, that does not mean that the stories are just fairy tales. Writing approvingly about the First Testament scholar, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, Strauß says:

112. On the difference between eminent and efficient causality, see the "Introduction:" 84, n. 23.

113. Strauß, *LJ*: 56–57. See above: 181, n. 56

Once admit, he [Eichhorn] remarks, a state of excitement, particularly of religious excitement, among a not unpoetic people, and a short time is sufficient to give an appearance of the marvelous not only to obscure and concealed, but even to public and well-known facts. It is therefore by no means conceivable that the early Jewish Christians, gifted with the spirit, that is, animated with religious enthusiasm, as they were, and familiar with the Old Testament, should not have been in a condition *to invent symbolical scenes* such as the temptation and other New Testament mythi. *It is not however to be imagined that any one individual seated himself at his table to invent them out of his own head, and write them down, as he would a poem : on the contrary, these narratives [...] were fashioned by degrees, by steps which can no longer be traced; gradually acquired consistency, and at length received a fixed form in our written gospels.*<sup>114</sup> (emphasis added)

The Greek word *μῦθος* (*muthos*) means "story" and, as we suggested above, is contrasted from *λόγος* (*logos*), which means to give a "logical account" of something. To read the gospels as mythic stresses that they are stories, not a logical account of a teaching or a collection of literal events governed by physical laws.

One can find the same distinction between a logical account and stories in Plato's *Republic* where he provides a logical account of three parts to the soul (Book IV 435b-436b; Book IX 580d ff) analogous to three classes of a state. Plato then tells a story (Book IX 588c ff) of the soul as consisting of a multi-headed beast (the appetites), a lion (*θῦμος*, meaning rage), and human being (reason), and he warns about the injustice perpetrated by those individuals who are dominated by the multi-headed beast or lion rather than reason. Plato is not claiming that the individual is literally a multi-headed beast, lion, and a human being. The story or *μῦθος* (*muthos*) illuminates aspects of the appetites, rage, and reason that a strictly logical account can't provide.

When it comes to taking the gospel stories as myths (*μῦθοι*, *muthoi*), one is consciously required to make a distinction between the story itself and the content it wishes to communicate. The very conditions that make for a story reflect the fundamental structure of 'husk' and 'kernel,' 'representation' and 'content.' As the case with an ear of corn, the story itself is the external husk that is concealing the kernels of the ear of corn. One has to 'work' to get to the kernels. The same is true of myths. The husk that is the story is only the shell. The meaning of the story is the jewel that has been protected and communicated by the shell (story).

Strauß says that the goal of the *LJ* is:

To investigate the internal grounds of credibility in relation to each detail given in the Gospels, (for it is with them alone we are here concerned) and to test the probability or improbability of their being the production of eyewitnesses, or of competently informed<sup>115</sup>

114. Strauß, *LJ*: 58.

115. By "competently informed" authors, Strauß means authors who reported empirical facts according to physical laws. Strauß wrote: "[...] [N]o just notion of the true nature of history is possible, without a perception of the inviolability of the chain of finite causes, and of the impossibility of miracles. This perception which is wanting to so many minds of our own day was still more deficient

writers, is the sole object of the present work. The *external grounds* of evidence may be examined [...] only so far [...] as is necessary in order to judge whether they yield a definite result, which may perhaps be in opposition to the internal grounds of evidence; or whether the external evidence, insufficient of itself, leaves to the internal evidence the decision of the question.<sup>116</sup>

Succinctly, if the *external grounds* (husk) result in a violation of the physical laws of nature, then the story must be judged on the basis of *internal grounds* (kernel). *The judgment on the basis of internal grounds does not mean that the story (myth) is false or a deception*. Rather, it means that the story must be judged on the basis of the kernel that justifies its narrative structure.

Strauß distinguishes among three kinds of mythic kernels:

- 1st. *Historical mythen* : narratives of real events coloured by the light of antiquity, which confounded the divine and the human, the natural and the supernatural.
- 2nd. *Philosophical mythen* : such as clothe in the garb of historical narrative a simple thought, a precept, or an idea of the time.
- 3rd. *Poetical mythen* : historical and philosophical mythen partly blended together, and partly embellished by the creations of the imagination, in which the original fact or idea is almost obscured by the veil which the fancy of the poet has woven around it.<sup>117</sup>

As we have already seen, Strauß viewed the task of distinguishing the historical kernel of the mythic husk to be a "difficult task"<sup>118</sup> – "[...] the precise boundary line between the historical and the unhistorical [...] is] the most difficult question in the whole province of criticism."<sup>119</sup>

First Testament scholars had proposed hermeneutical rules to govern the distinction between the historical and unhistorical, and Strauß summarizes them as follows:

The first essential is [...] to determine whether the narrative have [*sic.*] a distinct object, and what that object is. Where no object, for the sake of which the legend might have been invented, is discoverable, every one [*sic.*] would pronounce the mythus to be *historical* [McG: *Criterion of Inconceivable Invention*]. But if all the principal circumstances of

