

THE “NOCTURNAL SIDE OF SCIENCE”  
IN DAVID FRIEDRICH STRAUSS’S *LIFE*  
*OF JESUS CRITICALLY EXAMINED*

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Thomas Fabisiak

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Atlanta

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Publication of this volume was made possible by the generous support of the Pierce Program in Religion of Oxford College of Emory University.

The editors of this volume express their sincere gratitude to David E. Orton and Deo Publishing for publication of this series 2009–2013.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fabisiak, Thomas.

The “nocturnal side of science” in David Friedrich Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* critically examined / By Thomas Fabisiak.

p. cm. — (Society of Biblical Literature Emory studies in early Christianity ; 17)

Originally presented as the author’s thesis (doctoral)—Emory University, 2014.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-62837-108-6 (paper binding : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-62837-110-9 (electronic format) — ISBN 978-1-62837-109-3 (hardcover binding : alk. paper)

1. Strauss, David Friedrich, 1808–1874. *Das Leben Jesu*. 2. Jesus Christ—Biography.

I. Title.

BT301.S73F33 2015

230.092—dc23

2015005710

Cover design is an adaptation by Bernard Madden of Rick A. Robbins, *Mixed Media* (19" x 24" pen and ink on paper, 1981). Online: <http://home.comcast.net/~rick1216/Archive/1981penink.htm>. Cover design used by permission of Deo Publishing.

Printed on acid-free, recycled paper conforming to ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R1997) and ISO 9706:1994 standards for paper permanence.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish first to thank my Ph.D. dissertation committee, in whom I was unusually fortunate, for the environment where this manuscript originated. Professor Geoffrey Bennington and Professor Tina Pippin's comments and questions were crucial to the development of the manuscript. I am grateful for the time that they dedicated to reading and discussing my work, especially as my focus changed. I owe thanks above all to my co-chairs, Professor Jill Robbins and Professor Vernon Robbins. Jill Robbins has done more than anyone, through her teaching, her mentorship, and the example of her own work, to raise the standards to which I strive in thinking and writing. In my first semester at Emory, Vernon Robbins introduced me to the then unfamiliar landscape of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century biblical criticism. Since then, his support, encouragement, and scholarly example have been invaluable to me. Vernon Robbins and Jill Robbins also deserve special thanks for the time that they dedicated to meeting with me during the final stages of the writing of the manuscript. I benefited from their knowledge and insight in these meetings, and I enjoyed our conversations. They trusted me to pursue the wayward course of my research and helped me draw it back within the realm of legibility. I am also highly grateful for the generous support of the Pierce program in Religion of Oxford College of Emory University, which made possible the publication of this volume.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who taught me to think critically about the discipline of biblical studies and encouraged me to imagine what it might be. For their guidance, example, and encouragement, I must also thank Professors Kim Haines-Eitzen, Nancy Bouzrara, Eric Reinders, Elizabeth Bounds, Deborah Ayer, Carol Newsom, and Carl Holladay. Conversations with Professors Yvonne Sherwood, Steven Kraftchick, and Sander Gilman also influenced the course of my research.

The students, teachers, and staff of the Candler Certificate in Theological Studies Program at Lee Arrendale Correctional Facility; the administration, graduate fellows, and undergraduate staff of the Emory Writing Center; the staff of the Emory Writing Program; and the staff of the Graduate Writing Support Service at Woodruff Library have all contributed to my intellectual and writerly development. My work in these contexts contributed to a number of the driving questions behind the manuscript.

Many friends deserve thanks for their important roles in my life and work as I completed this project. Conversations with Joseph Laycock and Catherine Morgan had a significant impact on the manuscript. Tiffany Hodge, Anne Dalphin, and George Dalphin provided essential moral support and intellectual inspiration. Christopher Keister, Regan Eldridge, Justin Roig, Susannah Laramée-Kidd, Joshua Laramée-Kidd, Leah Rosenberg, Jean-Paul Cauvin, David Morgen, Sarah Feuquay, and Steven Alvarez have been invaluable conversation partners and have generally been a blast to be around over the last few years. I have benefited as well from conversations and friendships with Samira Mehta, Cayenne Claassen-Luttner, Ingrid Lilly, Yoshimi Azuma, Janelle Peters, Letitia Campbell, Barry Sawicki, Christina Conroy, Cathy Zappa, Galen Richmond, Meggie Dant, Emily Brennan, Manuela Ceballos, Kelly Murphy, George Branch-Trevathan, Elizabeth Venell, Carl Hughes, Moira Diaz-French, Kate Wilkinson, Nate Hofer, Kazumi Hasegawa, Diana Louis, and Camila Restrepo. For her incredible support in the final stages of the project, I wish to thank Christy Bradley.

