Vol. II Appendix III: Grounds for Skepticism in Christian Doctrine. "The Threat" to Christianity is not the *Life of Jesus* but the *Glaubenslehre*?

David Friedrich Strauß was appointed to the theological faculty of the University of Zurich, Switzerland in January 1839. The appointment triggered a series of events that led to a Christian, populist coup in September that brought the loss of 15 lives and collapse of the Liberal government. Strauß was accused by the populists of 'destroying Christianity' by 'attacking' the history of the 'Second' Testament gospels and calling them 'myths.' Strauß was pensioned by the government and never entered the classroom (he donated his pension to the poor). Strauß' *Life of Jesus* in 1835 was actually a defense of what Strauß took to be the core doctrine of Christianity: the Incarnation. In 1841, though, he published a two volume work, *Christian Doctrine in its Historical Development and in Conflict with Modern Science* (*Glaubenslehre*). In contrast to the *LJ*, Strauß' aim in his *Glaubenslehre* was to demonstrate that the internal logic of Christian doctrine, no philosophical position outside of it, threatened the collapse of its doctrinal teaching from the very beginning of the Christian movement.

From the earliest days of the new, Christian religious movement, there were internal tensions and contradictions to its doctrine that were never resolved. As the church gained status and authority, its doctrine was subject to the whims of power politics as much as theological truth. New challenges emerged from the internal logic of its teachings with the Protestant Reformation being only one moment in long series of challenges. Particularly, in the post-Reformation period with Socinians and Arminians, Jakob Böhme, Spinoza, the Rational Supernaturalists (Leibniz and Lessing), a new phase of criticism shook the foundations of church teaching. The most recent (at the time of Strauß), 'new' Speculative Metaphysics of Hegelianism, crowned this re-thinking of the events that led to Christianity. Hegel's logical meta-narrative of Absolute Spirit's Double Negation placed a new narrative of humanity's role in the achievement of Absolute Knowledge at core of Christian doctrine. The reported historical events of Christianity's origins were not taken to be empirical facts but representations of the 'truth of Spirit' behind and above all facts (representations).

As with his gospel analysis, Strauß is concerned to show in this material that understanding is driving the 'facts' rather than 'facts' driving understanding. Stated theologically: theology drives the determination of 'facts' rather than 'facts' grounding theology. Strauß' metaphysics in the *LJ* takes the accounts in the gospels as mythic representations of 'the truth' (stories, not facts), which is that Absolute Knowledge of Spirit achieved in the individual's consciousness is confirmed to be the goal of history. In the *Glaubenslehre*, Hegelian Absolute Knowledge has been rejected, but Strauß has no adequate metaphysics to replace it. The threat to Christianity in the *Glaubenslehre*

is not only the tradition's internal contradictions but also the lack of an adequate religious perspective as response to Christianity's internal collapse.

Strauß Ignored Kant's Methodology of Skepticism

The importance that I see in this material is how it illustrates Strauß' overlooked opportunity to grasp the value of the very first step of Kant's methodology: skepticism. Wherever the limits to reason are ignored, there's dogmatism. Given those limits, it is impossible to escape skepticism, and skepticism calls into question all dogmatism whether it be the dogmatism of Personal Theism, the dogmatism of the meta-narrative of Hegel, the dogmatism of Nominalism, or the dogmatism of the later Strauß' Materialism. They are grounded in a dictum (*Machtspruch*) and not on the required conditions of possibility for us to experience a world, understand it, and act responsibly in it.

Skepticism does not mean that that over which one doubts is false. It only means that the objective claims do not satisfy the criteria proposed by objectivity itself. Skepticism offers one strategy to achieve certainty, but that strategy is not to insist that one's objective claims must (!) be true even if we cannot empirically establish their truth, 'yet.'.

Rather, skepticism's strategy is to seek to establish what conditions are required for there to be doubt in the first place. Skepticism brackets out the objective 'facts' to focus on the subjective 'conditions' for there to be anything like conscious experience, understanding, and responsible agency. This does not mean that skepticism leads to subjective relativism. On the contrary, skepticism is the first step to establishing the *universal* conditions and capacities common to any and all consciousness that make consciousness possible.

