

**“Rede über die Frage: Gehört allzuviel Güte, Leutseeligkeit und grosse Freygebigkeit im engsten Verstande zur Tugend?”
Socrates as Secular Jesus in Schiller’s
First Karlsschule Speech***

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*I am not an Athenian, nor a Greek,
but a citizen of the world.*

Socrates (Plutarch, *Of Banishment*; 1st century CE)¹

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¹ Moses Mendelssohn calls Socrates “Weltbürger” in his “Leben und Charakter des Sokrates” (1767). Moses Mendelssohn, *Phädon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*, ed. David Friedländer, fifth edition (Berlin: Nicolai, 1814) 9. In his “Ankündigung der *Rheinischen Thalia*” (Announcement of the Journal *Rheinische Thalia*) of 11 November 1784, Schiller declares: “Ich schreibe als Weltbürger, der keinem Fürsten dient” (I write as a citizen of the world, who serves no prince; NA 22:93). The term “Weltbürger” was by no means uncommon in the second half of the eighteenth century (see NA 23:274) and Kant had recently used the phrase “weltbürgerliche Absicht” in his February 1784 essay “Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht,” which Schiller did not actu-

You are of this world; I am not of this world.
— Jesus Christ (John 8:23; 1st century AD)

In his praise of the life and death of Jesus Christ (“those of a God”) over the life and death of Socrates (“those of a sage”) in *Emile, ou De l’éducation*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) provides evidence that by 1762 a moral-philosophical practice of comparing the mortal philosopher with the divine prophet was common knowledge: “What prejudices, what blindness one must have to dare to compare the son of Sophroniscus to the son of Mary?”² Citing Rousseau in

ally read until 1787. The fact that Schiller immediately proceeds to explain that he lost his fatherland, Württemberg, due to the political response to his first drama, *Die Räuber* (The Robbers, 1781), in which Karl Moor refers to Plutarch’s *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* in his very first line in the drama (NA 3:20), indicates that his use of the term “Weltbürger” (citizen of the world) might also have been inspired by Plutarch’s characterization of Socrates.

² Rousseau’s early contribution to the discussion of the relative virtues of Christ and Socrates in *Emile* (1762) comprises the praise of the dramaturgical spectacle of Christ’s life and death over those of Socrates: “I also admit that the majesty of the Scriptures amazes me, and that the holiness of the Gospel speaks to my heart. [...] Can it be that he whose history it presents is only a man himself? Is his the tone of an enthusiast or an ambitious sectarian? [...] Where is the man, where is the sage who knows how to act, to suffer, and to die without weakness and without ostentation? When Plato depicts his imaginary just man, covered with all the opprobrium of crime and worthy of all the rewards of vir-

1785, the revolutionary English theologian Joshua Toulmin (1740-1815), the author of the book chapter “Christ and Socrates” on the “respective excellencies” of the two, wearily concludes that it is time to “drop the subject,” for Socrates’ time has passed: “Let Socrates retire at his [Christ’s] coming, and leave the chair of instruction vacant for a greater teacher than himself.”³ By 1803, Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) feels compelled to write a short book — dedicated to Toulmin — in defense of Christ entitled *Socrates and Christ Compared*,⁴ which, like Toulmin’s essay, has the dualist heretical distinction of comparing not only

tue, he depicts Jesus Christ feature for feature. [...] What prejudices, what blindness one must have to dare to compare the son of Sophroniscus to the son of Mary? What a distance from one to the other! The death of Socrates, philosophizing tranquilly with his friends, is the sweetest one could desire; that of Jesus, expiring in torment, insulted, jeered at, cursed by a whole people, is the most horrible one could fear. Socrates, taking the poisoned cup, blesses the man who gives it to him and who is crying. Jesus, in the midst of a frightful torture, prays for his relentless executioners. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates are those of a wise man, the life and death of Jesus are those of a god.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile: or On Education*, trans. Alan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979) 306-307.

³ Joshua Toulmin, “Dissertation VIII. Christ and Socrates,” in *Dissertations on the Internal Evidences and Excellence of Christianity: And on the Character of Christ, Compared with that of Some Other Celebrated Founders of Religion and Philosophy* (London: J. Johnson, 1785) 169-194. Here 170, 185, and 194.

⁴ Joseph Priestley, *Socrates and Jesus Compared* (Philadelphia: P. Byrne, 1803).

the philosophies, missions, and deaths, but the relative advantages and merits of the mortal Socrates and the divine Christ, the latter of whom both Toulmin and Priestley portray as the unquestioned earthly embodiment of the only god. These are not merely comparisons of parallel philosophies, lives, and deaths, but documentations of a genuine rivalry over primacy of influence. At stake is the answer to the question of which of the two is the more appropriate moral role model for the future of humankind. Rousseau, who is foremost concerned with the literary-historical character Christ⁵; as well as Toulmin and Priestley, who are sincerely invested in defending the divinity of Christ; bear witness to an awareness of — and in the latter two cases discomfort with — the palpable rise of Socrates as Secular Jesus in the second half of the 18th century.⁶ Few thinkers

⁵ In his open approval of Christ as the preferred martyr in *Emile* and in *Fiction ou Morceau allégorique sur la revelation* (1756-1757), Rousseau appears to be an exception in 18th century France. See Raymond Trousson, *Socrate devant Voltaire, Diderot et Rousseau: la conscience en face du mythe* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, Minard, 1967).

⁶ “Curious as it might seem to partisans of Seneca, Erasmus, or Montaigne, no such myth of Socrates ever existed prior to the eighteenth century. The pagan martyr had, to be sure, enjoyed a goodly share of respect and veneration. But it somehow required the peculiar conjunction of intellectual currents at work in this supposedly iconoclastic era to catapult him to the position of sacred relic.” Katherine Carson, in her review of Trousson’s book cited above, “Socrates Observed: Three Eighteenth-

were as consistent in the promotion of Socrates to this end, and of the idea that it was in fact Christ's time that had passed, as Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), beginning in 1779 with his first composition on moral philosophy, "Gehört allzuviel Güte, Leutseeligkeit und grosse Freygebigkeit im engsten Verstande zur Tugend?" (Does all too much Kindness, Sociability, and great Generosity necessarily Constitute Virtue?).⁷

Schiller's First Virtue Speech — a second followed in 1780⁸ —, in its designation of Socrates (469 BCE-399 BCE) as "den erhabensten Geist, den je das Altertum gebär" (the most sublime spirit ever born to the ancient world; NA 20:3) over the traditional candidate, Christ,⁹ is emblematic of a

Century Views," in *Diderot Studies* 14 (1971) 273-281. Here 274.

⁷ Friedrich Schiller, *Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe*. i.A. des Goethe und Schiller-Archivs, des Schiller-Nationalmuseums und der Deutschen Akademie, ed. Julius Petersen et al. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1943ff). Here volume 25:304. Subsequent references as "Virtue Speech"; subsequent citations appear as "NA" with volume and page number(s). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine [J.H.].

⁸ "Die Tugend in ihren Folgen betrachtet" (1780; NA 20:30-36).

⁹ Schiller's use of the term "Alterthum" (ancient period, approximately 4000 BC-700 AD) should not be understood to indicate that Schiller means to limit the discussion to Greco-Roman antiquity and thus exclude Christ from consideration geographically or culturally. Far from limiting himself to classical antiquity, Schiller specifically uses the term "Alterthum" in his characterization of Cathmor, a

significant moment in Late Enlightenment secularist thought in three regards:

1) the essay addresses a primary concern of late 18th-century thinkers, namely, the common philosophical and political agendas of reason free from religion;

2) on a practical level, the essay conspicuously relegates the divine and thus alien martyr Christ to one of many influences in the history of earthly virtue; and

3) on a theoretical level, the essay marks the beginning of Schiller's programmatic dismissal of the tribal-state religious practice of disguising moral choice as — and coercing civic behavior through — divine dictate to the annals of untimely historical necessities.¹⁰

character in James MacPherson's *Ossian* (1765). If Cathmor or a text regarding him ever existed previously, it would have been in medieval Scotland. Schiller's antiheroes in the essay, who serve as counterexamples to the virtue of Socrates, range in time from Absalom (around 1000 BCE) to Julius Caesar (100 BCW-44 BCE), Catiline (108 BCE-62 BCE), and Augustus (63 BCE-14 AD); to François Ravallac (1578-1610); and range in location from ancient Hebron to early modern Paris. Schiller specifically advises the listener (or reader) to look at the books of the Bible for virtuous role models: "Siehe an die heilige Bücher!" (Just look at the holy books; NA 20:6).

¹⁰ Note that Schiller pursues this same agenda in his exposé on Moses as a brilliant politician, but not a divine messenger, in "Die Sendung Moses" (The Mission of Moses, 1790). See Jeffrey L. High, "Clever Priests and the Missions of Moses and

Schiller's essay is representative of the positions taken by a number of leading Enlightenment thinkers; including (but by no means limited to) "the German Socrates" Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826); who not only see Socrates as a practical moral-political role model for the pursuit of happiness in the Age of Revolution, but consciously feature him in parallel narratives in which not only Socrates, but Christ himself, appear as a *Secular Jesus*, compared to and logically intended to displace the miraculous view of Christ, who himself had once risen as a *Divine Socrates*.¹¹ Like the present essay, none of the texts discussed below address in any detail the textual accuracy of the 18th century views of Socrates and Christ, nor do they address the question of Socrates' religiosity. The term "secular" here thus does not refer to a historical Socrates or his beliefs as described in the sources, but to Socrates reception in select 18th-century narratives that portray him as a human willing to give his only life for the earthly, rational concepts of virtue, truth, and happiness. Ergo, Socrates appears here only in his function as a role model for national and global citi-

Schiller: From Monotheism to the Aesthetic Civilization of the Individual," in Elisabeth Krimmer and Patricia Ann Simpson, eds., *German Classicism and Religion* (Rochester: Camden House, 2013) 79-98.

¹¹ According to Trousson, Denis Diderot was the first to suggest a Socrates tragedy written for the stage in *Traité de la Poésie dramatique* in 1758 (Trousson, 47).

zenship, representing the establishment of a sphere of public authority based on self-knowledge through reason that secures freedom of and from faith and religion in civil and public affairs.

I. Prelude: Moses Mendelssohn's "Leben und Charakter des Sokrates" and *Phädon*

Among the texts taught by Schiller's professor Jakob Friedrich Abel (1751-1829) at the Karlsschule was Moses Mendelssohn's book *Phädon, oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele* (Phaedo, or On the Immortality of the Soul), an adaptation of Plato's seventh dialogue on the death of Socrates.¹² The broad resonance of Mendelssohn's book is indisputable: by the time Schiller was sixteen years old (1776), it had appeared in four editions (1767, 1768, 1769, and 1776). The first some fifty pages of the book comprise Mendelssohn's essay, "Leben und Charakter des Sokrates" (The Life and Character of Socrates), based on "the sources"¹³ and English poet John

¹² See Laura Anna Macor, *Der morastige Zirkel der menschlichen Bestimmung. Friedrich Schillers Weg von der Aufklärung zu Kant* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010) 31.

¹³ In the course of the text, Mendelssohn mentions/cites Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Plato, Aristotle, and Aristophanes, though it is evident that the radicalism of the Socrates portrayed by Mendelssohn and then by Schiller, derives from Plato's portrayal. See Louis-André Dorion, "The Rise and Fall

Gilbert Cooper's (1722-1769) *Life of Socrates* (1750). Cooper's book features a spirited foreword in defense of Socrates and "true religion" (Deism/Naturalism) aimed at Socrates' detractors (evidently Christians), whose characters are informed by either "designing Deceits of the Heart" or "the involuntary Errors of a misled Understanding."¹⁴ Mendelssohn, like Cooper, frames Socrates' study of nature and humanity in modern eudaemonist terms; indeed, he more rewrites Plato's portrayal than adapts it for modern tastes,¹⁵ noting that his contribution is concerned with the "Harmonie der moralischen Wahrheiten,

of the Socratic Problem," in *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, ed., Donald R. Morrison (New York: Cambridge UP, 2011) 1-23, here 3-6.

¹⁴ Mendelssohn cites the second edition of 1750 (Mendelssohn, XL): John Gilbert Cooper, *The Life of Socrates* (London: R. Dodsley, 1750) v-vii, x.

¹⁵ Mendelssohn explains, for example: "Seine [Platos] Beweise für die Immaterialität der Seele scheinen, uns wenigstens, so leicht und grillenhaft, daß sie kaum eine ernsthafte Widerlegung verdienen [...] In dem dritten Gespräch mußte ich völlig zu den Neueren [Philosophen] meine Zuflucht nehmen, und meinen Sokrates fast wie einen Weltweisen aus dem siebzehnten oder achtzehnten Jahrhundert sprechen lassen" (His [Plato's] arguments for the immateriality of the soul appear, at least to us, so weak and quirky, that they scarcely deserve to be refuted [...] In the third dialog I had to resort entirely to modern philosophers and have my Socrates speak almost like an international sage from the seventeenth or eighteenth century; Mendelssohn, XXXVI-XXXVII), and calls his *Phädon* "Mittelding zwischen einer Uebersetzung und eigenen Ausarbeitung" (something between a translation and an original rendition; Mendelssohn, XXXVIII).

und insbesondere von dem System unserer Rechte und Obliegenheiten" (harmony of moral truths, and in particular with the system of our rights and responsibilities; Mendelssohn, XXXIX). Mendelssohn defines Socrates' path from the "finstere Schrecknisse des Aberglaubens" (darkest horrors of superstition; Mendelssohn, 8) and "Vorurteil" (prejudice; Mendelssohn, 26) that inform "Gemüther, die nicht unter der Herrschaft der Vernunft stehen" (the minds of those who are not ruled by reason; Mendelssohn, 7), through "Tugend und Weisheit" (virtue and wisdom; Mendelssohn, 8, 11), to the end of all human pursuits, "wahre Glückseligkeit" (true happiness; Mendelssohn, 5, 7, 12, 14, 26): "Die Glückseligkeit des menschlichen Geschlechts war sein [Sokrates'] einziges Studium" (The happiness of the human race was his [Socrates'] only study; Mendelssohn, 26). Mendelssohn attacks the sophists as "Priester des Aberglaubens" (priests of superstition, Mendelssohn, 8), who exploit religion to their own ends (Mendelssohn, 7), a religion that panders to "Vorurteil, oder Aberglaube" (prejudice or superstition; Mendelssohn, 26) and leads "zur offenbaren Gewalttätigkeit, Kränkung der menschlichen Rechte, Verderbniß der Sitten u.s.w." (to open violence, violation of human rights, moral depravity, etc.; Mendelssohn, 26) and "heillose Ungerechtigkeit" (unholy injustice; Mendelssohn, 28). The political consequence is an ignorant, self-enforcing populace, whose "blinden Eifer" and "pöbelhaften

Wahne” (blind zeal, mob delusion; Mendelssohn, 27) is easily manipulated by the “Bosheit einiger Mächtigen, die Heuchelei der Priester, und die Niederträchtigkeit feiler Redner und Demagogen” (malice of a powerful few, hypocrisy of the priests, and the despicable behavior of venal orators and demagogues; Mendelssohn, 27).