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in Palestine, and indeed throughout the Roman empire. And [*sic.*] to a mind still open to the reception of the marvelous, if it be once carried away by the tide of religious enthusiasm, all things will appear credible, and should this enthusiasm lay hold of a yet wider circle, it will awaken a new creative vigour, even in a decayed people. To account for such an enthusiasm it is by no means necessary to presuppose the gospel dearth of the period, a dearth so great that the cravings of the mind after some religious belief excited a relish for the most extravagant forms of worship; secondly in the deep religious satisfaction which was afforded by the belief in the resurrection of the deceased Messiah, and by the essential principles of the doctrine of Jesus." (*LJ*, 74–75)

116. Strauß, *LJ*: 70.

117. Strauß, *LJ*: 53.

118. See Strauß, *LJ*: 43, 53, 61, 91–92.

119. Strauß, *LJ*: 90.

the narrative concur to symbolize a particular truth, this undoubtedly was the object of the narrative, and the mythus is *philosophical* [McG: *Criterion of Philosophical Truth*]. The blending of the historical and philosophical mythus is particularly to be recognized when we can detect in the narrative an attempt to derive events from their causes [McG: *Criterion of Imputed Causality*]. In many instances the existence of an historical foundation is proved also by independent testimony [McG: *Criterion of External Attestation*] [...] or bear in themselves undeniable and inherent characteristics of probability [McG: *Criterion of Historical Conceivability*] : so that the critic, while he [*sic.*] rejects the external form, may yet retain the groundwork as historical. The *poetical* mythus is the most difficult to distinguish [...] [for here one has] only a negative criterion [McG: *Criterion of Neither Historical nor Philosophical*]. When the narrative is so wonderful on the one hand as to exclude the possibility of its being a detail of facts, and when on the other [hand] it discovers no attempt to symbolize a particular thought, it may be suspected that the entire narrative owes its birth to the imagination of the poet.<sup>120</sup>

Strauß himself offers the following set of nuanced, hermeneutical rules to govern the decision between the historical and unhistorical in the gospels:

Where not merely the particular nature and manner of an occurrence is critically suspicious, its external circumstances represented as miraculous and the like [McG: *Criterion of the Miraculous*]; but where likewise the essential substance and groundwork is either inconceivable in itself [McG: *Criterion of Inconceivability*], or is in striking harmony with some Messianic idea of the Jews of that age [McG: *Criterion of Messianic Similarity*], then not the particular alleged course and mode of the transaction only, but the entire occurrence must be regarded as unhistorical. Where, on the contrary, the form only, and not the general contents of the narration, exhibits the characteristics of the unhistorical [McG: *Criterion of Historical Inconceivability*], it is at least possible to suppose a kernel of historical fact; although we can never confidently decide whether this kernel of fact actually exists, or in what it consists; unless, indeed, it be discoverable from other sources [McG: *Criterion of External Attestation*] [...].

*The boundary line, however, between the historical and the unhistorical [...] as in our Gospels [...] will ever remain fluctuating and unsusceptible of precise attainment.*<sup>121</sup>

The observant reader will see that Strauß suggests that there is a profound difference between distinguishing, *generally*, between the historical and unhistorical in a narrative and distinguishing, *in particular*, between the historical and unhistorical with respect to a specific, gospel narrative: Strauß has added to the First Testament critics list both a *Criterion of the Miraculous* and the *Criterion of Messianic Similarity*. These changes in criteria are required by the particular theological concerns of the gospels: the miraculous is so overwhelmingly present because it serves the purpose of confirming the Christian community's belief in messianic fulfilment by the Christ. However, Strauß accepts the negative criterion for distinguishing *poetic* myths from *historical*

120. Strauß, *LJ*: 53.

121. Strauß, *LJ*: 91.



and *philosophical* myths: If the story is not a portrayal of fact and not a conveyance of a particular thought, it can be taken to be a product of the author's imagination.

## The Unstated Agenda: The Theology of the Exegete

For all the talk of "competently informed" authorship and dismissal of miracles on the basis of the "modern world view" for which "all things are linked together by a chain of causes and effects, which suffers no interruption," the criteria from First Testament scholars and Strauß' own criteria for adjudicating the historical, philosophical, and/or poetic nature of the text all ignore an elephant in the room: *the theology of the exegete*.