Rather than subjective relativism, the 'turn to the subject' establishes the objectively, *universal*, if subjective, elements that any and all consciousness requires to be conscious. Paradoxically, then, the subjective conditions and capacities of consciousness lead to objective necessities, even if those necessities, like all empirical claims to necessity, are incapable of absolute proof. *When in doubt, go for necessities, not certainties*!

What is *necessary* are the subjective conditions of possibility and the capacities of transcendental consciousness that make possible the drawing of (always tentative, no matter how convincing) 'conclusions,' for example, with respect to objective causes, substances, and the ultimate meaning and purpose of life. The 'objective' of subjective

necessities,[1] though, are not the objective causes, substances, and ultimate meaning and purpose of life, themselves. Those we can never establish with certainty.

The 'objective' of subjective necessity consists of the requirement that one *assume objective lawfulness* (physical laws, statistical significance, and algorithms) upon which any and all understanding of 'the facts' depends. This is the lawfulness embedded in any and all causal systems. In other words, objective, causal explanations are not necessary. *What is necessary is the subjective commitment to imperceptible, yet objective because universal, lawfulness that makes possible the conviction that a causal explanation is possible.* What drives the quest for understanding, then, is not the attainment of objective 'truths,' but the conviction that, despite our limits with respect to grasping those truths, all experience, understanding, and responsible agency requires that we assume a lawfulness that is both physical (objective) and moral (subjective). Subjective conditions and capacities necessarily must be combined with a conviction of objective lawfulness/order if we are to be(come) the species that we have the capacities to be(come). *Deny order, and there is no reason to seek understanding, much less assume responsibility for one's agency.*

The task of theology, then, is not to establish reasons for believing what one wants to believe, in the first place. Given the limits to empirical proofs the most lazy exercise of finite reason only seeks reasons for believing what it wants to believe. What is more difficult is to establish the necessities that are *not given directly with empirical phenomena* but, without which, there is no experience of any kind of phenomena. Theology 'seeks things that are not directly there' in perception. Those necessary things that theology and philosophy seek that are not there directly in perception, though, have little if anything to do with wishful thinking and self-interest. They have to do with the transcendental conditions and capacities required in order that any and all consciousness requires to be capable of intentionally doing and creating things that nature, left on its own, could never do or create.

Those universal, transcendental conditions and capacities are, obviously, nothing merely human. They include the 'givenness' of the universe and its significance, not merely the 'givenness' and 'significance' of individual egos. In fact, the conviction that causal systems conform to imperceptible lawfulness *requires* the conviction alone with that lawfulness that it and the universe are dependent upon 'God.' However, given the limits to consciousness/reason, all that we are capable of establishing with respect to 'God' are what the ultimate Noumenon must be in order for us to experience, understand, and to exercise responsible agency in a world.

In short, although incapable of being proved or disproved, all anthropomorphic predicates are driven by wishful and fanciful claims of the highest hubris that, as

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1. Necessary, here, does not mean causally determining, according to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, but conditions required merely for experiencing. What the individual actually *does* with these conditions and capacities is caused *to a degree* by nature but also, *to a degree*, by the individual's *autonomous, creative freedom* 'above' nature. See the "Foreword:" 42, n. 22.

analogies to human experience, say more about humanity and increase the likelihood that humanity is worshipping itself for no other reasons than such anthropomorphic predicates are by definition incapable of proof or disproof, much less as necessary for finite consciousness to be and do what it does. *Theology needs to rein-in God talk in order to focus on those imperceptible things that are truly necessary.*

Doubts raised by the *Glaubenslehre*

What follows here is a sampling (with supplements) of Strauß' analysis and criticism of the history of Church doctrine in his *Glaubenslehre*. Its purpose is to demonstrate the grounds for legitimate skepticism over the doctrinal claims of the Christian church given humanity's limits. When it comes to empirical, objective claims, the limits to reason make it possible for one to believe whatever one wants. *No one can objectively prove that one is wrong. However, skepticism points out that no one can objectively prove that one is right!*

This conundrum is no justification, though, to say that we must accept any and all objective truth claims because they are incapable of proof or disproof. Such a attitude opens the door to persecution, exploitation, and injustice because it denies (in the name of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism) not to speak of silencing any and all criticism of racism, misogyny, homophobia, child abuse, human trafficking, agism, prejudice over national origin, religious allegiance, etc. If there's nothing but subjective relativism, then we are silenced in the face of conspiracy theories and lying manipulation, calculation, prediction, and control over others for one's (and one's tribe's) self-interest.