One of the most notable features of Mendelssohn’s essay is the nature of the subtle negation of the significance of Christ’s death in contrast to that of Socrates. In the introductory essay itself, Mendelssohn’s interest in Socrates is clearly stated as morality within the limits of mortality: “[...] das Unendliche im Endlichen nachzuahmen, die Seele des Menschen jener ursprünglichen Schönheit und Vollkommenheit so nahe zu bringen, als es in diesem Leben möglich ist” (to copy the eternal in the finite and to bring the spirit of the human being as close to that original beauty and perfection as is possible in this life; Mendelssohn, 4). In contrast, Mendelssohn concedes that the superstitious beliefs of the average ancient Greek facilitated adherence only to the “albernste Religion” (silliest religion; Mendelssohn, 8). Mendelssohn stresses that Socrates’ strategy against the sophists features an assault on “unrichtige Begriffe von der Vorsehung und Regierung Gottes” (false ideas about providence and the rule of God) specifically regarding “die Belohnung des Guten und die Bestrafung des Bösen” (the reward for goodness and the punishment of

evil; Mendelssohn, 14).¹⁶ To this end, Mendelssohn praises a specific advantage of the Socratic method, namely, the sequestration of the unknowable: “[...] so war ihm erlaubt, das nicht zu wissen, was er nicht wissen konnte, oder durfte” (thus he was free not to know what he could not or was not allowed to know; Mendelssohn, 15); which justified Socrates’ refusal to provide answers to unanswerable questions beyond “Dieses weiß ich nicht” (This I do not know; Mendelssohn, 15), but to pursue them through further interrogation.

Not only did Socrates see divine reward and punishment as unknowable, and thus dishonest and distracting, Melitus’ charge that Socrates “habe dem jungen Menschen [Alcibiades] die Verachtung der Religion beigebracht” (taught contempt for religion; Mendelssohn, 33), indicates that Socrates’ dismissal of the unknowable itself was a violation of coerced worship of the Olympian gods and thus posed a danger to “die Vorschriften der Religion und der Politik, gegen welche er die Jugend gleichgültig gemacht haben sollte” (the rules of religion and politics, toward which he had allegedly made the youth indifferent;

¹⁶ Mendelssohn, 14. The third dialogue of Mendelssohn’s *Phädon*, which chronicles the death of Socrates, includes the greatest number of contradictions with Christian concepts of the afterlife. On the first page of the third dialogue, Socrates establishes that there is no evidence in nature for the concept of an eternity in Hell: “Aus der Natur und den Eigenschaften erschaffener Dinge läßt sich in diesem Falle nicht mit Gewißheit schließen” (Mendelssohn, 168).

Mendelssohn, 24). Indeed, according to Mendelssohn, Socrates' refusal to be initiated in the Elysian Mysteries was a strategy aimed specifically at reserving the right to demystify the coercive myth of divine judgment and frame virtue and vice in a social context.¹⁷ In this sense, Socrates sentences his accusers to earthly judgment

¹⁷ Mendelssohn points out his own belief that the Elysian Mysteries were no threat to Socrates' philosophy, since they comprised nothing other than "die Lehren der wahren natürlichen Religion" (the teachings of the true natural religion; Mendelssohn, 34), the simple deistic of all creation. This view mirrors the thesis presented in Karl Leonhard Reinhold's *Ueber die ältesten hebräischen Mysterien* (On the Most Ancient Hebrew Mysteries, 1788), the primary source for Schiller's "Die Sendung Moses" (1790; NA 17, 385). Schiller concludes: "Es scheint ausser Zweifel gesetzt, daß der Inhalt der allerältesten Mysterien in Heliopolis und Memphis, während ihres unverdorbenen Zustands, Einheit Gottes und Widerlegung des Paganismus war" (It appears to be beyond any doubt that the content of the most ancient mysteries in Heliopolis and Memphis, during their uncorrupted state, were the unity of everything in God and the refutation of paganism; NA 17:385). Mendelssohn's speculation as to why Socrates refused to be initiated in the Elysian Mysteries may contain a hint as to why notable free-thinkers Schiller and Jefferson appear never to have joined Masonic lodges: "Wenn Socrates sich weigerte, die Einweihung anzunehmen, so geschah es wahrscheinlich, um die Freiheit zu behalten, diese Geheimnisse ungestraft ausbreiten zu dürfen, die ihm die Priester durch die Einweihung zu entziehen suchten" (If Socrates refused to accept the initiation, then it is likely that this was in order to maintain the freedom to spread the secrets without punishment, a freedom the priests sought to revoke through the oath of initiation; Mendelssohn, 34).

for his unjustified death sentence: "Ich gehe zum Tode, zu welchem ihr mich verurtheilt habet: und sie zur Schmach und Unehre, zu welcher sie von der Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit verdammt werden" (I go to death, to which you have condemned me, and you go to disgrace and dishonor, to which you are damned by truth and justice; Mendelssohn, 40). If, as Mendelssohn and his portrayal of Socrates logically imply, all sentient beings have the same experience in the afterlife, then there is no reason to believe in punishment for sin or reward for virtue, and there is no reason to be thankful for atonement through the death of Christ (penal substitution), which promised only a dependent series of benefits that the death of other freedom fighters, such as Socrates, did not: forgiveness of sin, and therewith the salvation of the soul, and a heavenly afterlife. In the specific removal of these speculative and supernatural elements (judgment, heaven, and hell) from common Christian eschatology in his portrayal of Socrates, Mendelssohn establishes moral transformation and the sublime model of martyrdom as an empirical, earthly affair.¹⁸ Mendelssohn's essay thus glosses over the main violation of reason committed in Soc-

¹⁸ Mendelssohn's portrayal of judgment as an earthly concern foreshadows one of Schiller's most important lines on the subject in the poem "Resignation" (1786), which dismisses the biblical portrayal of Judgment Day: "Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht" (World history is Judgment Day; NA 1:168).

rates' dying days, namely his rationalization of an afterlife and the reduction of his otherwise heroic death to a function of the logic of the belief in an afterlife, which is addressed in great length in Dialog III of Mendelssohn's *Phädon* (Mendelssohn, 189-209). As for the details, Socrates responds: "[...] Alles dieses, mein Freund! Weiss ich nicht" (All this, my friend! I do not know; Mendelssohn, 209).

In the introduction to the 1814 edition of Mendelssohn's *Phädon*, editor David Friedländer captures the spirit of the late 18th century eudaemonist critics of religious orthodoxy (as evident in Mendelssohn's and Schiller's essays) in a few summary phrases. Friedländer calls the "Revolution in dem Gedankenreiche aller denkenden Menschen" (revolution in the realm of thought of all thinking individuals) an unavoidable result of the "Verknüpfung wachsender Einsicht mit Streben nach Glückseligkeit" (combination of growing insight and the pursuit of happiness; Friedländer, VI). He describes Glückseligkeit und Fortdauer" (happiness and stability; Friedländer, VII) as inextinguishable human longings, and he summarizes Mendelssohn's ultimate motivation: "[...] durch seine Schriften Tugend und Wohlwollen unter den Menschen verbreiten" (to spread virtue and good will among the people through his writings; Friedländer, XXIV). Friedländer subtly addresses the dangers of heresy in the 1760s, describing discussions of the earthly limits to speculation on the destiny of mankind as a work

of secrecy: "[...] Untersuchungen der Art scheinen in jenen Jahren mit einer gewissen Scheu, fast wie Mysterien bewacht worden zu seyn, so daß sie nur unter vertrauten Freunden Statt finden durften" (Such research projects appear in those years to be guarded with a certain caution, almost like religious mysteries, so that they could only occur between trusted friends; Friedländer, X). Friedländer also cites Mendelssohn's letter to Thomas Abbt (1738-1766) of 9 February on the fear of earthly persecution as motivation for using Greek pen names to promote a free discussion of "Die Bestimmung des Menschen"¹⁹: "Wenn ja orthodoxe Theologen hinter unsere Briefe kämen, so liefen wir denn doch nur Gefahr, in effigie verbrannt zu werden" (Friedländer, XIII). For Mendelssohn, the direct result of the dangerous discussion with Abbt on the destiny of humankind is his *Phädon*, which begins with the essay "Das Leben und Charakter des Sokrates." As Karl Fink has pointed out,

¹⁹ "the destiny of humankind"; Friedländer, XII. Both Abbt's "Zweifel über die Bestimmung des Menschen" and Mendelssohn's "Orakel, die Bestimmung des Menschen betreffend" were coordinated responses to Johann Joachim Spalding's *Betrachtung über die Bestimmung des Menschen* (1748). For a discussion of the origins of the term, the dynamics between the three texts, and Schiller's professor Johann Friedrich Abel's use of the texts in his courses at the Karlsschule, see Macor, 25-30, and Wolfgang Riedel, *Die Anthropologie des jungen Schiller: Zur Ideengeschichte der medizinischen Schriften und der "Philosophischen Briefe"* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1985) 156-176.

citing Mendelssohn's "The Life and Character of Socrates" and his *Jerusalem, Oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum* (*Jerusalem, Or on Religious Power and Judaism*, 1783), Mendelssohn's treatment of Socrates is a vehicle toward the promotion of the secular state:

Mendelssohn had argued that Socrates had dedicated his life to one of the fundamentals of democracy: the pursuit of happiness [...] Mendelssohn found Socrates happy in his moment of death. And so Mendelssohn balanced his own capacity for analytical reasoning with empathetic modes of discourse, particularly in his view that the separation of church and state (*Staat und Religion*) is more successfully accomplished as a matter of practical rather than theoretical discourse: "This is in politics one of the most difficult tasks, which for centuries has been looking for a solution, and only occasionally here and there perhaps with more success pragmatically applied than theoretically resolved."²⁰

Looking back from 1814, Friedländer's introduction captures the hostile atmosphere surrounding the reasoned discussion of religion toward the end of the separation of church and state during Schiller's college years, during which Germany's premiere

²⁰ Karl J. Fink, "Kleist's Justice Beyond Tears: Kohlhaasian Manifestos after Kleist," in: *Heinrich von Kleist: Artistic and Political Legacies*, eds., Jeffrey L. High and Sophia Clark (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013) 23-44. Mendelssohn writes that "dieses ist in der Politik eine der schwersten Aufgaben, die man seit Jahrhunderten schon aufzulösen bemühet ist, und hie und da vielleicht glücklicher praktisch beygelegt, als theoretisch aufgelöst hat." (Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, Oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum* (Berlin: Maurer, 1783) 3.

dramatist, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), was prohibited from writing on religious topics in 1778 for his publication of a series of arguments for natural religion and against orthodox Christianity entitled *Fragmente eines Ungenannten* (*Fragments of an Unnamed Author*; 1774-1778) by Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768).²¹ Schiller himself was the subject of open charges of polytheism and blasphemy in 1788 for his poem "Die Götter Griechenlands" (*The Gods of Ancient Greece*).²²

²¹ "Against the Lutheran orthodoxy, whose scholarly writings endeavored to, as it was called, harmonize, the four gospels into one narrative in which inconsistencies were explained away, Reimarus suggested that these inconsistencies existed because the resurrection and other supernatural happenings simply never occurred. After Jesus's death the apostles and gospel writers had to scramble to set forth a system of miraculous stories to support their claims, just as any system of revealed religion will." Friederike von Schwerin-High, "Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's religious pluralism in *Nathan the Weise* and *The Fragments Controversy*," in *Enlightenment and Secularism*, ed., Christopher Nadon (Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 2013) 273-288.

²² In the August 1788 edition of *Deutsches Museum*, poet Friedrich Leopold Graf zu Stolberg (1750-1819) published the most prominent attack on Schiller and his "Die Götter Griechenlands," "Gedanken ueber Herrn Schillers Gedicht: 'Die Götter Griechenlands'" (*Thoughts on Mr. Schiller's Poem: 'The Gods of Ancient Greece*). See Jeffrey L. High, "Friedrich Schiller, Secular Virtue, and 'The Gods of Ancient Greece,'" in *Enlightenment and Secularism*, ed., Christopher Nadon (Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 2013) 315-324. Subsequent citations as "High, Secular Virtue and

II. Happiness and the Moral-Philosophical Function of Socrates' Death in Schiller's First Virtue Speech

In "Gehört allzuviel Güte, Leutseeligkeit und grosse Freygebigkeit im engsten Verstande zur Tugend?," his first essay on moral philosophy and aesthetics, Schiller quietly lays the philosophical foundation for a life-long program to promote a reasoned, secular alternative to a faith-based role model, embarking from and concluding with the thesis that the destiny of humankind is happiness, and the path to happiness is virtue. The essay presents the case for virtue in three parts, the first presenting Socrates as the role model for virtue, the second presenting the case against the outward appearance of virtue driven by ulterior motives, and the third on the importance of inner struggle in the difficult choice of virtue when it is to one's own personal disadvantage. These are followed by a lengthy and unsteady summary in which Schiller performs a balancing act between the appearance of piety and a spirit of heresy. The influence of Scottish Enlightenment eudaemonism and reconciliation philosophy in Schiller's thought is nowhere more self evident than in the Virtue Speech, which features the key concepts of disinterested virtue, the role of virtue in the perfection of the individual and civil society, and the means and end of happi-

The Gods of Ancient Greece" with page number(s).

ness as the destiny of humankind. The thesis that good acts are neither those which cause mere private happiness, nor those which are outwardly good, but done for ulterior motives, both of which are inspired by self interest, is the titular problem of Schiller's Virtue Speech. Striving to counter the concept of the state of nature described by John Locke and David Hobbes by establishing a harmony of public virtue and private self-interest, Shaftesbury stressed in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) that to the harmonious and whole member of society, not all pleasure is necessarily good, and not all "good" acts necessarily moral.²³ Subsequently, Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) argued in his *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) —"In Which the Principles of the late Earl of Shaftesbury are explain'd and defended"²⁴

²³ "But when Will and Pleasure are synonymous; when everything which pleases us is called pleasure, and we never choose or prefer but as we please; 'tis trifling to say 'Pleasure is our good.' For this has as little meaning as to say, 'We choose what we think eligible'; and, 'We are pleased with what delights or pleases us.' The question is, 'whether we are rightly pleased, and choose as we should do. [...] And as for some low and sordid pleasures of human kind, [...] I should never afford them the name of happiness or good." Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed., John M. Robertson (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1964). Here volume II, part II, section I, pages 29-30.