Lastly, I wish to thank my family, Kathleen Fox, Stan Fox, Susie Fox, and Seann Colgan, along with my best friend, Tyson Black. You deserve more gratitude than I can express. I am grateful for your support, of course, and patience, but also because I can see the influence of each of you in this work, which have been a consolation and an encouragement throughout the process.

I dedicate this book to my uncle and godfather, Raymond Fabisiak.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ARA	<i>Annual Review of Anthropology</i>
CH	<i>Church History</i>
HLQ	<i>Huntington Library Quarterly</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JWK	<i>Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik</i>
LJ 1835	Strauss, David Friedrich. <i>Das Leben Jesu: Kritisch bearbeitet</i> . Vol. 1. Tübingen: Osiander, 1835.
LJ 1836	Strauss, David Friedrich. <i>Das Leben Jesu: Kritisch bearbeitet</i> . Vol. 2. Tübingen: Osiander, 1836.
LJ 1840	Strauss, David Friedrich. <i>Das Leben Jesu: Kritisch bearbeitet</i> . Vol. 2. Tübingen: Osiander, 1840.
LJ 1892	Strauss, David Friedrich. <i>The Life of Jesus Critically Examined</i> . Translated by George Eliot. New York: Macmillan, 1892. Translation of <i>Das Leben Jesu: Kritisch bearbeitet</i> . 2 vols. 4th rev. ed. Tübingen: Osiander, 1839–1840.
NLJ 1865	Strauss, David Friedrich. <i>A New Life of Jesus</i> . London: Williams & Norgate, 1865. Translation of <i>Das Leben Jesu: Für das deutsche Volk bearbeitet</i> . Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1864.
NTM	<i>Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Ethik der Naturwissenschaften, Technik, und Medizin</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OFN 1872	Strauss, David Friedrich. <i>The Old Faith and the New: A Confession</i> . Translated by Mathilde Blind. 2 vols. New York: Holt, 1873. Translation of <i>Der alte und der neue Glaube: Ein Bekenntnis</i> . 6th edition. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1872.
OFN 1873	Strauss, David Friedrich. <i>Der alte und der neue Glaube: Ein Bekenntnis</i> . 6th ed. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1872.
RH 19	<i>Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle</i>

- Streitschriften* Strauss, David Friedrich. *Die Evangelische Kirchenzeitung, die Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik und die theologischen Studien und Kritiken in ihrer Stellung zu meiner kritischen Bearbeitung des Lebens Jesu*. Vol. 3 of *Streitschriften zur Vertheidigung meiner Schrift über das Leben Jesu und zur Charakteristik der gegenwärtigen Theologie*. 3 vols. Tübingen: Osiander, 1837.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Disenchantment and Exorcism in Early Nineteenth-Century Germany

In his 1869 autobiography, the German Reformed theologian Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacker relates an anecdote that he heard many years earlier from the romantic poet and physician, Justinus Kerner. The story concerns Frederike Hauffe née Wanner, who came under Kerner's care in 1826. Hauffe suffered from epileptic seizures and died young at the age of twenty-eight; she claimed she was attacked by demons and entered into ecstatic trances in which she diagnosed her ailments and communicated with the dead. In 1829, Kerner published an account of her illness and clairvoyant revelations, *The Seeress of Prevorst*,<sup>1</sup> in which he claimed that Hauffe's experiences offered scientific evidence of a rich pneumatic realm concealed in the natural order. The work was immensely popular. While some contemporaries regarded Kerner and Hauffe with disdain, many welcomed his research. Krummacker was one of a number of important figures at the time—Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, for example, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and David Friedrich Strauss—who visited Kerner in his home in Weinsberg. It was during this visit that Kerner described to him the following incident:

A short time before, he allowed a celebrated theologian to accompany him to the sick-bed of the Seeress of Prevorst. There he granted him permission to try exorcism upon her in his own way. Approaching her bed in a ceremonial posture, [the theologian] began his demystification [*Entzauberung*] with this strange formula: "In the name of Reason, to which power is given over all specters; in the name of Science [*Wis-*

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1. Justinus Kerner, *Die Seherin von Prevorst: Eröffnungen über das innere Leben des Menschen und über das Hereinragen einer Geisterwelt in die Unsere* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1829).

*senschaft*] before whose light all deceptive images vanish; in the name of Christianity, which has purified the air of all evil spirits, I command you, demon who does not exist, depart from this sick woman!” She suddenly interrupted this solemn address and, in her crude Swabian dialect, she dealt the learned necromancer a flood of abuse, which included the delicate exclamation, “You human ass, you think I’m afraid of your filthy talk? Get out of here unless you want what’s coming to you!” The noble exorcist hurried sheepishly away.<sup>2</sup>

In his 1834 *Accounts of the Modern Possessed*, Kerner records an incident that may have been the basis for the story. He describes how a “respected scholar” sought to rid a possessed woman under his care, an Anna U, of her demon. He declared the invader a “delusion” and a “non-entity” and ordered it to come out. The demon replied with a barrage of insults and complained that it was “an evil thing, that he should be called a delusion and a non-entity.”<sup>3</sup>

If the story had some basis in fact, however, the telling is comical<sup>4</sup> and draws on an ancient narrative type whose roots can be traced to the Bible. In Acts 19, Luke narrates a similar incident in which the sons of the Jewish chief priest Sceva attempt to cast out a demon by appealing to “the name of Jesus in whom Paul preaches.” The demon refuses to be exorcised and responds, “Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?” (Acts 19:13–16).<sup>5</sup> It then compels its host to attack the would-be exorcists and chase them away. This tale became a *locus classicus* by which Christian writers in later centuries defined illegitimate religious practices as “magic.”<sup>6</sup>

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2. Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacher, *An Autobiography*, trans. M. G. Easton (New York: Carter & Brothers, 1869), 208–9 (translation modified); trans. of *Eine Selbstbiographie* (Berlin: Wiegandt & Grieben, 1869), 166.

3. Justinus Kerner with Carl August von Eschenmayer, *Geschichten Besessener neuerer Zeit: Beobachtungen aus dem Gebiete kakodaemonisch-magnetischer Erscheinungen nebst Reflexionen über Bessenseyn und Zauber* (Stuttgart: Wachendorf, 1834), 100.

4. Krummacher adds that the incident “offered many an occasion for laughter, which repeated itself among us when Kerner narrated it in his drastic fashion” (*Autobiography*, 209).

5. This story drew in turn on older traditions about competing ritual specialists. In the story of the Exodus, for example, Moses and Aaron’s miracles outstrip those of Pharaoh’s magicians.

6. The story helped to define “magic” against “faith” or “religion” by distinguishing legitimate, faithful propitiation of Christ from attempts to coerce divine and pneu-

Kerner's story, like Luke's, defines his religious opponents as illegitimate representatives of a shared tradition. But he adapts this trope to his modern polemical aims. Kerner, a romantic, and Krummacher, a conservative preacher, objected to demystifying critics who rejected orthodox religious views. They opposed arguments against the truth of biblical miracles, for example, or the reality of demon possession. Krummacher plays on the valences of *Entzauberung* ("demystification" or "disenchantment") and caricatures demystifying assaults on religious belief as illegitimate versions of exorcism, failed attempts to dis-spell (*ent-zaubern*) a religious spirit. Kerner's scientific theologian must endure a rebuke, ironically, from a demon whose existence he denies. His story takes an old polemic against false religion and turns it against the critics who might have seen his own work as superstitious or magical.