The way out of the conundrum is not to scream one's objective truth louder as a way of squelching skepticism or to question the character of those who defend a different objective truth claim. The way out of the conundrum is to seek to identify the subject conditions and capacities and the objective lawfulness without which we cannot be skeptical but which anchor understanding in necessary truths.

Themes that Demonstrate Limits to Reason

Paul invoked the 'limits to reason' to defend the truth of his experience of divine revelation by contrasting God's wisdom and human wisdom (I Cor. 1:20–21). His doing so is an application of attacking one's opponent with one's own weakness. As far as we have ever experienced, the only being who possesses 'wisdom' is humanity, and the claim for God's wisdom is only a projection of an imperfect, finite, human characteristic onto God as 'perfect.' In the current context and in dramatic contrast to

Paul, 'limits to reason' are viewed not as a weakness but as a strength of our species. Without limits, we could not experience, understand, or act responsibly in the world. Of course, with the recognition of 'limits' comes the recognition that humanity is, and cannot be, perfect or obtain Absolute Knowledge.

Strauß used F.C.Baur's *The Christian Doctrine of Atonement and its Historical Development from Most Ancient Time Down to the Present* from 1838 (*Die christliche Lehre von der Versöhnung und ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung von der ältesten Zeit bis auf die neuste*) in his *Glaubenslehre* of 1841. I present a summary of Baur's theses in the section "Significance of Baur's work on Atonement" in Chapter 5.[2] Although Baur's aim in *The Christian Doctrine of Atonement* is to establish his own version of Pauline Christology as not only a pre-Gospel theory but also the true Christology. Yet, once Baur's use of the metaphysics of the Hegelian meta-narrative of Double Negation is bracketed out, one is left only with antitheses of contradiction in Christian doctrine. The reader is encouraged to read the Baur summary prior to continuing.

What Strauß presents in his *Glaubenslehre* are a set of themes that, internally to Church doctrine, force skepticism with respect to objective faith claims (in truth κατ' ἀλήθειαν: absolute truth claims). This summary of themes, though, is not presented with the aim of undermining faith but to establish faith (in truth κατ' ἄνθρωπον: limited human truths)[3] in necessities:

> *Scriptures*: 'Revelation' is an anthropomorphic notion. Humans have to express their internal thoughts for them to be received by others. The history of scriptures is their serving as a record of how humanity has thought about 'ultimate' concerns on the basis of its own finite capacities. The text is not a factual record of historical events but a collection of stories that are stimulated 1) by an historical event (to communicate its meaning); 2) by a theological idea (to account for its significance); or 3) by a religious symbol (e.g., the Kingdom or Commonweal of God). In other words, finite understanding drove facts, not facts infinite understanding.

> Following what assumed to be Jesus' own strategy for understanding himself (see: Luke 24:27; 24:44; 22:37), Jesus/the Christ was understood to have suffered a certain fate for God's purposes, which were 'clearly' announced in the 'First' Testament: For example, several calamity Psalms (Ps. 16:8 ff. by Acts 2:25 ff.; Ps. 22:18) were re-interpreted by the gospel authors (Matthew 27:35; 39; 43; 46; and John 19:24; 28; Ps. 69:22 by Matthew 27:34; 48 and John 19:29); the sacrificial blood of Moses covenant in Exodus 24:8 was re-interpreted by Matthew 26:26 ff and Hebrews 9:18–19; the slaughtered Pascal lamb in Exodus 12:1–14 was seen the prototype of Jesus' death in Romans 3:25; 1 Cor. 5:7, 1 Peter 1:19, and Hebrews 9:12 ff.