Strauß engaged constructively an inherited tradition of mythic, biblical interpretation that he combined with Hegelian Speculative Theology. As I have commented, Strauß' radical, Left-Wing, Hegelian Speculative Theology as well as his understanding of the natural sciences have the same husk/kernel (representation/content) structure as his mythic model. This model distinguishes between representations (stories) and content (the idea/fact/symbol of the story) but in which both representations and idea are required, *dialectically*, for understanding. Strauß' formulation of the insight demonstrates his view of the complementarity of the natural sciences with his Hegelian Speculative Theology:

[...] science also in its newest development, has [...] perceived that to convert ideas simply into a mere ought [*Sollen*], to which no being [*Sein*] corresponds, is in fact to annihilate them, just as it would be to finitize the infinite to represent it as permanently beyond the finite [*als bleibendes Jenseits des Endlichen*].<sup>122</sup> Science has conceived that the infinite has its existence in the alternate production and extinction of the finite; that the idea is realized only in the entire series of its manifestations; that *nothing can come into existence which does not already essentially exist*; and, therefore, that it is not to be required of man [*sic.*], that he should reconcile himself with God, and assimilate his sentiments to the divine,

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122. Note what Strauß is saying here: without actual (*wirkliche*) representations, an idea is merely 'empty' of any truth. The translation of this sentence from the word "perceived" comes from the editor of the English translation, Peter Hodgson: 797, note to 777. Hodgson adds a comment that confirms that, he too, has misunderstood Kantian theoretical reason (not to mention entirely ignoring Kant's practical reason): "The point is that if the infinite is conceived undialectically, as *permanently* beyond the finite, not engaged in the alternate positing and annulment (*Setzen und Wiederaufheben*) of the finite, it is in effect finitized, for finitude *alone* is devoid of dialectical process. These concluding sentences represent, of course, the Hegelian critique of Kant." (*LJ*, 797, note to 777) Hegel's derisive dismissal of Kant for 'acknowledging the truth of' Absolute Spirit but ignoring its 'objectivity' along with Hegel's assertion that Kant's is merely a 'subjective' philosophizing are the clear indicator that he did not grasp the crucial insight of Kant's Copernican Turn. Strauß, as well, misunderstood Kant's Copernican Turn, but Strauß came to see that Hegel's historical Indifferentism results in his 'ideas,' themselves, being 'merely empty.'



unless this reconciliation and this assimilation are already virtually effected.<sup>123</sup> (emphasis added)

Two unstated, *dogmatic and truly speculative, theological assumptions* to this formulation are: 1) Hegel and Strauß assume that this dialectical structure is the product of *divine, logical dialectic of negation* (Absolute Spirit) *immanent to history* as the explanation of all of history and 2) humanity's reconciliation with God involves a turning from sensuousness to *divinizing the believer* in the Spirit. Both of these assumptions were 'brought to the text' by Hegel and the early Strauß.

Hegel views religion as the central theme of history as the achievement of a theological aim that commences with natural religion. According to Hegel, the natural religion of sensuousness passes through spiritual religion above natural religion by Judaism's sublime, transcendence religion and theocratic state as well as by the Greek religion of beauty immanent in the world in which the divine is a spirit in itself; followed by the Christian religion "of reason" in which the God/Man union is announced, with its highest expression reached in Philosophy in which the individual philosopher, internally, is capable of negating multiplicity to experience absolute unity.<sup>124</sup> For his part, though, rather than the God/Man having been exhaustively manifest in the historical Jesus or in the minds of philosophers, Strauß views the entire human species to be the necessary condition for the Second Negation (or spiritual reconciliation with God made necessary by the First Negation of God denying His Absolute Oneness to create multiplicity). The goal of Strauß' meta-narrative of Double Negation in the *LJ* is manifest, in point of fact, as a degree of awareness, but, *in principle, the full Negation of Negation, according to Strauß, is a form of realized eschatology as an always and already existing condition that is capable of being consciously recognized by all human beings.*

The second presupposition of humanity's reconciliation with God is confirmed by the following: "The believer, finding himself environed with the conditions of nature, must, like Christ, die to nature – but only inwardly, as Christ did outwardly, – must spiritually crucify himself and be buried with Christ, that by the virtual suppression of his own sensible existence, he may become, in so far as he is a spirit, identical with himself, and participate in the bliss and glory of Christ."<sup>125</sup> Strauß repeats two pages later: "By faith in this Christ, especially in his death and resurrection, *man is justified before God*; that is, *by the kindling within him of the idea of Humanity, the individual man participates in the divinely human life of the species.* Now the main element of that idea is, that the negation of Spirit [*Geist*] (the negation of negation, therefore), is the

123. Strauß, *LJ*: 777.

124. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* GW: XII and F.C. Baur, *Gnosis*: 722–740.

125. Strauß, *LJ*: 778.

sole way to true spiritual life.”<sup>126</sup> (Strauß’ parenthetical insertion) In the footnote here, Strauß responds to the charge that he is portraying only a “substantial, not a personal unity of man with God,” by saying: “That unity which exists in the determination of the race has already been present in individuals separately, according to the different measure of their religious development, and thus the substantial unity has become, *in different degrees*, a personal unity.”<sup>127</sup> (emphasis added)

The significance of these two theological presuppositions of Double Negation and Divinization is that the early Strauß is by no means engaged either in a theologically destructive enterprise or in the denial of history by speaking of the gospel stories as merely mythic imaginations in contrast to facts. For the early Strauß, the proper understanding of the gospel myths depends upon a ‘correct’ *theology* as well as the ultimately, theological understanding of the human condition, which the exegete ‘brings to the text’ – to be sure, for the early Strauß the ‘correct’ theology is *Hegelian dogmatics*.