²⁴ The quote is from the title page of the 1725 edition of Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of our*

— and *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (1728) that virtue yields pleasure because it conforms to the natural “moral sense” of virtue, a feeling faculty separate from reason, while vice yields pain because it offends the natural moral sense. Embarking from the universality of the moral sense, Hutcheson coined the utilitarian motto that the altruistic regulative idea of ethics is to achieve the “greatest Happiness for the greatest numbers,” resulting in the greatest perfection and the greatest good, as stated in *An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* (1725).²⁵ Adam Ferguson (1723-1816) criticized Locke’s

Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; In Two Treatises, reprinted in: *Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*, ed., Peter Kivy (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973) 3. Subsequently cited as “Hutcheson 1725” with page number.

²⁵ Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*, in *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, reprint of the second edition of 1726 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1971) 109-304. Here section I, article 1, page 117. In comparing the moral Qualities of Actions, in order to regulate our Election among various Actions propos’d, or to find which of them has the greatest moral Excellency, we are led by our moral Sense of Virtue to judge thus; that in equal Degrees of Happiness, expected to proceed from the Action, the Virtue is in proportion to the Number of Persons to whom the Happiness shall extend; [...] and in equal Numbers, the Virtue is as the Quantity of the Happiness, [...] so that, that Action is best, which procures the greatest Happiness for the greatest numbers; and that, worst, which, in like manner, occasions Misery.” Hutcheson: *Good and Evil*, section III, part VIII, page 177.

theory of an “imagined state of nature”²⁶ in his *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767),²⁷ arguing that even the “rudest state of mankind” distinguished itself through the “desire of perfection.”²⁸ As is the case with Schiller in a series of subsequent texts, Ferguson, like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson before him, equates the measure of perfection with the happiness achieved.²⁹ Ferguson’s book *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* contains two substantial chapters elaborating the philosophy of happiness, entitled “Section VII: Of Happiness” and “Section VIII: The Same Subject continued,” though the entire work is informed by the postulates, “to diffuse happiness, is the law of morality”

²⁶ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, reprint of the 4th edition of 1773 (London: Gregg International Publishers, 1969). Here part I, section I, page 3. Subsequently cited as “Ferguson” with chapter, section, and page number.

²⁷ The German translation of *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* was published in 1768: *Versuch Über die Geschichte der Bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Leipzig: Junius, 1768).

²⁸ Ferguson, part I, section I, page 13. Kettler suggests that Ferguson considered Locke’s theory “socially irresponsible,” which demonstrates a correspondence between Ferguson’s work and Jefferson and Schiller’s social programs based on happiness (Kettler, 118, 111). Schiller cited Garve’s translation of Ferguson’s *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* in his first dissertation (NA 20:30-36).

²⁹ Schiller’s second Karlsschule speech, *Die Tugend in Ihren Folgen betrachtet* (1779-80), and his rejected first dissertation, *Philosophie der Physiologie* (1779), equate the terms “perfection” (*Vollkommenheit*) and “happiness” (*Glueckseligkeit*). See NA 20:11, 30.

(Ferguson, I, VI:62.) and “the happiness of individuals is the great end of civil society” (Ferguson, I, IX:95).

On the first page of the Virtue Speech, Schiller coins a resilient guiding construct for both his future critical thought and artistic production on freedom and happiness when he poses the teleologically informed question as to what decides between virtue and vice. He finds the answer in “die moralische Quelle der That” (the moral source of action; NA 20:3), “Liebe zur Glückseligkeit” (love of happiness; NA 20:3). Thus begins a decades long pursuit of happiness through art intended to resonate and effect change in the sphere of public authority. Here in 1779 as in his later writings, “der scharfsehende Verstand” (the sharp insight of reason, [later *Formtrieb*]; NA 20:3), pitted against “Neigung” (impulse and inclination; NA 20:3), guides the moral decision-making process. Reason tests each choice according to whether it will lead to greater happiness than its alternative, the deciding factor.³⁰ To this moral formula, Schiller adds the measure of greater and lesser virtue: “Je heller also, je gewaltiger, je dringender die gegenseitige Neigung desto höherer Verstand

³⁰ “Der Verstand muß jede Neigung prüfen ob sie zur Glückseligkeit leite” (Reason must test whether or not each impulse will lead to happiness; NA 20:3). “Sie, diese Liebe ist es, die zwischen zwey Gegenneigungen [Tugend und Untugend] den Ausschlag geben soll” (It is this love that is the decisive factor between two competing inclinations [virtue and vice]; NA 20:3).

— desto höhere Liebe — desto höhere Tugend” (The more vibrant, more powerful, more urgent the competing inclination, the greater reason demonstrated, the higher the love, the greater the virtue; NA 20:3). If the love of greater happiness, which implies selfless conduct even in the single most extreme case, guides the individual in all choices between the competing inclinations virtue and vice, then the most grave and telling choice is that of a virtuous death over an unfree life. A paradigmatic case, indeed, according to Schiller, the defining moment in the history of moral choice, is Socrates’ decision to choose death before coercion, as a contribution to the freedom and happiness of all. Here, the third paragraph in its entirety:

Ich sehe den erhabensten Geist, den je das Altertum gebahr, dem nie dämmerte der Offenbarung Gottes ein blasser Wiederstrahl; — Er hat den Giftbecher in der Hand — Hier Liebe zum Leben, — das mächtigste Drangsgefühl, das je eines Menschen Seele bestürmte; — dort zum Pfade höherer Seligkeit ihm winkend ein zitternder Schein, ein eigner durch das Forschen seines Geistes einsam erschaffner Gedanke — Was wird Sokrates wählen? — Das Weiseste. — Izt, o Weißheit, leite du seine entsezliche Freyheit — Tod — Vergehen — Unsterblichkeit — Krone des Himmels — Versieglung blutige — große — mächtige Versieglung seiner *neuen* Lehre! — Leite seine lezte entscheidende Freyheit scharfsehender Verstand — Entschieden — getrunken das Giff — Tod — Unsterblichkeit — Seine Lehre mächtig versiegelt! — Höchster Kampf; — höchster Verstand — erhabenste Liebe — erhabenste *Tugend!* Erhabner nichts unter hohem, bestirntem Himmel vollbracht!

I see the most sublime thinker ever born in the ancient world, who never caught the faintest glimmer

of divine revelation; — He has the cup of poison in his hand — Here the love of life, — the most powerful drive that ever stormed a human spirit; — there marking the path to higher happiness a flickering light calls to him, an original idea, arrived at through of the solitary investigation of his mind — What will Socrates choose? — The wisest. — Now, oh wisdom, guide his terrible freedom — death — passing — immortality — the crown of heaven — bloody seal — great — mighty seal of his new teachings! — Guide his final, decisive freedom, sharp-eyed reason — Chosen — the poison drunk — death — immortality — mightily sealed his teachings — greatest struggle — highest reason — most sublime love — most sublime virtue! No more sublime deed done under the great starry heavens! (NA 20:3-4)

According to Schiller's introductory formula, Socrates' "greatest struggle" results in the reconciliation of competing inclinations of reason (toward "higher happiness") and the most basic of natural sensual drives (toward survival). There can be no more terrible form of moral freedom, nor any more unquestionable demonstration of "highest reason," than the choice of the more virtuous of two inclinations here, in the face of the most disadvantageous personal consequences, the ultimate act of self-determination in the choice of one's own death. Schiller, like Mendelssohn, declares Socrates' decision to die the ultimate proof of his practice of his own teachings.³¹ With the choice of virtue over vice, Schiller

³¹ Note the parallel between Schiller's description of the death of Socrates and Mendelssohn's: "sein Bekenntnis mit dem Tode zu versiegeln" (to sign and seal his belief system with his death; Mendelssohn, 14).

argues, humankind's "terrible freedom," namely, the requisite autonomy to choose personal disadvantage over personal advantage as a reconciliation of duty with desire, the greatest possible freedom from sensual-physical coercion is evident. But Schiller could have found other examples of such behavior and did so in almost all of his major works. What qualifies Socrates above all others as not only "most sublime thinker ever born in the ancient world," but the man who accomplished the most "sublime deed done under the great starry heavens," is his rejection of belief in a reward in the afterlife, and the assumption implied in the first line of Schiller's description, that giving one's only life without comfort — as opposed to abandoning a dreary prelude to bliss — when one should in the name of the future happiness of others, but does not have to, is the most extreme test of virtue. Schiller returns to the singularity of this test case in the subsequent paragraphs and in his later portrayals of Socrates. The first segment of the *Virtue Essay* concludes with his definition of the essence of virtue as altruism: "Liebe zur Glückseligkeit, geleitet durch den Verstand — Tugend ist das harmonische Band von Liebe und Weißheit!" (Love of happiness, guided through reason — virtue is the harmonious band that unites love and wisdom; NA 20:4). The second part of the definition, the thesis as well as the metaphorical leitmotif of the speech, appears another four times, at least once in

each segment of the speech (NA 20:4, 5, 6, 8).

In the second segment, comprising paragraphs 7-11, Schiller, like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson above, strictly differentiates between the moral inspiration of a deed and its reception, between appearance and ulterior motives. To illustrate the political application of the end of virtue as happiness of the whole, Schiller contrasts Socrates' sublime reconciliation of reason and sensuality (ennobled reason), as the example for the potential totality of the individual with a world history of tyrants and rebels, at least partially lifted from Hutcheson and Ferguson.³² The contrastive analysis of their actions demonstrates a lacking totality, which results in moral perversions marked either by a dangerous one-sided dictatorship sensuality (love) or theoretical reason (wisdom), and Schiller proceeds to analyze them according to the Socrates criterion, whether or not they advanced the goal of humankind — happiness of the whole. The examples are di-

³² Schiller's discussions of tyrants and rebels address Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, Ravaiillac, Catiline (NA, 20:4-6), and the relative merits of Brutus (NA 20:40, 161), Lycurgus (NA 20:33; 22:75, 174), and Solon (NA 20:34), a parallel to Ferguson's frequent uses of mostly the same tyrants, rebels, and lawgivers to explain moral theses: Julius Caesar (Ferguson I, X:120) Brutus (Ferguson I, VIII:84), and Lycurgus and Solon (Ferguson I, IX:98). All Ferguson references appear in Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, reprint of the 4th edition of 1773 (London 1969), with chapter and page numbers.

vided into two clear categories: the dominance of abstract reason unchecked by feeling, and the dominance of sensuality unchecked by reason, which break down as follows: 1) under the dictatorship of reason: Ravaiillac's regicide and Catiline's arsonist murder represent "verlarvtes Laster" (vice in disguise; NA 20:5); and 2) under the dictatorship of sensuality: Julius Caesar's entertainment of the masses with games and gifts as "Herrschaft" and "Ehrgeiz" (hunger for power and ambition; NA 20:5),³³ Absalom's "embracing the lowest citizens" as "thirst for control,"³⁴ and Augustus Caesar's desire to "become immortal" as "lasciviousness."³⁵ According to Schiller's argument, ostensibly good acts that appear to contribute to the happiness of the whole, such as rebellion against tyranny, often prove not to be motivated by virtue after all, but by selfish impulses of the mind or the body that actually threaten the happiness of the whole. Throughout, Schiller refers back to his thesis, concluding of his tyrants and rebels that either, "Hier war die Güte mit Weißheit aber nicht mit Liebe im bund" (Here kindness was in

³³ "Ich sehe den großen Julius das Römische Volk mit Spielen belustigen — mit Geschenken und Gaben überschwemmen" (NA 20:4).

³⁴ "Was war der Grundtrieb [...], daß er [...] in die Umarmung der niedrigsten Bürger sank? [...] der Durst nach Herrschaft" (NA 20:5).

³⁵ "unsterblich werden mit den Unsterblichen" and "wollüstiges Gefühl" (NA 20:5). Mendelssohn similarly describes the motivations of the Sophists as "Geiz, Ehrfurcht oder Wollust" (Mendelssohn 7-8).

league with wisdom [reason] but not with love [feeling]; NA 20:5), or “Hier also war Güte die Larve des in der Tiefe der Seele lauernden Lasters” (Thus here, kindness was merely masking vice lurking deep in the soul; NA 20:5).³⁶

The third segment, on moral resistance, comprising paragraphs 12-16, represents one of the great masterpieces of Schillerian double-speak, a skill that was evidently as valuable at the Karlsschule as it would prove to be in Schiller’s dealings with censors. Indeed, it is baffling why it took until 1788 for Schiller to be accused of outright blasphemy. Returning to his description of Socrates’ decision to choose death before coercion as “höchster Kampf,” Schiller in-

³⁶ For Schiller, as evidenced by the moral focus of his earliest and his latest theoretical works, the pursuit of totality and harmony through the reconciliation of drives was the unsolved problem of humanity and thus the challenge for his drama figures. The historical figures Schiller invoked to illustrate this early moral-aesthetic theory mirror the actual later characters in his dramas. The story of Absalom, the biblical son of King David, who conspired against his father and was killed during his father’s officer Joab’s coup attempt has most of the elements of *Don Karlos* and *Fiesco*; Socrates’ sublime composure and autonomy in the face of death parallels that of Marquis Posa, Maria Stuart, and Joan of Arc; Ravaiillac’s murder of a tyrant mirrors Charlotte Corday, his revolutionary hunger for power mirrors *Fiesco*, and Catiline mirrors *Fiesco*’s hunger for power as well as Karl Moor’s terror campaign. In a further important link between the early theoretical works and the early dramas, both *Fiesco* and Franz Moor are discussed in Schiller’s second dissertation (NA 20:60) as psychological case histories already in 1779-80.

roduces the measure of “Kampf der Seele” (inner moral struggle; NA 20:6) as the measure of virtue: “Die schönste That ohne Kampf begangen hat gar geringen Werth gegen derjenigen die durch großen Kampf errungen ist” (The most beautiful deed done without struggle has precious little worth when compared to that achieved through great struggle; NA 20:6). A person with all the trappings of wealth runs no risk in an act of charity, indeed, such a person is likely to gain from such an act, thus there is no “Gegengewicht” (counterbalance) to the “Neigung Wohlzuthun” (inclination to do good; NA 20:7), and the act is merely outwardly good, but not virtuous. Following the order of considerations in his title, Schiller proceeds to address whether “Leutseligkeit” (sociability) necessarily constitutes virtue. According to the established formula, “jener Große dort der seinen Adel seine Hoheit von sich legt” (that particular person of importance there, who sets aside his nobility, his highness; NA 20:6) and fraternizes with the common man, does not demonstrate virtue, because he lacks “das Gefühl eigener innerer Erhabenheit” (the inner sense of sublime sacrifice; NA 20:6) that would serve as a counterbalance to meaningless sociability; on the contrary, such an encounter is more likely to inflate his pride: “So ist demnach allzuviel Güte und Leutseligkeit und große Freygebigkeit das harmonische Band von Liebe und Weißheit nicht; — so hat sie keinen Kampf gekostet; [...] Sie ist nicht *Tugend!*”

(Therefore, all too much kindness, sociability, and great generosity does not constitute the harmonious band between love and wisdom — for it cost no struggle [...] This is not virtue; NA 20:7). The subversive irony cannot be lost that Schiller will go on to praise both the Duke Carl Eugen and his extra-marital partner Franziska von Hohenheim, neither of whom were popular with the students, in terms that parallel his description of Socrates, directly after he had disqualified facile good deeds by the obscenely wealthy and socializing with the lower classes for the sake of one's own ego from the class of virtuous acts. Schiller closes the speech with a disingenuous vision of “die Söhne der Zukunft” (future sons) at Carl Eugen's funeral (referred to as a “Fest” or celebration), and yet another future generation searching — evidently in vain — through the grave markers for those of “Wirtembergs trefflicher Carl” (Württemberg's worthy Carl) and “Franziska, die Freundin der Menschen” (Franziska, the friend, [or girlfriend] of humanity; NA 20:9).