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2. See in Chapter 5: "Traces of an Intellectual Crisis:" the section "Significance of Baur's work on Atonement." 591 ff.

3. On the difference between truth κατ' ἀλήθειαν and κατ' ἄνθρωπον, see Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* B 767–768.

Messianic Expectations: Especially, when it came to messianic expectations, the 'Second' Testament is the product of gleaning possible references to the Messiah found in the 'First' Testament some of which were already articulated by the various messianic conceptions in the Intertestamental Period (time between the 'First' and 'Second' Testaments). to articulate early Christian understanding of Jesus and his status as the Christ: The messiah was conceived as a 1) *Political leader* ("New David") who would bring freedom and self-governance "forevermore" (Luke 1:32 f. Acts 1:6); 2) *a ransom to free people from sin* (Matthew 1:21) (but *NOT by a suffering and dying* Messiah himself *but by means of divine judgment* [Strafgericht] *and* the *outpouring of the divine Spirit* over the reformed remainder); or 3) that *the remission of sin and outpouring of the Spirit would be the task of a preacher of repentance* [Bußprediger] (according to Malachi. 3:32 f., see Luke 1:17) (but *NOT by the messiah but his predecessor*, Elijah). *Jesus is* portrayed as himself to be the predecessor (Matthew 4:17; Luke 24:47) *associated with the belief in the future coming of the messianic kingdom.* Later that predecessor role was attributed to John the Baptist.

The Messiah was conceived of as an individual as a 'mere' human being or a 'higher' being. The understanding of Jesus as himself the Messiah initially swung between two extremes: 1) *a human being* chosen by God (Ebionism/[Dynamic] Monarchianism) and; 2) *a divine being* who only 'appeared' to be human(Docetism); followed by the claim that 3) Jesus was God (as a result of his resurrection [Synoptics], of his coming 'on the clouds of heaven' in reversal of the direction portrayed in Daniel 7:13 or by his union with God prior to creation [Johannine Logos]).

God: Every (!) divine characteristic is the product (!) of anthropomorphic analogy: '*What*' *God's attributes are and how 'He' knows, plans, and intentionally acts* are all formulations by the species we know of who 'knows,' 'plans,' and intentionally acts. Divine characteristics (predicates) are all figuratively anthropomorphic.

Creation: Whether 'Intellectualist' (thought precedes will) or 'Voluntarist' (will precedes thought) (for example, Logos theology is Intellectualist; and Duns Scotus is Voluntarist), is conceived analogously thought (Intellectualist) and agency (Will).
Thinking about God non-anthropomorphically requires acknowledging 'limits to reason' without taking those limits justify wild speculations.

I*ndifferentism*: Forgiveness is the second wounding of the victim without any indemnity of the victim by the perpetrator, and history is meaninglessness when the goal is an eternal Afterlife ('orthodox' Christian teaching) and/or Mystical union with God (including Schleiermacher and Hegelianism). Indifferentism means that what actually happened in time has no real significance because in the Afterlife everything that has happened in this life is forgiven or merely the passing of fleeting representations required for one to encounter, internally, God/Absolute Spirit.

Furthermore, the dualistic teaching of an eternal heaven and an eternal hell is irreconcilable with a Monotheistic deity.

Salvation: Sacrifice for Remission of Sin formulated as an Economic Contract. Yet to whom was a debt owed?: Was it owed as a ransom (Matthew 20:28) to the Devil who had a legitimate claim to humanity because of its sin of having violated divine law (Colossians 2:14);

OR is the debt one owed to God 'Himself' (Isaiah 43:25), who until Jesus' coming had patiently tolerated humanity' affront to 'His' honor (Romans 3:25–26) with humanity's 'blasphemy consisting in violating the divine Spirit, not the law (Matthew 12:30–32; Mark 9:40, Luke 11:23, 1 John 3:16); OR does God arrange a disempowerment of the Devil by violently destroying the power of the devil, who had power over death (Hebrews 2:15), by breaking into the kingdom of the Devil to rob him (Matthew 12:29). With respect to the devil, was he *deceived* by God to release humanity (Irenaeus and Origen[4])? Note the anthropomorphic character of the claim that God 'knows,' 'plans,' and 'acts' (by deception) like a human being! A truly omnipotent, God by no means had to murder 'His' Son or deceive the devil to 'free the souls' of humanity – The framework of early Church teaching is Manichaeism (reality is divided into a Good Kingdom and an Evil Kingdom) with the Devil's Evil Kingdom in control of this world.'