As the theological elephant in the room, these Straußian presuppositions of 1835 are not (and cannot) be literally expressed by the text because they are “speculative:” –the imperceptible, concealed, dialectical dynamic (the ultimate kernel) that drives history, not the historical events themselves (the mere husk). Hegel appeals to the ‘*cunning of reason*’ in his “Introduction” to his *Philosophy of World History* to ground his claims about the goal of history, that is, humanity’s reconciliation with God. The “*cunning of reason*” works out the teleological goal that is the historical project of reason, precisely in spite of the events or the intentions of the actors of history.<sup>128</sup> As far as I have been able to determine, though, Strauß nowhere embraces this meaning of the ‘*cunning of reason*.’<sup>129</sup>

According to Strauß, the gospel writers were neither the vehicle for supernatural revelation that violates the natural order nor were they deceivers. Rather, for Strauß in 1835 *the gospel writers are, unwittingly, articulators of a narrative whose significance is far greater than the gospels*. This narrative involves the origin of the universe as the original condition that establishes the possibility of a reconciliation/identification between creation and God, which has now come about, again unwittingly, by the emergence of human consciousness and its long but unavoidable religious development to the pinnacle claim of the God/Man as the model for the elite few (Hegel’s philosophers) or the entire species (Strauß’ humanity).<sup>130</sup>

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126. Strauß, *LJ*: 780.

127. Strauß, 780, n. 7.

128. See Hegel, “Introduction” to the *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*: GW XII: 45–46, 53 (Sibree trans.: 31–32, 38).

129. On Strauß’ engagement of Hegel’s notion of the ‘*cunning of reason*’, see the ‘Introduction:’ 168, n. 210.

130. Baur summarizes the contextualization of the gospels within the framework of the entirety of creation/history from Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and “*Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*” in his *Gnosis*: 36, 690, n. 28, and 763. Later, when I engage Strauß’ initial reading of Kant in 1835 in comparison to his *LJEGP* in 1864, I will examine the limits of speculative theology that includes not only Hegelian

In other words, Strauß is not alone when it comes to the presence of a *dogmatic*, theological elephant in the room with the reading the gospels. The (Lutheran) Supernaturalist brings to the text a *dogmatic*, atonement theology based on "original sin" from Augustine of Hippo combined with the logic of Anselm's *Cur deus homo* that only the sacrifice of a perfect human being can cover humanity's debt owed to God because of sin. The Rationalist, naturalist theologian brings to the text a *dogmatic* Deism. Strauß in 1835 brings to the text a *dogmatic*, 'Hegelianism.' None of these theologies are found literally articulated in the scriptures. All of them are based on speculations about divine causality (and intentionality) that can neither be proved nor disproved by the text or any historical event. Causes are incapable of proof or disproof given that we only experience their effects and must construct our understanding of them – although we don't create the causes themselves, but our understanding of them.

Important for grasping Strauß' understanding of myth in the gospels, though, is to recognize that whether he is talking about a gospel story, a scientific explanation of physical events, or his own theological vision for humanity, they all share the same epistemological structure of husk/kernel: appearances that require an imperceptible idea or law in order to be understood. The task of the "critical" reader is to peel back the husk to illuminate the kernel. This constitutes the crucial Hegelian assumption of the early Strauß, and it is inseparable from his mythic reading of the gospels.

## On the Mythic Reading's Ancient, Classical Roots and Theology

In his "Introduction" to the *LJ*, Strauß provides a cryptic overview of the non-literal, hermeneutical strategies for reading (sacred) texts (not limited to Christian scriptures) employed in the past. He identifies Anaxagoras as the "inventor" of the allegorical reading of Homer. However, early on as well, there were attempts at 'Rationalist' or "Naturalist" readings of stories about the gods: Euhemerus read Greek myths of the gods to be exaggerated stories about extraordinary human beings, and Polybius in his *Histories* VI, 56, suggests that the purpose of accounts of the gods was encouraged by the founders of the state to inspire awe, subservience, and honesty.<sup>131</sup> Strauß also refers to Philo of Alexandria's development of the allegorical reading, but Strauß

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Speculative Theology but also the anthropomorphic theism of Augustinian and Anselmian atonement theology that is the elephant in the room of Supernaturalist biblical literalism. The notion of the "cunning of reason" is not a Hegelian invention but found in a *dramatically alternative form* a half-century before Hegel in Kant's notion of *unsocial sociality*. See the "Fourth Proposition" of *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, AA VIII, 20 as well as Otfried Höffe, *Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Die Grundlegung der modern Philosophie* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2004): 269 and *Kritik der Freiheit. Das Grundproblem der Moderne* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2015): 99.