It would be unrealistic to expect Schiller to express himself entirely freely in writing at an institution where once mere feudal subjects were sentenced to teenage years spent in the total absence of freedom. This makes it difficult to discern what in the Karlsschule writings Schiller wants to write, and what he is required to write. On the other hand, there are enough examples of Schiller's surprising recklessness in this regard. In his second dissertation,

Schiller cites thirteen lines of the entirely fabricated “*Life of Moor*. A Tragedy by Krake” (NA 20:60), which is nearly word for word lines 44-56 of act V, scene 1 of *Die Räuber* (NA 3:117-118). It is highly likely that Schiller developed his trademark kaleidoscope of metaphors in response to the police state censorship of the Karlsschule.³⁷ In keeping with the practice established in his earliest poems, in the Virtue Speech Schiller works on a number of metaphorical registers, including pagan and biblical imagery from both the Old and New Testaments.³⁸ In the fifth of twenty-three

³⁷ For a familiar example of a Schiller poem that employs a blur of interfaith and deist metaphor, yet remains palatable to adherents of the most diverse beliefs, see Schiller's “An die Freude” (Ode to Joy, 1785; NA 1:169-172). See also Jeffrey L. High, “Schiller, Freude Kleist and Rache / On the German Freedom Ode,” in Dieter Sevin and Christoph Zeller, eds., *Form - Violence - Meaning: Two Hundred Years Heinrich von Kleist* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013) 123-145, here 130-131.

³⁸ In the strictly monitored religious confines of the Karlsschule, Schiller established the inscrutable practice of mixing philosophical with mythological and religious metaphors, and expressing modern experience in ancient metaphor. This is evident from the earliest poems written at the Karlsschule — “Der Abend” (At Dusk, 1776), “Der Eroberer” (The Conqueror, 1776) to the last — “Elisium” (1780 or 1781) and “Gruppe aus dem Tartarus” (A Group from Tartarus; 1780 or 1781), and continues in his mature poetry. Calvin Thomas notes the “free blending of Christian with pagan conceptions.” Calvin Thomas, *The Life and Works of Friedrich Schiller* (New York: Holt, 1906) 67-68. For centuries, critics have confused Schiller's metaphorical expression of the inexpressible with a genuine ex-

paragraphs, an unrecognizable version of God the Creator appears in the equation: he was inspired by endless love to create a world out of chaos, he was guided by endless wisdom to give it order and harmony through immutable laws. Thus love and wisdom comprise God's relationship to all creation, and virtue, the harmonious band between love and wisdom, is the emulation of God (NA 20:4). Three paragraphs later, in the seventh paragraph, the highest "Gottheit" (deity; NA 20:5) is Jupiter. In the fifteenth paragraph, Schiller addresses an entirely nondescript God of Klopstock's ode, "Für den König" (For the King; NA 20:7, NA21:113). The eighteenth paragraph is dedicated to "Liebe" (love; NA 20:7), which is first "die Krone der Tugend" (the crown of virtue; NA 20:7) and then "Erstgebohrne des Himmels" (heaven's first-born; NA 20:7), and features four exhortations to bow before this concept of love, including one to nature, one to the human, one to an angel, and one to all (NA 20:7-8). In the nineteenth paragraph, "Weißheit! Schönste Gespielin der Liebe" (Wisdom! Most beautiful playmate of love) appears as "das meisterwerk Gottes" (God's masterpiece) and "des Schöpfers

pression of religious conviction, though, they provide no evidence why anyone might agree with them, aside from the fact that metaphors can be vague. As in the Virtue Essay, Schiller's more spiritual outbursts are routinely accompanied by heretical or blasphemous ideas. For a sampling of positions on Schiller and religion, see High, "Schiller and (no) Religion," 144.

großherrlicher Plan" (the creator's grand design; NA 20:8). All of these references are anchored in seven exhortations to worship "Weißheit," which is a synonym for "große Unendliche Natur" (great, infinite nature; NA 20:8) and "ewiges Uhrwerk" (eternal clockwork; NA 20:8). The paragraph ends with a final command to worship, love, wisdom, and "Tugend" (virtue; NA 20:8). In the twentieth paragraph, Schiller appeals to the "Göttin der Wohlthätigkeit" (Goddess of Charity; NA 20:8). There are perhaps as many as three clear allusions to the New Testament, all of which, significantly, refer to the Sermon on the Mount,³⁹ where Christ appears more than elsewhere as a human teaching humans and admonishing — in terms of separation of church and state, and in close agreement with Schiller's thesis regarding ulterior motives — that hypocrites worship in public displays of piety are at best questionable, and personal beliefs are best kept private.⁴⁰

The most remarkable comment on virtue and religion comes in the final two

³⁹ "der Gottmensch auf dem Tabor" (NA 20:4); "einer mitleidigen Träne in Hütten geweint" (NA 20:5); and "Nein! Die Armen in den Hütten ruf ich itz auf [...] Im Hertenzen dieser dieser Unschuldigen wird Franziskens Andenken herrlicher gefeyert, als durch die Pracht dieser Versammlung" (NA 20:9).

⁴⁰ Schiller is not alone in singling out the Sermon on the Mount: "Deists like Jefferson and Franklin went so far as to believe that the only thing worth keeping of the Christian faith was the Sermon on the Mount." Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992) 158.

paragraphs (15-16) of the third segment (on moral resistance, paragraphs 12-16). Again returning to “die ächte Tugend des Weisen” (the true virtue of the sage; NA 20:7) as a role model, Schiller switches metaphorical registers from the judgment of a powerful Old Testament God — who knows the source of all superficially good deeds at their conception and rewards or punishes them before they reach fruition (reminiscent of Socrates’ concept of retribution in the here and now) — to the power of virtue over the ever-changing demands of gods throughout history and thus the ever-changing pseudo-virtue of religion: “Ihm [dem Weisen] ist sie [die Tugend] ein mächtiger Harnisch gegen-trotzend den Donnern des Himmels ein gewaltiger Schirm wenn zu Trümmern gehen die Himmel, wie vor dem Winde Spreu hinwegflattert” (For the sage, virtue is a mighty armor, defying the thunder of heaven, a powerful shield when all the heavens fall to ruins, blown away like chaff in the wind; NA 20:7). Note Schiller’s uses of “Himmel” as both a singular and a plural noun. “Himmel” is a collective noun that already can mean “the heavens,” thus Schiller’s unusual use of the plural form “die Himmel” would appear to indicate a coming age when all non-metaphorical concepts of the realm of gods will collapse. To the question of whether the chaff in question is more inspired by Socrates or the Bible,⁴¹ the logic appears to indicate the

former. There is no mention here of the ungodly to be blown away like chaff; on the contrary, it is the heavens that will be blown away like chaff, and left standing will be the sage, Socrates, in his impenetrable virtue. Despite the practical limits of freedom of speech at the Karlsschule, where daily prayer and an intensive curriculum in religion were mandatory, Christ warrants little more than these few veiled mentions in Schiller’s oeuvre, whereas Socrates continues to be an important figure, and Schiller’s introduction to the Virtue Speech implies that Socrates is most sublime because of — not in spite of — his ignorance of Judeo-Christian revelation. Throughout the essay, Christ is never mentioned by name. Of the positive role models mentioned by name, Socrates, Roman Emperor and stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE; NA 20:8), who promoted stoicism over Christianity, and Cathmor, the paragon of virtue in James Macpherson’s *Ossian* (1760; NA 20:8), all three are pagans.

Schiller’s thesis in the Virtue Speech is that the realm of moral-political possibility is polarized into fields of potential acts that constitute virtue and result in moral happiness (those of Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, and Cathmor) and those that constitute its many perversions, selfish pursuits of personal happiness (those of Ravallac and Catiline, Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar,

the chaff which the wind driveth away.”

⁴¹ Psalms 1:4: “The ungodly *are* not so: but *are* like

and Absalom).⁴² In essence, every day, each individual has a fresh opportunity to save or doom the forever-endangered potential republic. This thesis demonstrates a remarkable consistency over the final decades of Schiller's life, after his study of Kant and long after he famously expressed his disgust with the French Revolution, events often said to bring about changes in Schiller's thought. In particular, the arguments in the Virtue Speech and Schiller's portrayal of Socrates as the ideal guarantor of human happiness serve as important components of Schiller's future moral-aesthetic writings. First, the choice of death and freedom over life and servitude is the lynchpin of Schiller's aesthetic and drama theory, since in this one extreme choice, the decision for death and freedom, the victory of freedom over the slavery to the desire to live is a universally moving experience and the most obvious and shocking exercise of freedom that can be portrayed

⁴² In *Philosophische Briefe* (Philosophical Letters; 1786), that is, prior to the criticism of *Don Karlos* that prompted Schiller's theoretical defense of Marquis Posa's inferred moral failure, and before Schiller had read Kant, Schiller articulated the variations of perversion with a new vocabulary, but with the same parameters and results. Here the category "goodness in league with wisdom, but not with love" (NA 20:5) of 1779 appears as "theoretical reason" (theoretische Vernunft), an "incomplete enlightenment" ("halbe Aufklärung"), which describes the state of the dangerous ideologue. In a further parallel, theoretical reason reconciled with sensual nature ("höchster Verstand") is now "erleuchtete Verstand" (enlightened reason; NA 20:107).

to an audience. Second, the Virtue Essay is the first writing by Schiller extant that articulates the function of happiness in Schiller's moral-political theory in philosophical terms. However, the political application of Schiller's happiness discourse is already readily evident in his first published poem, "Der Abend" (At Dusk, 1777), in which Schiller refers to "andre, ach! glücksel'gre Welten" (other, oh! happier worlds; NA 1:3). It is evident from the description of the sun setting in Europe and rising across the Atlantic that by "happier worlds" revolutionary North America is intended, and that "happiness" here serves as the distinctive marker of the discourse of modern revolution.

In each of Schiller's subsequent theoretical treatises, the end and the regulative moral principle of humanity is autonomy and happiness of the whole through autonomy and happiness of the individual. In the first chapter of his rejected first dissertation, *Philosophie der Physiologie* (Philosophy of Physiology, 1779), Schiller again seeks to establish the destiny of humankind, and concludes, "Diß ist Glückseligkeit" (This is happiness; NA 20:10-11).⁴³ In the second Karlsschule speech,

⁴³ Schiller also grounded his moral aesthetics in *Philosophie der Physiologie* in Scottish terms closely resembling Adam Ferguson's gravitation analogy: "Was den Menschen jener Bestimmung näher bringt, es sei nun mittelbar oder unmittelbar, das wird ihn ergözen. Was ihn von ihr entfernt, wird ihn schmerzen. Was ihn schmerzt, wird er meiden, was ihn ergötzt, danach wird er ringen" (That which

“Die Tugend in ihren Folgen betrachtet” (The Consequences of Virtue Considered, 1779-80), Schiller asserts likewise in the first paragraph, that the source and the consequences — the means and the ends — of virtue are “Vollkommenheit” (perfection) and “Glückseligkeit” (happiness; NA, 20:30), the same pair that appear in the same context in the fourth of the *Ästhetische Briefe* (Aesthetic Letters, 1795; NA 20:354) and in *Über Naive und Sentimentalische Dichtung* (On Naive and Sentimental Poetry, 1795; NA 20:427-428). In Act III, Scene II of *Die Räuber* (The Robbers, 1781), Schiller’s main character Karl Moor asks the other robbers what is the measure of humankind’s quest, and answers his own question with, “das wunderseltame Wettrennen nach Glückseligkeit” (the astonishingly strange race toward happiness; NA 3:78). In Schiller’s speech *Die Schaubühne als moralische Anstalt betrachtet*

brings the human closer to his destiny, either directly or indirectly, will make him happy. That which distances him from this goal will cause him pain. That what hurts him, he will avoid, that which delights him, he will pursue; NA 20:11). “[...] er [der Mensch] wird ewig wachsen, aber es [das Maas der Unendlichkeit] niemals erreichen” (he [the human being] will always grow, but never achieve [the measure of infinity]; NA 20:10). Note that Schiller’s definition of the regulative idea here is a paraphrase of Mendelssohn’s Socrates: “[...] der Weg zu derselben [Vollkommenheit] ist unendlich, kann in Ewigkeiten nicht ganz zurückgelegt werden” ([...] the path to the same [perfection] is infinite, and cannot entirely be achieved in eternities; Mendelssohn, 188).

(The Stage Considered as Moral Institution) of 26 June 1784, the education of humankind toward the ultimate goal of happiness and autonomy via art is best achieved through the observable presentation of the stage: “Was wirkt die Bühne? Die höchste und letzte Foderung [...] Beförderung allgemeiner Glückseligkeit [...] Menschen- und Volksbildung” (What does the stage accomplish? The highest and ultimate challenge [...] the promotion of general *happiness* [...] the education of the individual and the people; NA 20:88). To this end, Schiller adds, the wise legislator introduces the stage in order to redirect the impulses and drives of the people into “Quellen von Glückseligkeit” (sources of happiness; NA 20:90). In *Philosophische Briefe* (Philosophical Letters, 1786), the path from mere belief to truth achieved through reason is a “Quelle von Glückseligkeit” (source of happiness; NA 20:107). In *Ueber die tragische Kunst* (On Tragic Art, 1790-92) and in *Ueber Anmuth und Würde* (On Grace and Dignity, 1793), it is the “Glückseligkeitstrieb” (drive to pursue *happiness*) that elicits feelings of desire and repulsion in the theater audience.⁴⁴ In *Ueber den Grund des Vergnügens an tragischen Gegenständen* (On the Reason for the Enjoyment of Tragic Objects, 1792) Schiller writes: “Daß der Zweck der Natur mit dem Menschen seine Glückseligkeit sey, [...] wird wohl niemand bezweifeln”

⁴⁴ NA 20:149 and NA 20:282. Cf. Hutcheson: *Good and Evil*, VI, VII:261.