Cur deus homo: Anselm of Canterbury's (11th C) 'Why God became Man' defines sin as the 'failure to adhere to God's will' (an anthropomorphic conception of God with a 'will;' not to mention that such 'sinlessness' is *impossible* for a finite creature) by placing humanity above God. Creation, the Fall, history, salvation are all a game of God playing with Himself to achieve eternal applause (Isaiah 43:25).

Perfection, presupposed and insisted upon by Anselm is an anthropomorphic notion that only requires a 'perfect' cause because such a perfect cause is required to satisfy the Principle of Sufficient Reason (*Satz vom zureichenden Grund*), grounded in humanity's own experience of finite, 'eminent' causality. Duns Scotus, the Voluntarist (what God wills is Good) saw no need for perfection, that is, a perfect, infinite cause greater than all of creation to cover humanity's infinite debt to God, only for something greater than 'the original sin' of Adam – based by Augustine of Hippo (5th C) on a questionable translation of Romans 5:12.

Restauration to what?: To the state of Adam and Eve in the garden? Then the whole process of 'Fall' and need for redemption would just begin again (Origen and Gnosticism); to the status of angels in heaven (Origen, Pseudo-Dionysius) 'above' humanity? Why create humanity in the first place? The Gnostic conception is that creation is an unfortunate mistake by God's creation of dualism so that God was powerless over the emanation of creation but powerful enough to reverse the process (influx) once it reached the darkest depths (Irenaeus' Recapitulation Theology) – Issue applies to both Covenantalism and Dispensationalism, of course.

Forgiveness and Substitution Theory of Atonement: Is forgiveness a 'natural,' internal process of individual responsibility and effort for moral improvement, or does forgiveness require objective, external assistance? The Substitution Theory of Atonement's anthropomorphic blindness (presupposes an anthropomorphic deity and ignores the finite, imperfect conditions necessary for a creature to be human): The individual can think, act, and make amends for her/his failures *only for her-/himself* – substitution for the other by means of accumulated 'merit' violates the human conditions of possibility for experiencing, understanding, and exercising responsible agency.

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4. Baur, *Die christliche Lehre von der Versöhnung*: 49.

Rituals:

1. Baptism: Presupposes the Fall [?] and the miraculous power of water to wash away sin (see issue of external, objective source for achieving forgiveness above); as remembrance and commitment of the community to raising the child in a moral community no need for a magic ritual
2. Eucharist: Reformation options for Eucharist (Luther, Zwingli, Calvin) 1) all presuppose anthropomorphic character of God and His Son's offices of high priest, prophet, and king; 2) Luther and Zwingli portray heaven as spatially located somewhere outside of this world (= Jesus is physically located at the right hand of God; Christ is either miraculously physically present in the wine and bread of the Eucharist = Luther; or 'remember as' in the Eucharistic elements = Zwingli, whereas Calvin maintains the contradiction that heaven is ubiquitous although ritual maintains unique presence); Roman Catholic and Lutheran teaching on the Eucharist can't avoid stercoranismus (recipient's own body turns Christ into shit); not to mention the problems with 'Concomitance' or the requirement that both Eucharist elements have the entirety of Christ present in them (e.g., fear of spilling the 'blood' to justify only distributing the 'body' is inconsistent, especially, in light of stercoranismus).