131. See Strauß, *LJ*: 40–41.

points out that "In many cases [...], he [Philo] [...] considered the narrative merely as *the figurative representation of an idea* [...]" for example, whenever the sacred story appears [...] to present delineations unworthy of Deity [...] or otherwise to contain contradictions."<sup>132</sup> (emphasis added) Strauß uses the example of Origen to indicate that early in the Christian tradition the text was not simply read literally. Origen drew on an anthropomorphic analogy to speak of the different "senses" of the text: the literal was the body; the moral was the soul; and the mystical (figurative) was the spirit/mind.<sup>133</sup>

However, the fact that Strauß is highlighting the mythical (figurative) character of the gospels is no grounds to conclude that his questioning of the literal character of the gospels is merely to deny any and all historical value to the gospels. As I stated above, the structure of his reading is threefold: A Supernaturalist, Rationalist, and Mythic reading of the texts.

What Strauß accomplished as a 27-year old is astonishing. Despite the "advancements" in Second Testament scholarship since Strauß, the reader profits enormously from a careful reading of his opus although this is by no means to suggest that Strauß is not in need of correction, that his reading needs no amendment, or that one must embrace Hegelian philosophy to properly grasp the gospels' truth. Nevertheless, his detailed comparative analysis of the individual pericopes of the gospels and identification of their prototypes in the 'First' Testament remains valuable today for NT studies.

However, Strauß overlooks that the early church already saw theological significance in the miracle stories independent of the question of their historical status when it came to understanding the spiritual status of the clergy for ensuring the efficacy of the sacraments, which suggests, even more emphatically, that, early on in the Christian tradition, *philosophical ideas* were recognized to be a, if not *the*, ultimate intent of the stories, not simply the historical factuality of the stories.

For example: The miracle stories already functioned in the early church not only as confirmation of Jesus's divinity and status as Messiah, but as philosophical myths. A clear example is the case of Basilides of León and Martialis of Mérida (Spain) following the Decian Persecution of 250–251 CE. Their case resulted in a conflict between Carthage (Cyprian) and Rome (Pope Stephen) over the purity of the clergy for the effectiveness for the laity of the sacraments over which the clergy officiate,<sup>134</sup> and at the core of the controversy is a profound difference between the Synoptic gospels and John over the function of miracles: In the Synoptic gospels, the miracle occurs because of the faith of the recipient. In John's gospel, the miracle occurs in order to generate or enhance the faith of the recipient. In other words, *already in the third C* (if not before?!), *miracles have a theological significance in addition to the issue of the historicity or non-historicity of particular miracles.*

132. Strauß, *LJ*: 41.

133. See Strauß, *LJ*: 41–44.

134. See W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985): 352–357.

Basilides and Martialis were Christian bishops in Spain who gave up their offices during the Decian Persecution. After the persecution, they both sought re-instatement from Pope Stephen in Rome. To the horror of the North African church, particularly Cyprian in Carthage, Stephen re-appointed them as bishops in their respective dioceses. Cyprian called a Synod in Carthage that condemned Stephen's action – not insignificant, this is an important event with respect to the claim for priority in church matters made by Rome. The issue at issue: the "purity" of the clergy for the efficacy of church sacraments.

Given the widespread apostasy on the part of Christians during the Decian Persecution, even North Africa acknowledged the power of the church to forgive sins and to re-instate laity in the church contrary to Tertullian and the New Prophecy Movement. However, when it came to the clergy, Cyprian and the North African church stayed true to their tradition of spiritual purity by insisting that the sacraments would be ineffective because of spiritual corruption were they to be dispensed by an apostate clergy. In contrast, Stephen and the Roman church emphasized that the effectiveness of the sacrament was not dependent upon the spiritual purity of the clergy but on the faith of the recipient.<sup>135</sup> Obviously, North Africa appeals to the Johannine understanding of miracles (the miracle occurs to generate faith in the recipient) whereas Rome appeals to the Synoptics' understanding of miracles (the miracle occurs because of the faith of the recipient). The controversy was left unresolved as a consequence of the death of Stephen in 257 CE along with the much later conquest of North Africa by Islam.

Although it appears to presuppose the literal, historical status of miracles in the gospels, which Strauß is, of course, rejecting, the Basilides/Martialis controversy between North Africa and Rome underscores that, *by the second century church at least, the miracle stories were taken to have theological ideas as their intent in addition to their status as historical events*: not only that an anthropomorphic deity is capable of violating the laws of nature but also that miracles either generate faith or are the consequence of faith.

Furthermore, Strauß points out that demon possession although not found in the 'First' Testament, was a popular belief among Jews, Greeks, and Romans of the day,<sup>136</sup> and, despite his attributing the belief to Jesus, he emphatically stressed that the notion of demons constituting a "household of Satan" must be attributed to the popular belief among Jews of the day.<sup>137</sup> Rather than concluding that the demon possession stories were products of evangelical authorship (and the tradition they inherited), Strauß believes, on the basis of Matthew 12: 25 -19 and Luke 10:18–20, that Jesus was no

135. There are several parallel issues here, of course: 1) the priority of Rome in church matters and 2) the Roman throwing open the door to clergy abuse of power.

