

Week 2: Religious thought at the threshold to the 19th century

- Readings:
- D.L. Edwards, *Religion and Change* London 1969 (useful introduction)
- K. Barth, *Protestant Theology in the 19th Century – its Background and History*, London 1972
- C. Welch, *Protestant Thought in the 19th Century (2 Vols.)* , New Haven (1972; 1985)

a) Introduction

- How should theology react to the developments of modernisation?
- First by producing 'programmes of modernisation' such as rationalism or deism
- John Toland (1669-1722): *Christianity not mysterious* (1696)

a) Introduction II

- Since the end of the 18th century theology has reacted critically to those programmes.
- After the shock of the French Revolution, the ambiguities of modern development become more apparent.
- Religion is hoped to retain its specifics to mend some of the problems of modernity.

b) Lessing and the 'fragments controversy'

- Lit.: H. Chadwick (ed.) *Lessing's Theological Writings*, London 1956 (contains a good introduction by Chadwick and the most important primary texts).
- K. Barth, *Protestant Theology in the 19th Century*, chapter on Lessing.
- T. Yasukate, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford (OUP) 2003 (excellent monographical treatment).

b) Lessing II

- Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) stands at the borderline between 18th and 19th cent.:
- Accepts historical and philosophical criticism of orthodox Christianity.
- At the same time dissatisfaction with Enlightenment attempts to reform theology.

Lessing III: The 'fragments controversy'

- From 1770 Lessing was librarian at Wolfenbüttel.
- From 1773 he edited a Journal : *On History and Literatur. From the Treasures of the Libary at Wolfenbuttel.*
- Therein he published *Fragments of an unknown author* in 1774, 1777, 1778.
- Real author: Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), Oriental scholar and radical deist.

Lessing's own Position

- The demise of orthodox Christianity is a fact.
- Enlightenment attempts to its rescue do not work.
- Ensuing questions: How is the acceptance of faith related to its historical basis?
- How can 'accidental truths of history' prove 'necessary truths of reason'?

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

- *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781, ²1787
- *Critique of Practical Reason*, 1788
- *Critique of Judgment*, 1790
- A. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*

Kant II

- Historical background:
- Rationalism (Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 1646-1716)
- Philosophy leads to rational theology, specifically the ontological argument.
- Construction of a 'Natural Theology' on the basis of those insights.

Kant III

- Influence of David Hume (1711-1776): Cognition always based on sense-perception.
- In his first *Critique* (1781) Kant studies human cognition.
- Result: Cognition always involves rationality and sense-perception.
- The senses produce the 'material', mind provides the 'form'.

Kant IV

- Consequence: No cognition without the possibility of sense-perception.
- → God cannot be an object of cognition.
- Result: Criticism of 'natural religion' provides new interest in historical, 'positive' religions.

d) The (first) debate about Pantheism

- G. Valee (ed.), *The Spinoza Conversations between Lessing and Jacobi*
- T. Yasukata, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion*, op. cit., ch. 7
- F. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason. German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, ch. 2

Pantheism II

- B. Spinoza (1632-1677): developed in his *Ethics* a monistic (rationalist) system in which everything is said to be a single substance.
- → For the identification of God and world implied therein, he has been labelled 'pantheist'.
- In the 17th century Spinoza was a radical outsider.

Pantheism III

- Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819)
- Met Lessing in 1780, briefly before his death.
- Published a book about this encounter in 1785 in which he claimed that Lessing had expressed sympathies for Spinoza's views.
- Alongside he gave a critical exposition of Spinoza's thought peppered with lengthy quotations from his works.

Pantheism IV

- The publication caused a major controversy
- Lessing's friends rushed to his 'defence'.
- Jacobi's book offered the first chance for many to acquaint themselves with Spinoza.
- A whole younger generation (Goethe, Schleiermacher) was, in spite of Jacobi's intentions, deeply impressed by Spinoza's thought.
- They perceived a chance here to think more appropriately of God (and world).
- → a being that permeates the world, is truly present.