These themes are only a narrow slice of the conundrums, contradictions, and fallacies of Church doctrine. The entire edifice is constructed on the basis of a self-interested wish to 'eliminate guilt,' to 'explain,' and to 'escape from,' the death of the individual – while overlooking the victim(s) of one's 'sin.' Church doctrine is a history of objective claims made about God and humanity that appear to be confirmed by humanity's experience but are incapable as appearances to carry the weight of Absolute Truth placed upon them. The Copernican Turn of Critical Idealism offers an understanding of the human condition within the limits of finite reason that views humanity not as the player of a zero-sum game of self-interested consumption regardless of the consequences for nature or other human beings. Rather, humanity possesses a transcendental consciousness that, in common with all transcendental consciousness, is constitutes a breach in the blind, mechanical causality of nature. Transcendental consciousness is the place in the nature order where a finite, creativity can occur 'above,' but always in conformity with, nature. The *a priori* capacities and capacities of transcendental consciousness anchored in a world make it dependent upon nature but also upon an imperceptible culture that promotes the moral will. Not only is humanity not reduced to 'morality,' but 'creativity,' but also humanity's exercising of its autonomous, creative freedom requires its cultivating its theoretical reason by no means reducible to merely instrumental reason. Not only is a community required for the individual to exercise her/his capacities, but also Critical Idealism by no more denies than it affirms the afterlife because it is beyond the limits of our reason to adjudicate. Nonetheless, the afterlife, whether it exists or not, has an important role to play in motivating human creative, responsible agency in this world.

Above all, though, the attraction of lawfulness and the repulsion over against unlawfulness has nothing to do with a heteronomous moral law (either from God or as a social construction). Rather, the passion for order and the individual's ownership of her/his imperceptible granting of permission to exercise its agency responsibly result in the experience of *a powerful and motivating satisfaction* as it discovers ever more coherent order in experience even when its agency does not bring 'objective' success technically or ethically.

The conditions of possibility and capacities of transcendental consciousness as grounding the feeling of attraction of attraction to lawfulness (including statistical significance and algorithms) and repulsion when confronted with lawless chaos establish transcendental consciousness as final end of nature.[5] As the final end of nature in this sense, transcendental consciousness is essentially religious but not as a specific institution that defends an objective creed and ritual as grounding the ultimate meaning of life or because humanity achieves 'worthiness' in the eyes of God. Rather, transcendental consciousness is essential religious because of the nature of its conditions of possibility and capacities and its potential to create a culture that promotes the moral will on the basis of the imperceptible, Commonweal of God. In short, the individual knows always and already inwardly whether or not it is 'worthy' of happiness. It needs no objective reward of happiness from society or God to establish its awareness of worthiness.[6] Religion and transcendental consciousness, then, have the same aim: meaning and satisfaction in life through creative talents and responsible agency supported by a culture that promotes the moral will to exercise one's capacities responsibly.

> One may formulate the attraction and repulsion at the core of transcendental consciousness so: The imperceptible conditions of possibility and capabilities of transcendental consciousness make attractive (!) the effort that is required for seeking understanding (theoretical reason) and exercising of responsible agency (practical reason). There is no more or less significant meaning or satisfaction in life than one's acquiring the symbols and skills (theoretical reason) that make for creative agency and accompany one's granting of permission to act responsibly on the basis of wide, moral principles (practical reason) – even when to do so is contrary to one's personal or communal interest and regardless of one's external success or failure. However, when the individual violates the physical order that makes it possible for such technical/pragmatic effort and/or violates the moral order on which her/his granting permission to act depends, it is not the repulsion of technical error itself or the objective/social censorship that is most searing but the internal self-repulsion (!) that haunts the individual far beyond the present moment of self-disappointment.

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5. On transcendental consciousness as the ‚final end of nature' not because of its accomplishments of technical skill or because of its moral success, but, rather, because of the capacity of practical reason to assume responsibility for its agency, which, in turns, drives its moral efforts as a member of a culture (community that promotes the moral will), see Chapter 5: "Traces of an Intellectual Crisis:" 632, n. 274

6. See Chapter 8: "Strauß' Kant Reading Over his Career:" "γ) Neither Happiness nor Pleasing God, but Worthiness of Happiness **in History**:" 830 ff.

The faith at the core of Critical Idealism, then, is: *When in doubt, go for necessities, not certainties*!