136. In *LJEGP* of 1864, Strauß points out that 'demon' possession is not found in the 'First' Testament but was the 'mode illness' of the inter-testament period. See Strauß, *LJEGP*: (§71: 426, §74: 446).

137. See Strauß, *LJ*: 419.

exception to this popular belief. Here Jesus speaks of "a kingdom and household of the devil." Strauß excuses Jesus' error by commenting: "In answer to the repugnance of those with whose enlightenment a belief in demoniacal possession is inconsistent, to admit that Jesus held that belief, [...] [Paulus, the Rationalist] justly observes that the most distinguished mind may retain a false idea, prevalent among his contemporaries, *if it happen to lie out of his peculiar sphere of thought*.<sup>138</sup>" Apparently, Jesus is excused for his belief in demons because he hadn't carefully thought about it. Hence, *Strauß agrees with Paulus that Jesus accepted the notion of demon possession, and he was as mistaken about it as was his audience.*

In another unusual moment of agreement with the Naturalist/Rationalist Paulus, Strauß believes that Jesus practiced exorcism<sup>139</sup> *when it came to psychosomatic illnesses* whose "healing" *did not involve violation of natural causes*.<sup>140</sup> However, when it comes to the healing stories that obviously violate natural laws, he and Paulus dismiss the literal status of the stories, and Strauß claims, further, that the stories are only examples of "prophetic exaggeration" to establish Jesus' superiority over the First Testament prophets. In short, the historical element in the healings of persons possessed by demons is that Jesus healed psychosomatic illnesses by means of "conjuring" on the basis of the Jewish conception of demon possession of his day. However, the overwhelming majority of the healing stories are mythic as unhistorical embellishments of First Testament accounts in order to demonstrate Jesus' fulfilment of First Testament prophecy or his having exceeded the accomplishments of all prophets of the past.

One can only speculate with respect to why Strauß was reluctant to deny that Jesus performed psychosomatic healings. However, his own criteria and analysis suggest that the mythic tendency of the gospel writers and of their sources raises the possibility that even "conjuring exorcisms" are more appropriately understood to be mythic, as well. All the healing stories, including the psychosomatic healings, are driven by a theological *idea: Jesus superiority over First Testament miracle workers*. Strauß refers to the mining of the First Testament for precedents for the mythic development of stories

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138. Strauß, *LJ*: 417. Strauß shares this logic not only with Paulus but also with Schleiermacher. However, for Strauß the logic is not for the purpose as it was for Schleiermacher of defending Christ's 'perfect God-consciousness' by means of the notion that outside of Christ's 'calling,' he was not obligated to 'correct' the perceptions of his followers. Thirty years later, Strauß explicitly rejects Schleiermacher's proposal of a 'middle position' between 'objectively false' and 'subjectively true' when it comes to the miraculous and demons because they lie 'outside of the domain of Jesus' calling.' See *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History*: 67, 148, 138–139, 151–142. For Strauß the notion that something 'lie out of his peculiar sphere of thought' is an indicator of Jesus' finite, human understanding, not perfect God-consciousness as the case for Schleiermacher.

139. See Strauß, *LJ*: 416–417.

140. See the discussion of psychosomatic healing and Justinus Kerner in the opening paragraphs of Chapter 4: Why Schleiermacher was not an Option:" 249 ff.



about Jesus according to the *genetic mythical principle* some 50+ times<sup>141</sup> to underscore Jesus' status as the Messiah capable of far more than the First Testament prophets.<sup>142</sup>

Later, Strauß observes:

[...] apart from the difficulties which the notion of the existence of a devil and demons entails – whatever theory may be held as to the relation between the self-consciousness and the bodily organs, it remains absolutely inconceivable how the union between the two could be so far dissolved, that a foreign self-consciousness could gain an entrance, thrust out that which belonged to the organism, and usurp its place. Hence, for every one [*sic.*] who at once regards actual phenomena with enlightened eyes,<sup>143</sup> and the New Testament narratives with orthodox ones, there results the contradiction, that what now proceeds from natural causes, must in the time of Jesus have been caused supernaturally.<sup>144</sup>

As a consequence, Strauß dismisses the Supernaturalist reading of a "kingdom of evil" in which greater immorality indicates the more that the kingdom of evil reigns. He suggests that this is refuted, for example, by the fact that Judas was not reported to be possessed.<sup>145</sup>

Whereas, the Supernaturalist Olshausen proposed that there is demonic possession only where there's an inward moral struggle,<sup>146</sup> Strauß points out that disorders of the nervous system can occur without moral fault<sup>147</sup> to strengthen his conclusion that shifting from natural causes of affliction to moral causes "is one of the most useless which Olshausen's work contains."<sup>148</sup>

Unquestionably, Strauß' provides analysis, details, and insights into the gospels, the First Testament, and the history of *theology* that are astonishing and worthy of careful engagement by every biblical scholar and historian of religion. However,

141. See for example, Strauß, *LJ*: frequently (see for example, *LJ* 58, 63, 69–70, 77–78, 84, 86, 104–105, 107, 127–130, 177, 215, 312, 413, 440, 495, 498, 517, and 582).