(No one will doubt that [...] nature's intended end for humankind is its happiness; NA 20:133). It takes Schiller an entire two and a half sentences to get to the regulative idea of the *Ästhetische Briefe*, which is "happiness."⁴⁵

Not only the end of all human pursuits is the same, but the path to happiness has proven surprisingly stable. When one compares the First Virtue Speech to the later theoretical treatises, one finds the arguments from the former restated in new contexts. In *Ueber Anmuth und Würde* (1793), Schiller articulates three possible states of development; 1) dictatorship of reason (*Formtrieb*) over sensuality (*Stofftrieb*); 2) dictatorship of sensuality over reason; and 3) harmonious reconciliation of sensuality and reason and of duty and inclination, which after some fourteen years remains Schiller's prerequisite for virtue. In both the letters to Augustenburg and the *Ästhetische Briefe*, Schiller provides a direct comparison of the same two categories of perversion. In his letter to Augustenburg of 13 July 1793 and in the *Ästhetische Briefe*, Schiller describes the paradoxical gulf between the "Inhalt" (mo-

⁴⁵ "Glückseligkeit" is no less than the stated end to be pursued in the first paragraph of the *Ästhetische Briefe* (1795). Indeed, it is the thirteenth word of the first sentence of content after the dedication: "Ich werde von einem Gegenstande sprechen, der mit dem besten Theil unsrer Glückseligkeit in einer unmittelbaren, und mit dem moralischen Adel der menschlichen Natur in keiner sehr entfernten Verbindung steht" (NA 20: 309).

tivation) and "Verhandlungsart" (act itself), as well as "Inhalt" (motivation) and "Folgen" (consequences) of rebellion, and employs the now sixteen-year-old "band that unites wisdom and love" again in the context of rebellion, specifically the French Revolution, which demonstrates the dictatorship of reason in its leaders, and the dictatorship of sensuality in its followers: "Wenn die Kultur ausartet, so geht sie in eine weit bössartigere Verderbniß über, als die Barbarey je erfahren kann. Der sinnliche Mensch kann nicht tiefer als zum Thier herabstürzen" (When civilization degenerates, it falls into a much more malicious state of decay than barbarism ever can. The sensual human being can't fall any deeper than an animal state).⁴⁶ The abstract theoretical human being, Schiller concludes, is capable of rationalizing diabolical disregard for humanity. In the third of the *Ästhetische Briefe*, Schiller promotes the cultivation of "den dritten Charakter" (the third character), the medium between sensual and rational nature. In a political context, the harmonic third character reconciles the sensual "Herrschaft bloßer Kräfte" (rule of mere might) of the "Notstaat" or "Naturstaat" (state of nature) with the rational "Herrschaft der Gesetze" (rule of law) of the "Vernunftstaat" (state

⁴⁶ NA 26:263. Presumably in the summer of 1793, Schiller wrote the undated note entitled *Methode*, in which he wrote: "Der Mensch ist mächtig, gewaltsam, er ist listig und kann geistreich seyn lang eh er vernünftig wird" (NA 21:90).

of reason; NA 20:315). In the fourth of the *Ästhetische Briefe*, Schiller concludes that the lack of the third character made the terror of the French Revolution not only possible but fairly unavoidable: “Soviel ist gewiß: nur das Uebergewicht eines solchen [dritten] Charakters bey einem Volk kann eine Staatsverwandlung nach moralischen Principien unschädlich machen, und auch nur ein solcher Charakter kann ihre Dauer verbürgen” (So much is certain: only the preponderance of such a third character in a people can render a change of government harmless, and also only such a character can guarantee its endurance.”⁴⁷ Also in the fourth letter, Schiller again returns to the triadic model of totality and perversion of 1779: “Der Mensch kann sich aber auf eine doppelte Weise entgegen gesetzt sein: entweder als Wilder, wenn seine Gefühle über seine Grundsätze herrschen; oder als Barbar, wenn seine Grundsätze seine Gefühle zerstören” (The human being can work against himself in a twofold sense: either as a savage, when his feelings rule over his principles; or as a barbarian, when his principles destroy his feelings; NA 20:318). The reconciliation of these two inclinations is “Totalität des Charakters” (totality of character; NA 20:318), the ennobled state of reason, which is the prerequisite for a political state of freedom, as

⁴⁷ NA 20:315. See the discussion of the *Ästhetische Briefe* by Nicholas Martin, who compares these excerpts. Nicholas Martin, *Schiller and Nietzsche. Untimely Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 72.

Schiller formulates in the fourth of the *Ästhetische Briefe*: “Totalität des Charakters muß also bey dem Volke gefunden werden, welches fähig und würdig seyn soll, den Staat der Noth mit dem Staat der Freyheit zu vertauschen” (Totality of character must be found in the people who would be capable and worthy of exchanging the state of necessity with the state of freedom; NA 20:318). Indeed, in each of Schiller’s treatises from 1779-1795, the end and the regulative moral principle of humanity is autonomy and happiness of the whole through autonomy and happiness of the individual. Socrates appears as an example in four of them.

III. Socrates in Schiller’s Subsequent Works

Given the consistency of Schiller’s theory of the autonomy required for self-governing, proceeding from the dedication to “happiness” to “wisdom in league with love” and “totality of character” embodied foremost in Socrates, it is hardly surprising to find Socrates as the paradigmatic sublime hero of wisdom in the poem “Rousseau” (1782) and four further aesthetic treatises: *Brief eines reisenden Dänen* (Letter of a Traveling Dane, 1785), *Über die tragische Kunst* (On Tragic Art, 1791), the *Ästhetische Briefe* (Aesthetic Letters, 1795), and *Über Naive und Sentimentalische Dichtung* (On Naive and Sentimental Poetry, 1795). In 1782, Schiller produces a blasphemous compari-

son of Socrates, Christ, and Rousseau in his early poem, "Rousseau."⁴⁸ Regarding Rousseau's persecution by his own countrymen, Schiller draws a remarkable parallel between Socrates' death at the hands of the sophists and, according to Schiller's portrayal, Rousseau's death at the hands of Christians, as two cases of collusion of politics and religious orthodoxy: "Wann wird doch die alte Wunde narben? / Einst war's finster — und die Weisen starben! / Nun ist's lichter, — und der Weise stirbt. / Sokrates ging unter durch Sophisten, / Rousseau leidet — Rousseau fällt durch Christen, / Rousseau — der aus Christen Menschen wirbt" (When will ancient wounds be healed? / Once was dark — and the wise men died! / Now is lighter, — and the wise man dies. / Socrates was brought down by sophists, / Rousseau suffers — falls at the hands of Christians, / Rousseau — who sought to make Christians humans!; NA 1:62). Rousseau was specifically persecuted for removing divine

⁴⁸ Calvin Thomas notes: "Schiller seems to have got his idea of Rousseau chiefly from H. P. [Helfrich Peter] Sturz's *Denkwürdigkeiten von Johann Jakob Rousseau* (1779)," from which Thomas cites Rousseau's recollection of his persecution for his criticism of the papacy and of religious orthodoxy first by the Parisian parliament, then by the city council of Geneva, the Protestant minister of a village, and finally in Bern (Thomas 67-68). See also Helfrich Peter Sturz, "Denkwürdigkeiten von Johann Jakob Rousseau" in *Schriften von Helfrich Peter Sturz* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1779) 129-179, here 150-168. Sturz compares Rousseau to Socrates on page 179 of his essay (NA 2IIA:63).

speculation from Christianity in *Emile*, much as Jefferson would do later in the *Jefferson Bible*, addressed in the next unit. In the sixth stanza of Schiller's poem, horns signal Judgment Day and the resurrection of the dead Rousseau, and in the tenth stanza, Schiller makes a sarcastic reference to the eighteen centuries to pass without improvement since Christ's birth, for, as revealed with bitter irony in the final stanza, Rousseau, like Socrates, was one in a series of Christ-like martyrs: "Rousseau doch du warst ein Christ," a play on the German word "Christ," which can mean here either "Rousseau, you, too, were a Christian," or "Rousseau, you, too, were a Christ" (NA 1:63). Given the context and the earlier comparison to Socrates, the text makes entirely more sense with the latter.

Schiller features Socrates' wisdom and his willingness to die for his principles in four further works on aesthetics and morality between 1786 and 1795. In "Brief eines reisenden Dänen," Socrates appears again as a role model for freedom. Socrates, who "für seine Weißheit starb" (died for his wisdom; NA 20:106), is not only a reminder of a better Greece, but "eine Ausforderung dieses Volks an alle Völker der Erde" (a challenge by the Greeks to all peoples of the earth; NA 20:106). The key to the achievements of ancient Greece lie not in the artworks themselves, but in the philosophy that informed them, a philosophy that accepted that the human being could strive to be "mehr als er selbst war" (more than he was; NA 20:105), and al-

lowed the thinker “jede Spekulation über die Fortdauer der Seele ersparen” (to spare himself any speculation about the afterlife of the soul; NA 20: 105). Without the moral distraction of the Christian concept of the afterlife — an incentive to behave virtuously for selfish reasons, “ein Surrogat der wahren Tugend” (a surrogate for true virtue; NA 26:330-31) — the Greeks were more free to focus on actual virtue: “Die Griechen philosophierten trostlos, glaubten noch trostloser, und handelten — gewiß nicht minder edel als wir” (The Greeks philosophized without comfort, held even less comforting beliefs, and acted — certainly no less noble than we do; NA 20:105). In *Über die tragische Kunst* (On Tragic Art, 1791), Schiller explains the importance of universality in the choice of tragic subjects for the theater, addressing grades of truth from subjective to objective, and arguing of the subjective class that in order to understand a Roman’s response to the judgment of Brutus or the suicide of Cato, one would have to be a Roman. Thus the portrayal of an event of subjective significance that requires insider knowledge is likely to have “einen engeren Wirkungskreis” (a more select sphere of influence; NA 20:161). Of the objectively tragic, Schiller writes: “Hingegen braucht man bloß Mensch überhaupt zu seyn, um durch die heldenmüthige Aufopferung eines Leonidas, durch die ruhige Ergebung eines Aristid, durch den freywilligen Tod eines Sokrates in eine hohe Rührung versetzt, um durch

den schrecklichen Glückswechsel eines Darius zu Thränen hingerissen zu werden” (Conversely, one needs only to be a human being to be moved to the great emotion by the heroic sacrifice of a Leonidas, by the quiet humility of an Aristides, by the voluntary death of a Socrates; or to be moved to tears by the terrible turn of fortune of a Darius; NA 20:161). In the *Ästhetische Briefe*, Socrates, along with the last honest politician Phocion (402-318 BCE), represents one of two isolated exceptions to a Greek culture civilized and alienated from nature to the point of near universal superficiality and dishonesty (NA 20:338-339): “Als unter dem Perikles und Alexander das goldenen Alter der Künste herbeykam, und die Herrschaft des Geschmacks sich allgemeiner verbreitete, findet man Griechenlands Kraft und Freyheit nicht mehr, die Beredtsamkeit verfälschte die Wahrheit, die Weisheit beleidigte in dem Mund eines Sokrates, und die Tugend in dem Leben eines Phocion” (When under Pericles and Alexander the golden age of arts arrived, and refined taste expanded its reign more generally, one no longer finds the strength and freedom of Greece; eloquence made falsehood truth, and the wisdom that came from the lips of a Socrates, the virtue displayed in the life of a Phocion, became merely offensive; NA 20:339). In *Über Naive und Sentimentalische Dichtung* (On Naive and Sentimental Poetry, 1795), Schiller argues that even in the satirical portrayals of Socrates by Aristophanes (448-380 BCE) and Lucian of Samosata

(125-180 CE), the attack on the reason of Socrates says more about his critics than about him: "Selbst durch den boshafte[n] Scherz, womit sowohl Lucian als Aristophanes den Sokrates mißhandeln, blickt eine ernste Vernunft hervor, welche die Wahrheit an dem Sophisten rächt, und für ein Ideal streitet, das sie nur nicht immer ausspricht" (Even amid the mean-spirited parody, to which Lucien and Aristophanes subject Socrates, serious reason peaks through, the truth of which betrays the sophist and fights for an ideal not even necessarily addressed; NA 20:447). In *The Clouds* (423 BCE), Aristophanes caricatures Socrates as a clownish sophist, which Plato mentions in *The Apology* as a contributing factor in the atmosphere that led to Socrates' trial and suicide.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Lucian not only satirizes Socrates in *The Passing of Peregrinus* (165 CE), in which Peregrinus appears as the new Socrates, but also dismisses Christ and Christianity in terms that parallel those of late Enlightenment critics: "The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody, most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws." A. M. Harmon, *Lucian*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1936) 15. See Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000) 59.

IV. A Survey of Schiller's Contemporaries on the Secularist Function of Socrates

Benjamin Franklin's list of 13 main virtues, the thirteenth of which regards Humility, features a common pair of Late Enlightenment role models: "13. Humility: Imitate Jesus and Socrates" (Franklin, 38). As Franklin himself documented, he was not a Christian, but a deist. In his letter to Ezra Stiles of 9 March 1790, Franklin outlines his attitude towards Christ and Christianity, stressing that he admires Christ the moral philosopher, while indicating that he has no interest in "his Religion":

As to Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think his system of morals and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is like to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England, some doubts as to his divinity; though it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble. I see no harm, however, in its being believed, if that belief has the good consequence, as probably it has, of making his doctrines more respected and more observed; especially as I do not perceive that the Supreme takes it amiss, by distinguishing the unbelievers, in his government of the world, with any peculiar marks of his displeasure.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ John Bigelow, ed., *The Complete Works of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1888) vol. 10, 192-195. Here 194.

Franklin's brief response to Stiles' question constitutes substantially more than a polite expression of distance toward Christianity. First, Franklin writes that he considers Christ's moral philosophy and "his Religion" to be without equal. It is, however, impossible to reconcile the common usage of the term "religion," as opposed to philosophy, with the sentiments that Franklin delivers next. Franklin questions the divinity of Christ without interest in researching the matter, and, in agreement with Socrates, he does not believe that a supreme being would take any interest in whether an individual believes in any religion, much less in a specific religion. Both of these positions stand in stark contrast to Christianity as articulated in quotes attributed to Christ in the Bible, the only canonical source. Franklin summarily offers the conditional proposition that he would see no harm in Christianity, if its consequences were good, that is, if its adherents observed the teachings of Christ specifically, but not necessary those of the apostles or Church leaders. Franklin never mentions the Christian churches in the letter. Most significantly, Franklin's approval of Christ's moral philosophy without his divinity, the *sine qua non* of his promise of an afterlife, reduces Christ himself to a Secular Jesus (like Socrates). A number of Franklin's younger contemporaries focused less on the possibility that Christianity could still have a civilizing effect at the micro-level, and more on the belief that Christianity as a belief system had proven

destructive at the macro-level on two fronts, both deriving from Christ's divinity, namely, the perpetuation of an unfounded belief in the supernatural, and the coercive relationship between a god of reward and punishment and its worshippers. This rule of superstition and fear is compounded by Christian intrusion in political affairs and the personal lives of others, a development Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) calls the "failure" of Christ, which he specifically contrasts with the success of Socrates. In the *Berner Fragmente* (1793-1794), Hegel emphasizes the importance of the written word for the spread of a folk religion (*Volksreligion*) and blames Christ's followers for misunderstanding Christ's mission as a symbolic and hegemonic campaign of formal conversion to adherence (*Sittenlehre*), rather than a pedagogical and missionary program of practical morality. As Joshua D. Goldstein summarizes, "The educational success of Socrates, and the failure of Christ" results in a "new sectarianism and estrangement from others."⁵¹ Of Hegel's *Berner Fragmente* and "Die Positivität der christlichen Religion" (The Positivity of the Christian Religion; 1795/1796), Frederick C. Beiser writes that morality is not possible without autonomy, which is why Hegel considers Socrates the better moral teacher: "While

⁵¹ Joshua D. Goldstein, *Hegel's Idea of the Good Life: From Virtue to Freedom. Early Writings and Mature Political Philosophy* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2006) 51.