142. Today, the "Jesus-Seminar" continues to propose on the basis of the "criterion of multiple attestation" that the miracles in the gospels are historical, and that the historical Jesus was a miracle worker as Lane McGaughey frequently has said and the Jesus Seminar theologian, Lloyd Geerings, claims in his (to my knowledge) unpublished lecture "Excavating Jesus," the second of a four-part lecture series entitled "Is Christianity going anywhere? – although there are no accounts of demon possession healings in John's gospel (*LJ* 437). Yet, already in the second volume of *LJ* (1835), as the citations in this paragraph above indicate, Strauß demonstrated that the miracles are not historical but narratives (mythoi) stimulated by stories of miracles performed by Old Testament characters (especially, Moses, Elijah, and Elisha) or by the process of association evoked by certain themes (e.g., faith moving mountains and trees). It is precisely the miracle stories that allow for observing the creative power of the mythic in religious texts.

143. Strauß here refers to recent advancements in the understanding of epilepsy, insanity, and personality disorders that might be attributable to demons as indication of the afflictions having natural causes. (*LJ* 419).

144. Strauß, *LJ*: 419–420.

145. See Strauß, *LJ*: 421.

146. See Strauß, *LJ*: 422.

147. See Strauß, *LJ*: 426.

148. Strauß, *LJ*: 422.



we will see that what Strauß accomplished in 1835 is only the first step toward his contribution to a *theology of history*.

## Strauß and 'Mediating' Theology

Strauß, in particular, and the Hegelians, generally, were attacked not only for their intellectual elitism but also for their ignoring of the need to address the "suffering and anxieties" of humanity<sup>149</sup> not to speak of their calling into question the "simple," narrative of Christian salvation that has in-formed the Christian faith of the Latin world since Augustine of Hippo and the 5<sup>th</sup> C CE.<sup>150</sup> These themes are emphasized in the letter by the First Testament scholar and "Mediating Theologian," Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette in his "Dr. Strauß and the Church of Zurich: a Voice Out of North Germany" included in *The Historical Reader* that is Part II of Volume I of the present work.

De Wette was among those 19th C theologians seeking to mediate between science and religion. Their notion of mediation was not the Hegelian mediation between the finite "self" and divine "Other" that is ultimately "mediated" or "unified" by the Absolute Concept. Rather, the 19th C, "Mediating Theologians" (*Vermittlungstheologen*) in the German world sought to combine their commitment to the Lutheran principle of "sola scriptura" ("the scriptures alone" as the source of revealed, theological truth) with "historical-critical" biblical scholarship as well as with the ever-increasing, significant insights of the historical (that is, natural) sciences. The most well-known of them was Friedrich Schleiermacher, a contemporary of Hegel's at the von Humboldt University in Berlin who had already written in his *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* of 1799: "Therefore here and there at all times, God sends persons armed with miraculous powers, paving their way by means of an omnipotent Word, and giving them the task of translating their wills and works in order to mediate that which otherwise would be eternally separated."<sup>151</sup> Their goal was to "germinate the dormant seed of an improved humanity, to spark a love for the highest of ideals, and to transform everyday life into something more elevated."<sup>152</sup>

149. Hegel claimed that the 'sufferings and anxieties' of history are 'necessary' for Absolute Spirit, but they are only 'logically' necessary as the indifferent place holder for the Second Negation's 'point of indifference' that is the 'return' to Absolute Spirit above sensuousness.

150. See Douglas R McGaughey, *Christianity for the Third Millennium: Faith in an Age of Fundamentalism and Skepticism*, paperback edition (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1998), "Chapter 2: The Separation Model of the Christian Faith" in *ibid.*: 37–82.

151. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, John Oman trans. (New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks/Cloister Library, 1958): 6.

152. See <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vermittlungstheologie> (8 October 2017).

The commitment on the part of these Mediating Theologians to "historical-critical" biblical scholarship sought a means to unite the very two exegetical strategies so thoroughly examined by Strauß in his *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, that is, "Supranationalism" (biblical literalism) and "Rationalism" (a commitment to the laws of nature that limit even the God who created them). *Whereas Strauß saw the power of the "poetic" (narratives with historical events, ideas, or symbols at their core informed by the Hegelian meta-narrative of Double Negation) for avoiding the alternatives of the exegetical divide, the Mediating Theologians sought reconciliation of religion and science by means of mysticism*, for example, Schleiermacher's metaphysical option of the "feeling of absolute dependence" [*schlechthinniges Abhängigkeitsgefühl*] or de Wette's "mystical feeling" that elevates and unites above materiality. Their goal proved difficult to achieve, and in his *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie*,<sup>153</sup> Emanuel Hirsch gives de Wette's own acknowledgement of failure:

"Ich fiel in eine wirre Zeit,  
Die Glaubenseintracht war vernichtet.  
Ich mischte mich mit in den Streit.  
Umsonst! Ich hab ihn nicht geschlichtet!"

"I fell into a tumultuous time,  
Concord among believers was destroyed.  
I entered into the fray.  
Futilely! I was unable to mediate peace!"

Strauß came to see that his Hegelian 'reconciliation' of Infinite and finite Spirit was no more up to the task of 'mediating peace' between the gospels and the natural sciences than the 'mysticism' of 'Mediating Theology', and he fully recognized the insufficiencies of historical-critical scholarship alone to provide a 'factual' foundation for theological claims. Nonetheless, his gospel criticism in the *LJ* provides invaluable insights in biblical exegesis, and his work on the history of Church Doctrine (his *Glaubenslehre*) of 1841 marks a crucial watershed for his theological reflections that resulted in a twenty year hiatus in his theological publications. When he picked up his pen in the 1860s to articulate his theological reflections, he was in a very different world.

Dripping with cutting irony when it comes to those who take the accidental forms of religion to be the indication of religious essence, Strauß wrote a short, but illuminating, piece that appeared in the *Jahrbücher der Gegenwart* (April 1848). In an article entitled "Jewish Persecution and Jewish Emancipation," he presents the Jews in Germany from the Crusades to his day as occupying a similar position in society as farmers/peasants whose pressing for recognition of their legitimate status in society was marked by the brutally repressive Peasant Wars in the 15<sup>th</sup> C. and 16<sup>th</sup> C and

153. Emanuel Hirsch, *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie im Zusammenhang mit den allgemeinen Bewegungen des europäischen Denkens*, Fünfter Band (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1954); 362.

whose disadvantaged position continued to Strauß' day.<sup>154</sup> Strauß' proposal for the 'emancipation' of the Jews was to dismiss the 'top-down' legal attempts to provide access to broader social privileges, which he argued would only perpetuate stereotypes and isolation on the part of both Christians and Jews.

[When it comes to religious differences,] it is not possible to help [...] a people within a people] from above [...]. Therefore, it remains to try to find a remedy from below, from the physical side instead of the meta- and hyperphysical side. How impractical we Christians have become! *Thanks to our supernaturalism, we do not perceive the natural, that which lies before our feet.*<sup>155</sup> (emphasis added)

Strauß invoked the example of the attempts in Rome to overcome the separation of Patricians and Plebians by the 'physical' solution of intermarriage by which over time "the two estates came to become One People." "Where [...] henceforth the Romans wanted to unite a city or a nation particularly closely, they used to grant it the *connumbium*."<sup>156</sup>

Strauß stresses that the formation of Jewish identity is as much a product of German persecution as it is of a Jewish 'national' identity and proposes that the goal is not simply to integrate Jews into German culture but to bring about the positive benefits for Germany that could come from an integration of Germans into Jewish culture. He optimistically proposed that within families, each group will try to maintain its identity, but this resistance will disappear over time.<sup>157</sup>

As religious freedom has led to Catholics and Protestants fragmenting into sects (e.g., Trinitarians and Unitarians, Theists, and Pantheists, and Atheists [into] day-, night-, and sunset wrinkles), 'Jews' will no longer be such an anomaly. Those Christian families who love the light will shortly feel more united with educated Jews than with Christian Pietists. *One will regard ethos and education to be more essential than the fundamental rawness to which accidental religious forms are related only as coloration.*<sup>158</sup> (emphasis added)

He concludes:

The remaining knights of the Christian idea of the state should concede, even if reluctantly; for if hitherto the Jew had first had to become a Christian in order to be able to enter a higher profession, he could not be blamed for silently despising a religion which by such a

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154. Wilhelm Zimmermann, Strauß' fellow student at the Stift in Tübingen, published a devastatingly, detailed account of the Peasant Wars between 1841 and 1843. See Zimmermann, *Der große Deutsche Bauernkrieg* (1841–1843). 4th ed. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1989.

155. David Friedrich Strauß, "Judenverfolgung und Judenemancipation" in *Jahrbücher der Gegenwart*, 30 (April 1848): 118b–119a.

156. Strauß, "Judenverfolgung und Judenemancipation:" 119a.

157. See Strauß, "Judenverfolgung und Judenemancipation:" 119b.

158. Strauß, "Judenverfolgung und Judenemancipation:" 119b.

clumsy coercion chased proselytes into its fold, as well as the state, which allowed itself to be used for such lowly service.<sup>159</sup>

Although Strauß returned to publishing theological texts in 1862, it would not be until his final work in 1872, *The Old and the New Faith*, that he formulated a thoroughly (if containing serious gaps and begging of questions) bottom-up materialist 'faith.'

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159. Strauß, "Judenverfolgung und Judenemancipation:" 119b.