Socrates respects the freedom of the individual, his right to find the truth for himself, Jesus preaches a prescribed path toward salvation. [...] Socrates knows that he is no better than anyone else; but Christ regards himself as a savior.” In short, the Catholic replacement of virtue with compliance means that expiatory sacrifice and undeserved eternal life necessarily comprise a dual insult to the republican freedom of the virtuous human being, while for Christian sinners of competing denominations, there is either hell to fear or no reason at all to see Christianity as a philosophy of virtue, but rather one of mere obedience.⁵² Consequently, by the 1790s, in accordance with Mendelssohn’s description of “mob delusion” and political collusion (Mendelssohn 27), even a secularized version of Christ is established as a problematic solution for a political Age of Reason.

As Germany’s most prominent proponent of the Scottish Enlightenment’s happiness discourses⁵³ and one of Heinrich von Kleist’s (1777-1810) most frequent sources, Schiller appears to be the most likely inspiration for Kleist’s brief and certainly to

some extent fatal foray into eudemonism.⁵⁴ In March 1799, Kleist, a political liberal and then still a Christian-oriented free thinker, articulated the tragically flawed philosophy expressed in “Aufsatz, den sichern Weg des Glücks zu finden und ungestört – auch unter den größten Drangsälen des Lebens — ihn zu genießen!” (Essay on the Most Certain Way to find Happiness, And — Even Amidst Life’s Greatest Hardships — How to Appreciate the Journey Undeterred, 1799) as well as in a lengthy letter to his former tutor, Christian Ernst Martini, of 18 (and 19) March 1799. Kleist’s “life plan”⁵⁵ is supported by two pillars that would prove to be fundamentally incompatible, the (deist/agnostic/atheist) Enlightenment concept of political happiness-

⁵⁴ The following paragraph on Kleist is based on the arguments in Jeffrey L. High, “Schiller, Freude Kleist and Rache / On the German Freedom Ode,” in Dieter Sevin and Christoph Zeller, eds., *Heinrich von Kleist – Style and Concept: Explorations in Literary Dissonance* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013 forthcoming) 123-145.

⁵⁵ In May 1799, Kleist wrote the related “Lebensplan” letter to his step-sister Ulrike, in which the quest for truth through reason (“Gründe der Vernunft”; Kleist II:489) will lead to virtue, and virtue in turn will lead to happiness. The project is still informed by a belief in life after death: “Denn schon die Bibel sagt, willst du das Himmelreich erwerben, so lege selbst Hand an” (For, as the Bible says, if you want to enter the kingdom of heaven, begin working to that end). Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, 2 vols., ed. Helmut Sembdner (Munich: Hanser, 1984), volume II, page 489. Subsequent citations as “Kleist” with volume and page number(s).

⁵² Frederick C. Beiser, *Hegel* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005) 129-130.

⁵³ See Jeffrey L. High, “Schillers Unabhängigkeitserklärungen: die niederländische *Plakkaat van Verlatinge*, der ‘amerikanische Krieg’ und die unzeitgemäße Rhetorik des Marquis Posa,” in *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Schillergesellschaft* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010) 80-108.

through-reason and Christian faith. In basing the pursuit of happiness on the rewards of virtue, in aesthetic education through observing “moral beauty” (Kleist II:305), in his prison and chain metaphors (Kleist II:305), transplanted flora metaphor (Kleist II:311); in his quotes from Schiller’s “Briefe über *Don Karlos*” (1787, Letters on Don Karlos) and “Die Schaubühne als Moralische Anstalt;” in the “virtue untested” turn from Schiller’s “Der Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre” (The Criminal of Lost Honor; Kleist II:312), in allusions to “Der Ring des Polykrates” and “Die Götter Griechenlands,” for which latter Schiller was accused of blasphemy in 1788,⁵⁶ Kleist runs an almost unadulterated Schillerian program of happiness, with one remarkable, and not entirely coincidental, exception. In the two introductory paragraphs of the First Virtue Speech, Schiller articulates the thesis that the means, disinterested virtue (“Tugend,” mentioned five times), results in the end, happiness (“Glückseligkeit,” three times), before introducing his historical role model, Socrates (NA 20:3). Although it is very unlikely that Kleist had read Schiller’s First Virtue Speech, Kleist supports the thesis of his own happiness essay — the end happiness is achieved through the means, disinterested virtue⁵⁷ — with an alternative con-

struct remarkably similar to Schiller’s introduction of Socrates: “[...] blicken Sie einmal zweitausend Jahre in die Vergangenheit zurück, auf jenen besten und edelsten der Menschen, [...] auf Christus” (Look back into History 2000 years, to that best and most noble human being [...] to Christ; Kleist II:306).⁵⁸ In the final three pages of his essay, Kleist returns to role models for virtue, twice invoking Christ and Socrates in the same passage (Kleist II:314). Kleist’s evident intent is to inject religion into a philosophy of happiness (through virtue governed by reason), from which it had only recently been removed, due to its self-evident incompatibility with, if not hostility toward, reason and the happiness of Others (in both the Hegelian and Lacanian senses of the term). Kleist’s attempt to erect twin towers of virtue in Socrates and Christ stands in stark contrast to Schiller’s definitive statements on conflating reason with religion, among many others, those in *Philosophische Briefe*,⁵⁹ a work that clearly did inform Kleist’s es-

⁵⁶ See High, “Friedrich Schiller, Secular Virtue, and ‘The Gods of Ancient Greece.’”

⁵⁷ Kleist II:302-303. In the letter to Martini, the phrase is “die Tugend allein um der Tugend willen” (virtue for virtue’s sake; Kleist II:475).

⁵⁸ Ironically, Kleist concludes his contribution to the dueling martyrs debate with a Schiller quote regarding yet another secular Socrates/Christ typology, Schiller’s Marquis Posa in the drama *Don Karlos* (1787): “Unrecht leiden schmeichelt große Seelen” (Suffering is flattering to great souls; Kleist II:305).

⁵⁹ See for example, Julius to Raphael: “Du hast mir den Glauben gestohlen, der mir Frieden gab. [...] Tausend Dinge waren mir so ehrwürdig, ehe deine traurige Weisheit sie mir entleideten” (You stole my faith, that gave me peace [...] A thousand things were so venerable to me, before your dreary wisdom exposed them to me; NA 20:110).

say. By 1801, Kleist testifies that he had discovered the fault line between reason and religion and concludes, based on his understanding of Kant's view of subjectivity, that the impossibility of knowledge of the afterlife has reduced the *Lebensplan* and the certain path to happiness to rubble: "Seit diese Überzeugung, nämlich, daß hienieden keine Wahrheit zu finden ist, [...] war der einzige Gedanke, den meine Seele in diesem äußeren Tumulte mit glühender Angst bearbeitete, immer nur dieser: dein *einziges*, dein *höchstes* Ziel ist gesunken" (Since this conviction — that no truth is discoverable here on earth — [...] in all this outer tumult the one thought working and burning in my anxious soul was this: your highest and only goal in life has sunk.)⁶⁰ As a result, Kleist arrives at a new position, namely that the subjectivity of "Wahrheit und Bildung" (truth and education; Kleist II:633) cannot be uncritically fused with an even less reliable Christian vision of heavenly reward and then recast as a coherent personal religion ("eine eigene Religion"; Kleist II:633). Ergo all speculation about the afterlife, which had been the goal of Kleist's exercise of earthly virtue to begin with,⁶¹ is fruitless: "Wir können nicht entscheiden, ob das, was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaft Wahrheit ist, oder ob es uns nur so

⁶⁰ Kleist's letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge of 22 March 1801 (Kleist II:634).

⁶¹ See Kleist's letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge of 22 March 1801 on his concept of the afterlife (Kleist II:633).

scheint. Ist das letzte, so *ist* die Wahrheit, die wir hier sammeln, nach dem Tode nicht mehr — und alles Bestreben, ein Eigentum sich zu erwerben, das uns auch in das Grab folgt, ist vergeblich —" (We cannot decide whether that, which we call truth is truly truth, or whether if it only seems so to us. If it is the latter, then the truth that we gather here is nothing after death — and all our striving to acquire anything we can take to the grave, is in vain —" (Kleist II:634).

Joseph Priestley's (1733-1804) *Socrates and Jesus Compared* (1803)⁶² is an early example of the new dualist heresy of comparing the relative merits of the mortal Socrates with those of the unquestioned son of god. Priestley's book is dedicated to his friend Joshua Toulmin, himself the author of a book chapter on the "respective excellencies" of "Christ and Socrates" (1785),⁶³ in which Socrates is ultimately declared lacking in the categories of polytheism (Toulmin, 192), "divine commission," prophecies, and miracles (Toulmin, 193): "Here the character of the philosopher, is eclipsed by the superior greatness of the *Son of God*, and the *Saviour of the World*" (Toulmin, 193). Citing Rousseau's *Emile*,

⁶² Joseph Priestley, *Socrates and Jesus Compared* (Philadelphia: P. Byrne, 1803).

⁶³ "Dissertation VIII. Christ and Socrates," in *Dissertations on the Internal Evidences and Excellence of Christianity: And on the Character of Christ, Compared with that of Some Other Celebrated Founders of Religion and Philosophy* (London: J. Johnson, 1785) 169-194. Here 170.

Toulmin concludes that Socrates' time has passed: "Let Socrates retire at his [Christ's] coming, and leave the chair of instruction vacant for a greater teacher than himself" (185). Socrates' retirement, however, was evidently premature. Given its proximity to Toulmin's attempt, Priestley's apology for "important Christian truth" (Dedication) appears redundant and superfluous on its face. Yet Priestley's vehemence demonstrates how much ground Socrates had gained on Christ in the second half of the eighteenth century. In fact, Priestley makes some curious concessions, in which Socrates actually measures up to Christ: "Both of them were friends of virtue, and laboured to promote it [...] Both the discourses and the general manner of life of Socrates and Jesus have an obvious resemblance, as they both went about gratuitously doing good [...] with respect to natural capacity, he [Socrates] was probably equal to Jesus" (Priestley, 36). Ultimately, however, while ostensibly comparing Socrates and Christ on an even playing field, Priestley repeatedly points out that the son of god is more impressive than the "heathen," "polytheist," "idolater" (Priestley, 4-5) philosopher. Priestley praises the "miracles" (Priestley, 38), "extraordinary authority" (Priestley, 40), and "the great superiority of the system of religious truth" Christ enjoys in monotheism, while bemoaning the comparative advantage of Socrates' upbringing and education to those of the son of god, who, one would think, could do without a middle class up-

bringing and college. Priestley marvels over Christ's literacy and rhetorical confidence, as if these were not to be expected from one who can claim, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Priestley, 38), while he belittles the "exceedingly trifling" (Priestley, 41) discourses of the heathen, mocking Socrates' relatively comfortable patrician death, in contrast to Christ's more sublime readiness to suffer a death both "painful and ignominious" (Priestley, 42).

Upon completion of his book, Priestley immediately sent a copy to the President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, who had clearly already given the subject some thought, and would continue to do so over the next two decades. Jefferson's ideas on Christ, religion, and the creator are wide-ranging, erudite, and articulated at some length, thus, the following will be limited to a brief summary of his secularist work and his comparisons of Socrates and Christ. It was Jefferson who had provided "The Declaration of Independence" with its deist register and blurred its two references to a supreme being to "the Creator" and "nature's God," terms distinct from those of Christian orthodoxy. It was also Jefferson who wrote the "Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom" of 1779, which provided the language for the First Amendment to the US Constitution (1791), in which the "separation of Church and State" is implied and de facto codified. In Paris in 1787, Jefferson had marveled at the unveiling of Jacques Louis David's "Death of Socrates"

(La Morte de Socrates, 1787), one in a series of significant Socrates paintings from the eighteenth century.⁶⁴ One of the earliest mentions of Priestley's book is in Jefferson's letter to Benjamin Rush of 21 April 1803, in which Jefferson declares his allegiance to a secularized Christ: "I am a Christian, in the only sense in which he [Christ] wished any one to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every human excellence; and believing he never claimed any other."⁶⁵ Thus the condition of Jefferson's attraction to Christ is Christ's humanity, and his interest purely philosophical. Attached to the letter is a brief outline entitled "Syllabus of an Estimate of the Merit of the Doctrines of Jesus, compared with those of others," which regards the following philosophers: "particularly Py-

⁶⁴ Giambettino Cignaroli (1706-1770), also known for his portrayal of another Enlightenment hero from antiquity in his "Death of Cato" of 1759, painted his "Death of Socrates" in the same year;⁶⁴ and Jacques-Philip-Joseph de Saint-Quentin (1738-?) won the Grand Prix de l'Académie Royale with his "The Death of Socrates" in 1762, the first year in which antique rather than biblical entries were solicited. Evidently George Washington disagreed with Schiller's assessment of the limited appeal of the death of Roman Senator Marcus Porcius Cato (95-46 BCE), perhaps a reaction to Gottsched's tragedy, *Der sterbende Cato* (1731/1732); Washington organized a performance of Addison's *Cato* (1713) for the Continental Army at Valley Forge in 1778.

⁶⁵ Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Library Edition* (Washington, D.C.: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903) 380.

thagoras, Socrates, Epicurus, Cicero, Epictetus, Seneca, Antoninus" (Jefferson, 381). In contrast to those of Priestley, Jefferson's remarks on Christ's poverty and lack of formal education make perfect sense, since he is clear that he is talking about a man, and not the son of God: "The question of his being a member of the Godhead, or in direct communication with it, claimed for him by some of his followers, and denied by others, is foreign to the present view, which is merely an estimate of the intrinsic merits of his doctrines." Jefferson's letter to Priestley of 9 April 1803 marks the first of his three significant responses. Aside from his first response, his vague praise of Priestley's work, Jefferson writes at length in his second response, his own goal to fulfill the idea of the syllabus mentioned above, including one point of contrast with Priestley's book: "This view would purposely omit the question of his divinity, and even his inspiration" (Jefferson, 375).

During the same period, Jefferson began work on the third response, the philosophical experiment that he would complete in 1819 or 1820, *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, commonly known as "The Jefferson Bible": "It is a paradigm of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts out of the book and arranging them on the pages of a blank book." The project is undertaken in the spirit of his letter to William Short of 4 August 1820, in which he describes the challenge of removing from the New Testament "the follies, the false-

hoods and the charlatanisms” of Christ’s biographers, and their “groundwork of vulgar ignorance, of things impossible, of superstitions, fanaticisms and fabrications,” including Christ’s divinity, and leaving only about fifty full book pages of the “sublime ideas of the Supreme Being, aphorisms and precepts of the purest morality and benevolence, sanctioned by a life of humility, innocence and simplicity of manners, neglect of riches, absence of worldly ambition and honors, with an eloquence and persuasiveness which have not been surpassed” (Jefferson, 1436).

In 1813, Jefferson refers to both the “Syllabus” and the “Jefferson Bible” in a letter to John Adams, in which Jefferson again demonstrates his practice of ignoring the commentary of intermediaries, even when they are the only sources. Thus, Plato’s depiction of Socrates’ religiosity in *The Apology* and Xenophon’s depiction of the same in *Memorabilia* merit no consideration in Jefferson’s dismissal of the possibility that Socrates believed in a spiritual realm:

An expression in your letter of Sep. 14 that “the human understanding is a revelation from it’s maker” gives the best solution, that I believe can be given, of the question, What did Socrates mean by his Daemon? He was too wise to believe, and too honest to pretend that he had real and familiar converse with a superior and invisible being. He probably considered the suggestions of his conscience, or reason, as revelations, or inspirations from the Supreme mind, bestowed, on important occasions, by

a special superintending providence.⁶⁶

On the contrary, in the same letter to William Short cited above, Jefferson provides insight into his materialist understanding of (his) Socrates by entirely disqualifying Plato for an inconsistent and implausible spiritual portrayal of Socrates.⁶⁷ Jefferson’s de-spiritualization of Socrates bears strong similarities to his dogged dedication to systematically cutting away the divinity of Christ. In the same vein, and again, in a comparison of Socrates and Christ, Jefferson dismisses the very divine foundations of Christianity in defense of his Secular Jesus:

That Jesus did not mean to impose himself on mankind as the son of God, physically speaking, I have been convinced by the writings of men more learned than myself in that lore. But that he might conscientiously believe himself inspired from above, is very possible. The whole religion of the Jews, inculcated on him from his infancy, was founded in the belief of divine inspiration. The

⁶⁶ *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, Lester J. Cappon, ed., (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) 385.

⁶⁷ “So again, the superlative wisdom of Socrates is testified by all antiquity, and placed on ground not to be questioned. When, therefore, Plato puts into his mouth such paralogisms, such quibbles on words, and sophisms, as a school boy would be ashamed of, we conclude they were the whimsies of Plato’s own foggy brain, and acquit Socrates of puerilities so unlike his character.” Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1994) 1435.

fumes of the most disordered imaginations were recorded in their religious code, as special communications of the Deity [...] Elevated by the enthusiasm of a warm and pure heart, conscious of the high strains of an eloquence which had not been taught him, he might readily mistake the coruscations of his own fine genius for inspirations of an higher order. This belief carried, therefore, no more personal imputation, than the belief of Socrates, that himself was under the care and admonitions of a guardian Dæmon. And how many of our wisest men still believe in the reality of these inspirations, while perfectly sane on all other subjects. (Jefferson, 1436)

In other words, Jefferson, who is a serious devotee of the moral philosophy of Christ, writes that it is insane to believe in the divinity of Christ. As M. Andrew Holowchak concludes: “Christ is, to Jefferson, an historical figure, and he and his teachings are matters for historians and ethicists, not opportunistic theologians.”⁶⁸

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed a deluge of comparisons of Socrates and Christ,⁶⁹ only the

⁶⁸ M. Andrew Holowchak, “Jefferson and Jesus,” in *Dutiful Correspondent: Philosophical Essays on Thomas Jefferson* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013) 93-110, here 102.

⁶⁹ See for example Gladys M. Wauchope, “Socrates and Jesus: their trials and deaths,” in *London Quarterly Review* (London, England: 1862) 157, (April 1932) 171-181; Paul Carus, “Socrates: A Forerunner of Christianity,” in *The Open Court*, vol. 21 (September 1907) 523-527; William Ellery Leonard, *Socrates: Master of Life* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1915); R. Goldwin Smith, “Christ and Socrates,” in *Canadian Magazine* 45 (October 1915) 477-484; William F. Bostick, “Jesus and Socrates,” in *The Biblical World*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (April, 1916) 248-252; “Socrates or Jesus?” in *Christian Century* 42

small minority of which find comparable merit in Socrates. In 1821, Percy Bysshe Shelly (1792-1822), the author of “The Necessity of Atheism” (1811), published his similarly heretical “Epipsychidion: Passages Of The Poem, Or Connected Therewith,” citing Socrates and Christ as his authorities on the morality of free love: “And Socrates, the Jesus Christ of Greece, / And Jesus Christ Himself, did never cease / To urge all living things to love each other, / And to forgive their mutual faults, and smother / The Devil of disunion in their souls.”

In 1854, theologian and philosopher Robert William Mackay (1803-1882) captures more the essence of the cases made by Schiller and his contemporaries:

The Christian movement was, in many respects, analogous to the philosophic movement begun with Socrates. [...] The one effected practically what the other sought theoretically. The initial Christian re-

(October 15, 1925) 1269-1270; William Riley Van Buskirk, William Riley, *Saviors of Mankind: Lao-Tze, Confucius, Gautama, Zoroaster, Aakhnaton, Moses, Isaiah of Babylon, Socrates, Jesus of Nazareth, Saul of Tarsus, and Mahomet* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); Adelaide P. Bostick, “A comparison of the portrait of Jesus in the Gospels with the portrait of Socrates in the writings of Plato and Xenophon,” in *Journal Of The National Association Of Biblical Instructors*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (January 1, 1935) 94-101; Michael Tierney, “Socrates and His Message,” in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 33, No. 132 (December, 1944) 487-497; George M. A. Hanfmann, “Socrates and Christ,” in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 60 (1951) 205-233.

quirement, repentance (μετάνοια), the establishment of a condition of mind and feeling “fit for the kingdom of heaven,” was the necessary practical result of the self-examination and self-knowledge insisted on by Socrates, and of the ethical direction given by him to the earliest systematic inquiry after truth. Ideal righteousness, the search for divine perfection, the endeavor to be “as good and wise as possible,” these were the true and only means of “escape,” (ἀποφυγή κακῶν) or salvation contemplated both by Socrates and Jesus. To the truths already uttered in the Athenian prison, Christianity added little or nothing, except a few symbols, which, though perhaps well calculated for popular acceptance, are more likely to perplex than to instruct, and offer the best opportunity for priestly mystification.⁷⁰

As Mackay points out, however, the moral philosophy of Socrates was then and remained at a distinct disadvantage when pitted against the complete *idola theatri* program of Christianity for the hearts and minds of a broader audience:

But philosophy belongs to the few; the common mind, when sufficiently awakened to become conscious of disparity and disunion, pines under the impression of a corrupt and ‘fallen’ nature, and escapes from the haunting self-conviction only when, accepting as a faith what reason repudiates, it anticipates the conclusion, and grasps the absolute unity of the human and the divine as a given indubitable fact. (Mackey 20)

Mackey and the Shelleys, however, belong to an increasingly silent minority. The clear trend in post-Enlightenment compari-

⁷⁰ Robert William Mackay, *The Rise and Progress of Christianity* (London: John Chapman, 1854) 19-20.

sons of Socrates and Christ marks a return to pre-Enlightenment religious-intellectual orthodoxy. In 1889, R. M. Wenley prefaces his *Socrates and Christ: A Study in the Philosophy of Religion* with a series of quotes intended to bolster the argument of his work, that Christ is superior to Socrates because Christ gave life where Socrates could not.⁷¹

The first quote is from Elisabeth Barrett Browning’s verse novel *Aurora Leigh* (1856): “Subsists no law of Life outside of Life [...] The Christ himself had been no Lawgiver, unless he had given the life, too, with the Law.” In the utter lack of evidence for her declaration, its circular form, and its general incoherence, Leigh’s position on eternal life lends ironic support to those of Mendelssohn, Schiller, Franklin, and Jefferson, who are more willing to believe a law-giver than an eternal life-giver. If the quote is intended to indicate that the promise of the afterlife sealed Christ’s moral teachings, then, in aspiring to eternal life as a reward for adhering to the law, the idea violates the key measure of virtue in Schiller’s *Virtue Speech*, namely that true virtue seeks no reward.⁷² If, by giving life,

⁷¹ The present essay takes no position on the appropriateness of the mottos for Wenley’s book. R. M. Wenley, *Socrates and Christ: A Study in the Philosophy of Religion* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1889). All three quotes appear in the front matter on page ii.

⁷² In 1786, Schiller is particularly clear on the importance of earthly life as opposed to the insignificance of speculation about an afterlife, which Schiller de-

Leigh's fragment is intended to mean Christ giving his own, then he accomplished less than Socrates by pretending to be divine and promoting a false belief in an afterlife.

Wenley's second quote is from Joseph Henry Shorthouse's historical novel *John Inglesant* (1881): "[...] it was expedient that a nobler than Socrates should die for the people, — nobler, that is, in that he did what Socrates failed in doing, and carried the lowest of the people with him to the ethereal gates." The quote, however, is precisely the argument turned on its head by the logic of the introduction to Mendelssohn's work, which served as Schiller's model in the *Virtue Speech*. If Christ had died to absolve sinners, then, according to the logic of Mendelssohn's essay, he would have accomplished very much less than Socrates and died for nothing.

The third quote is a compilation of fragments of *Lectures* from Thomas Carlyle, ironically, the author of *The Life of Friedrich Schiller* (1872), who contrasts Christ's offer of eternal life with the focus on noble death in the Socrates narrative. All square brackets indicate my attempts to reconstruct Carlyle's original:

There is no word of life in Socrates. [In another point of view we may regard it (Christianity) as the

scribes as "Ein Lügenbild lebendiger Gestalten" (the false promise of living figures) and "Verwesung" (decay) "in den kalten Behausungen des Grabes" (in the cold dwelling of the grave; NA 1:168).

revelation of eternity] [...] [It is this which gives to] this little period of life [, so contemptible when weighed against eternity, a significance it never had without it.] [It] ... is [thus] an infinite arena, where infinite issues are played out [. Not an action of man but will have its truth realized and will go on for ever.] ... This truth [, whatever may be the opinions we hold on Christian doctrine, or whether we hold upon them a sacred silence or not,] we must recognise in Christianity and its belief independent of all theories.

The hostility toward theory and the expression of faith in an afterlife explain both Carlyle's inattention to Socrates' overwhelming emphasis on life and Carlyle's disdain for life and embrace of death. Indeed, Schiller's Socrates is the undisputed "master of life,"⁷³ and "this little period of life" on earth and its quality are the foremost topics addressed in Plato's *Phädon* and subsequently in Mendelssohn's *Phädon* and Schiller's *Virtue Speech*: it is precisely the finality of death that makes life precious, and life's preciousness that makes self-sacrifice sublime. Although Wenley sets out in his preface to "eliminate doctrinal considerations" (Wenley, vi), the entire work is informed by its predictable conclusion: "The supremacy of Christ is further enhanced by the strange circumstance that His revelation is not, like Socrates, Luther, or of Carlyle, representative only of a specific stage in the world's development" (Wenley, 256).

In his 1927 essay, "Why I am not a

⁷³ William Ellery Leonard, *Socrates: Master of Life* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1915).

Christian,” Bertrand Russell contrasts Christ’s belief in a punishment in hell with Socrates’ sublime tolerance of those who disagreed with him and his belief in earthly judgment, concluding: “I cannot feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history. I should put Buddha and Socrates above him in those respects.”⁷⁴ But even among academics, the parallel truths offered by Socrates and Christ are not necessarily evidence of a moral truth beyond Christian revelation. Like Priestley’s work and a host of others since, John Scott’s *Socrates and Christ* (1929) is of interest only in that it sincerely attempts to compare the relative significance of Socrates and Christ as guides for modern morality.⁷⁵ Predictably, Scott dismisses Socrates with pseudo-arguments based on the evidence of bible citations: “[...] there is no parallel in Socrates to the following: ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life’” (Scott, 51). Most such efforts, informative as they may be, embark from the premise that Christ was the son of god. As a result, few in the end strive to achieve a serious comparison of the suitability of the two

⁷⁴ Bertrand Russell, *Why I am not a Christian and other Essays* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957) 19.

⁷⁵ John Adams Scott, *Socrates and Christ. A Lecture Given at Northwestern University* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, 1929).

characters as role models for individuals seeking a personal and political constitution based on morality achieved at through reason. Scott’s book ends on a note so un-scholarly that it would have been merciful of him to confess this in a preface:

My great teacher, Professor Gildersleeve, said that “Socrates reached an arm’s length toward Christ, — it was only an arm’s length, but it was toward Christ.” It is just this fact, that the greatest man [Socrates] of the most intellectual city and at its most exalted period saw but dimly and partially that which Jesus saw so clearly and so completely and with such assurance, which has strengthened my faith that the carpenter of Nazareth and the companion of simple men of lowly Galilee must have been something more than a man. (Scott, 52)

V. Conclusion: Schiller and the Virtue of Socrates

In an October 2012 article entitled “Tsunami of Secularism,” a US-American minister compares the deaths of Socrates and Christ, in the process rejecting centuries of moral-philosophical progress. Having dismissed Rousseau’s secular tendencies as a problem rather than a solution, then vaguely implying that the founders of the United States were not in favor of removing religion from the sphere of public authority, the author delivers a penultimate ironic rhetorical turn — equating secularism with sophistry — the formal reverse of Schiller’s parallel of sophistry with Christianity in his comparison of Socrates and Rousseau (and of Mendelssohn’s portrayal

of the sophists as priests of superstition). He concludes: "As Christians we will be held to a higher accountability than even Socrates was held to. How do we know this? Because Jesus tells us so: 'To whom much has been given, much will be required' (Lk 12:48)." The second-hand testimony of Christ is scant enough evidence, but there is no evidence for the article's dramatic closing argument against secularism: "Hell exists and it is eternal."⁷⁶ That hell exists, and that Christians will be held to a higher standard than Socrates, is bad news indeed, since a great deal of evidence indicates that even most Christian intellectuals believe that the one human who rivals Christ in virtue is Socrates, perhaps the most deserving citizen of the heavenly republic, who, according to Schiller, "never caught the faintest glimmer of divine revelation" (NA 20:3). The logic in this relative clause in Schiller's *Virtue Essay* is razor sharp: the belief in the reward of an after-life for earthly "kindness, sociability, and great generosity" is a violation of the concept of virtue itself. On the other hand, there is no rational sense to be made of the metaphysical presuppositions that serve as arguments for the Christ-apologists against the relative merits of Socrates as a philosopher and martyr for humankind. These conclude without fail that Christ supersedes Socrates because Socrates was

merely human and did not promise eternal life. This conclusion, too, fails the serious measure of Schiller's *Virtue Essay*.

Franklin, among many others, offers a compromise between the demands of reason and the benefits of a pseudo-civilization based on revelation, namely, that regardless of the truth of the Biblical narrative, the world would probably be a slightly better place if Christ's doctrines were more respected and better observed (Franklin, 194). Franklin's language makes it quite clear that the group most in need of such virtue guidelines were those Lessing characterized as "der christliche Pöbel" (the Christian rabble)⁷⁷ and whose God Schiller described as "das wohlthaetige Traumbild des grossen Haufens" (the benevolent dream vision of the great masses; NA 25:167). To Schiller, however, as indicated by his description of Socrates as history's greatest example of the triumph of virtue, the happiness of humankind is a zero sum game, and thus no "Surrogat der wahren Tugend" (surrogate of true virtue; NA 26:339-331) will suffice to advance this end. On the contrary, surrogate virtue and the anti-intellectualism that drive it were and remain the greatest threat to the rule of reason and the happiness of the individual, a threat that the comparison of Socra-

⁷⁶ At: <http://yearoffaith2013.com/2012/10/27/a-tsunami-of-secularism-by-rev-benjamin-bradshaw/>. Accessed on 2 January 2013.

⁷⁷ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "Fragmente einer Vorrede" to *Nathan der Weise* of 1778/1779, in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Werke und Briefe*, Klaus Bohnen and Arno Schilson, eds. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993) 665.

tes and Christ is uniquely situated to expose. Wenley's insidious formula of 1889 threatens to turn the clock back to a pre-Socratic concept of the responsibility of humankind for its own fate: "Judaism saw heaven from earth, Hellenism imagined earth as heaven, [...] Christianity brought heaven to earth" (Wenley, 261). Evidently, however, it did not; it merely brought the promise of heaven and the threat of hell to those who would believe it, and much worse still to those who would instrumentalize it, priests and politicians. For Schiller and many of his contemporaries, the belief in heaven as a reward for earthy virtue and the threat of a punishment in hell stood counter to the very idea of virtue. According to the Christian narrative as Wenley portrays it here, Christ in end effect removed the responsibility for philosophy from human individuals and relocated it in the promise of a heaven inconveniently located just beyond their reach for the duration of their lives. It is little wonder the secularist thinkers of the eighteenth century sought support in the non-Christian thinkers of ancient Greece. In a remarkable preemptive counter-strike to such disempowering nineteenth-century formulas as Wenley's, Cicero described Socrates as the first to "call philosophy down from the heavens," by which he meant the cosmos,⁷⁸ "and set her [philoso-

⁷⁸ See Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in*

phy, not the promise of heaven] in the cities of men and bring her also into their homes and compel her to ask questions about life and morality and things good and evil."⁷⁹ Cicero's statement, like Schiller's declaration that "Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht" (World history is Judgment Day; NA 1:168), is a declaration of secular independence from judgment by holy barbarians. On a theoretical level the First Virtue Essay marks the beginning of Schiller's programmatic dismissal of the tribal-state religious practice of disguising moral choice as — and coercing civic behavior through — divine dictate to the annals of untimely historical necessities.⁸⁰

Schiller, who called religion "die Lügnerin, gedungen von Despoten" (the hired liar in the service of despots; NA 1:168) in the poem "Resignation" in 1786, shared Jefferson's and Mackey's conviction that the irrational nature of Christianity served to secure the "opportunity for priestly mystification" (Mackey, 20) of the masses.

Early Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 42.

⁷⁹ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. by J. E. King (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1927) 434-435.

⁸⁰ Note that Schiller pursues this same agenda in his exposé on Moses as a brilliant politician, but not a divine messenger, in "Die Sendung Moses" (The Mission of Moses, 1790). See Jeffrey L. High, "Clever Priests and the Missions of Moses and Schiller: From Monotheism to the Aesthetic Civilization of the Individual," in Elisabeth Krimmer and Patricia Ann Simpson, eds., *German Classicism and Religion* (Rochester: Camden House, 2013) 79-98.

Schiller singled out the presence of religious authority as facile tool of political coercion in *Abfall der Vereinigten Niederlande von der Spanischen Regierung* (The Revolt of the Netherlands against Spanish Rule, 1788): “Das gemeinschaftliche Ziel des Despotismus und des Priestertums ist Einförmigkeit, und Einförmigkeit ist ein notwendiges Hülfsmittel der menschlichen Armut und Beschränkung” (The common aim of despotism and of priestcraft is uniformity, and uniformity is a necessary expedient of human poverty and imperfection).⁸¹ The structure of Schiller’s argument in the Virtue Essay, in its focus on human reason, wisdom, love and happiness, and its uncompromising requirement that virtue be unconditional, dictates that the exercise of reason be free from religious dogma and defiant in the face of the collusion of religion and the state.

Schiller’s enduring commitment to the removal of religion from moral philosophy is nowhere more evident than in his response to Kant’s *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (Religion within the Confines of Reason Alone; 1793-1794), in which Kant sought to popularize moral philosophy by demonstrating where it overlaps with Christian principles. Here Schiller dismissively summarized that in his disingenuous attempt, “die Resultate des philosophischen Denkens dadurch an die

⁸¹ NA 17:55. Friedrich Schiller, *History of the Revolt of the Netherlands*, translated by A. J. W. Morrison (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855) 54-55.

Kindervernunft anzuknüpfen und gleichsam zu popularisieren, [...] hat Kant dann weiter nichts gethan, als das morsche Gebäude der Dummheit geflickt” (to connect the conclusions of philosophical thought to the reason of children and thus popularize philosophy, [...] Kant has done nothing more than patched the rotting house of stupidity; NA 26:219).⁸² In the logic of Schiller’s Virtue Essay, Kant’s benevolent gesture is just another chapter in the history of surrogate virtue and pseudo-civilization.

Like Socrates relocating philosophy from a metaphorical mystery to the homes of humans, Schiller’s dramatic recasting of Socrates as the most virtuous character in history is compelling, and the motivations are self-evident in the context of the Virtue Speech: if the immortal son of God, who agrees to his own execution, is impressive because he descends to the level of humans, who, unlike immortals, are wont to cling to earthly existence, then the mortal freedom philosopher who agrees to his own execution is entirely more impressive because he transcends his human nature. Ironically, if one removes the divine aspect from the Jesus story, as Thomas Jefferson did in *The Jefferson Bible*, the moral-political story gains endlessly. As it stands with Christ and Socrates, one, according to the sources, ostensibly did not really die so that sinners might not go to hell, a place or

⁸² See Schiller’s letter to Gottfried Johann Körner of 28 February and 1 March 1793 (NA 26:219).

state for which there is no evidence; and one died for the principle — “most sublime love” — so that innocent individuals might not spend their brief mortal existences living in one of the many forms of hell on earth made possible by ignorance. Christ’s divine act of death violates the first measure of Schiller’s thesis: not only was it not an exercise of disinterested virtue, it was in fact a divine mission that brought with it a series of coercive conditions. Conversely, Socrates’ death — “most sublime virtue!” — was a selfless and unconditional gift in the name of humankind’s progress toward happiness, which is the condition of virtue.

On a practical level, in the context of Schiller’s oeuvre, the Virtue Essay conspicuously relegates the divine and thus alien martyr Christ to one of many influences in the history of earthly virtue. Christ appears in a league with the pagans Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, and the fictional Cathmor in his moral resistance to persecution on a story level, but, due to his function as a divine messenger, not in the ultimate measure of disinterested and human virtue.⁸³ Not that the story of Socrates constitutes significantly less than a Christ-like capacity for the fantastic. In *Emile*, Rousseau playfully refers to his surpris-

ingly dignified illusionist as our “magician-Socrates” (Rousseau, 175), and Mendelssohn’s biography of Socrates stresses the unusual on a biblical scale, sparing no detail in an otherwise sober portrayal of Socrates’ divine immunity to misfortune and suffering. In battle, Socrates was the greatest Athenian warrior, carrying a man on his back, walking miles in his bare feet on ice, and surviving as the only soldier in an entire army who did not contract the plague. As a poor teacher, he lived under a ban on teaching rhetoric passed against him by Charicles, with an additional personal restraining order against consorting with the youth. As a public figure, he suffered humiliation by Aristophanes in *The Clouds* and by Ameipsias in *Connus* (both 423 BC). During his political persecutions, he raised a large enough following of disciples to survive his silent betrayal by Critias, then suffered renewed persecution by sophists and priests in charges of impiety and corrupting the youth of Athens under the restored democracy. As a prisoner, he refused to participate in Criton’s escape plan, forgave of the foreman the jury, bathed himself to spare the slaves the task of washing his dead body, and demonstrated his ultimate dedication to the social contract, the rule of law, and the republic through his martyrdom in the name of truth, freedom, and the love of the happiness of humankind. Finally, he chose his own death over injustice and demonstrated sublime composure at an unjust end. And he was just a man.

⁸³ Unlike Socrates, Christ is not mentioned by name, but as the “Gottmensch auf dem Tabor” (God-man on Mount Tabor) as one in a list of teachers of virtue: “So spricht der Gesetzgeber aus den Donnern von Sina! So der Gottmensch auf dem Tabor! — So Religion — Sittenlehre — Philosophie — und aller Weisen einstimmiger Mund!” (NA 20:4).

But this is exactly the point of the Secular Jesus movement. Happiness and freedom from coercion are human — not divine — pursuits, and in a contest of dueling martyrs to be decided by moral resistance, virtue derived from reason, and the goal of human happiness, it is not only advantageous to be human rather than divine, it is a requirement. According to Schiller's "Die Götter Griechenlands" (The Gods of Ancient Greece) in 1788, the alien nature of Christ's divinity is precisely what disqualifies him, the Christian God, and the entire Trinitarian blur, as appropriate guides for humans.⁸⁴ When Christ (and or the Christian God) arrives in the poem to displace the Greek gods, he appears as a judgmental, punishing, joyless, sexless, and comparatively very alien immortal usurper — "ein heiliger Barbar" (a divine barbarian; NA 1:193) — displacing the mild Greek judge, "der Enkel einer Sterblichen" (the grandson of a mortal), who along with the furies, had been human enough to feel compassion for humans, "zarte Wesen, die ein Weib gebar" (tender beings, born to women; NA 20:193). Thus, Christ's famous admission, "I am not of this world," is not a selling point, but a point of dis-

⁸⁴ There is evidence enough in Schiller's works, in particular in "Die Götter Griechenlands," to believe that Schiller's position was not far from that of his choir of demons in the poem fragment of 1776, "Triumphgesang der Hölle" (Hell's Song of Triumph): "Pfu! heilige Dreifaltigkeit" (Boo! holy trinity; NA 1:14).

qualification. Only a human — a citizen of the world — will do.

As a result of his upbringing in Württemberg, resistance in the face of coercion was Schiller's primary concern, and in the eighteenth-century church states, freedom from religion was the only hope of freedom of thought. As an artist and a theorist, Schiller was forever on the lookout for an historical human willing to die for principle, rather than merely be murdered, looking for a Secular Jesus who fulfilled the very real promise of humankind without any ulterior motives or conditions, and thus without making any further promises: "Mir deucht, ein gewisser Hyginus, ein Grieche, sammelte einmal eine Anzahl tragischer Fabeln entweder aus oder für den Gebrauch der Poeten. Solch einen Freund könnte ich brauchen" (I believe that a certain Hyginus, a Greek, collected a number of tragic plots either from or for the use of poets. I could use such a friend).⁸⁵ Not that Schiller had a difficult time finding such characters; Wilhelm Tell is his only main character in a completed drama who survives long after the curtain falls, and Schiller's Tell had more than demonstrated the likelihood of his willingness to die for the right cause, freedom from coercion. Schiller's Marquis Posa, like his Mary Stuart and Joan of Arc, is a Christian (Catholic), but a conspicuously Socratic Christian, involved in what his enemies be-

⁸⁵ See Schiller's letter to Goethe of 15 December 1797 (NA 29:169).

lieve is a conspiracy to introduce the separation of church and state to Spain. In his audience with Philipp II, Posa demonstrates the great paradox of religious coercion with his confession — “Ihr Glaube, Sire, ist auch / der meinige” (Your faith, Sire, is my faith; NA 6:184) — and his demand — “Geben Sie / Gedankenfreiheit” (Grant freedom of thought; NA 6:191). In unraveling the puzzle of the coercion of a believer, Schiller’s comparison of Socrates and Rousseau (in the poem “Rousseau”) is telling. Although Schiller and his contemporaries either ignore reports of Socrates’ belief in the supernatural or, in Jefferson’s case, are eager to dismiss them, there is no way to deny Rousseaus’ repeated attempts to belong to a church, nor much justification to compare the virtue of Rousseau with that of Socrates. It is likely that all the eighteenth-century thinkers require from Socrates is his resistance against the religious state and his insistence on the practice of reason in the sphere of public authority, regardless of personal belief. Likewise, all other similarities notwithstanding, resistance against religious persecution is all that is required of Rousseau to make him Socrates-like.

In the *Virtue Essay*, Schiller goes to great lengths to establish that disinterested virtue is only then most evident in the most disadvantageous of moral choices — “terrible freedom” — that of the virtuous death (of a human) over an unfree life, a thesis that informs his entire career as a dramatist and an aesthetic theorist. In

“Über das Erhabene” (variously dated from 1796-1801), Schiller’s Lessingian thesis, “Kein Mensch muss müssen” (No human being must have to do anything; NA 21:38) is tested against the human capacity for moral resistance — “greatest struggle” — against the most extreme demand of sensual nature, the desire to live in the face of death, against the highest demand of ennobled reason, to be free from coercion. The history of the trial and death of Socrates, with its ancient, and importantly pre-Christian emphasis on virtue, ethics, epistemology, and logic, in an act of defiance toward a coercive state — all in the defense and service of human freedom and happiness — is singularly suited to the moral philosophy that informs Schiller’s theory of tragedy, which is rooted in the sacrificial defiance of coercion. According to Socrates, “Science says ‘We must live,’ and seeks the means of prolonging, increasing, facilitating and amplifying life, of making it tolerable and acceptable, wisdom says ‘We must die,’ and seeks how to make us die well.” According to Schiller, the individual is free to transform even death into a defiant act of free will. And the meaning of life, according to Schiller’s Socrates, is not to make it tolerable and acceptable, but to make it meaningful by contributing to the freedom and the happiness of the whole through virtue. Dying well, according to both, means dying of one’s own volition after a life of virtue — and freedom is never more evident than in a final act of defiant virtue, the hallmark of

Schiller's tragedies in the decades after the Virtue Speech. Accordingly, for Schiller, the notion of immortality Socrates represents in the First Virtue Speech is not metaphysical, but moral, political, and aesthetic. Mortal and dead as he was, the justification for Socrates' immortality — "No more sublime deed done under the great starry heavens!" — had never been more self-evident than in the Age of Secularist Revolution. For the empiricist Schiller in 1779, Socrates' time had only just begun.