We generally associate the rise of the modern, secular era with the "disenchantment of the world," the "*Entzauberung der Welt*," to use Max Weber's famous phrase.<sup>7</sup> Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries in the West, beliefs that rested on miracle and mystery were eclipsed by the conviction that nature could be subjected to rational control and calculation. Many traditional religious views faded under scientific scrutiny.<sup>8</sup> This rationalization and demystification was not a straightforward process, however. The relationship between science and faith or secularity and religion remained complex and tangled throughout the period. Kerner's anecdote illustrates this complexity. We might object to his insinuation that demystifying critique is a derivative form of esoteric religious practices. But the story points to the fact that distinctions between religion, science, reason, and superstition at the time were flexible. The very notion of "disenchantment" was contested.

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matic beings or to appeal to their bare names. Christians associated the latter polemically with Jewish and pagan magical practices. Nevertheless such practices have their own rich history in Christian tradition. Luke's story in Acts 19 suggests as much—these practices may have occurred among followers of Jesus whom Luke did not count as members of his community.

7. "The fate of our times is characterized above all by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'" (Weber, "Science as Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. Hans Heinrich Gerth and C. Wright Mills [New York: Oxford, 1946], 155). Gerth and Mills add the quotation marks around "disenchantment of the world."

8. Thus in Weber's view, a modern scientist's integrity stands opposed to "pure religious devotion" (*ibid.*).

In nineteenth-century Germany, “science” (*Wissenschaft*) encompassed a wide range of disciplines—natural science, historical criticism of the Bible, and speculative philosophy, for example. These disciplines had in common the aim of analyzing their subject matter in a systematic, repeatable, and transparent fashion. But scientific disciplines did not spring forth fully-formed, nor did they univocally oppose “superstition” and religious mystification. On the contrary, they often took shape in the crucible of arcane religious controversies. Debates about demon possession offer a case in point. Fifty years before Kerner published the *Seeress of Prevorst*, the Catholic Priest Johann Joseph Gassner became famous throughout Germany by performing well-attended public exorcisms.<sup>9</sup> Gassner could appeal to hard, empirical evidence to justify his reputation. Even his most dedicated critics acknowledged the solid testimony that his successes as a healer presented. He faced his most significant challenge when Franz Anton Mesmer produced similar results without any mention of demons or devils. The medical historian Henri Ellenberger has claimed that this confrontation between Mesmer and Gassner represented the “fateful turning point from exorcism to dynamic psychotherapy.”<sup>10</sup> But Mesmer’s own theory of “animal magnetism”—the idea of an ethereal fluid that permeates the cosmos and bodies of living creatures and that could be manipulated by a physician—would soon come under scrutiny in its own right; ironically, it would eventually serve as the foundation for Kerner and others’ defenses of the old ideas about demons and exorcism.

Kerner’s writings on possession exemplify this enduring complexity in the early nineteenth century. Kerner, like Gassner, claimed that demons were real and appealed to empirical evidence. His 1834 *Accounts of the Modern Possessed* included a series of case studies of modern “demonomaniacs” with supplemental theoretical reflections by the philosopher and physician Carl August von Eschenmayer.<sup>11</sup> Although skeptics rejected

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9. H. C. Erik Midelfort has considered Gassner’s history as evidence for the significance of esoteric religious debates in the Enlightenment in *Exorcism and Enlightenment: Johann Joseph Gassner and the Demons of Eighteenth-Century Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

10. Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 57.

11. He includes two case studies of women he observed personally (Kerner and Eschenmayer, *Geschichten Besessener neuerer Zeit*, 20–103), along with supplemental

Kerner and Eschenmayer's conclusions, many admired his careful observations of human psychology and physiology. Ellenberger and other historians of psychiatry still credit him with helping to found the discipline.<sup>12</sup> Even a romantic and traditionalist in religious matters like Kerner could claim the mantle of science. Nor was he an isolated example. Kerner stood among an array of notable contemporaries who drew on Schelling's natural philosophy, Mesmer's theory of magnetism, or Etienne Esquirol's writings on "demonomania" to offer scientific justifications for esoteric and miraculous religious phenomena.

Kerner's anecdote also captures the fact that struggles between science and faith were struggles over spiritual authority, religious legitimacy, and the legacy of Christianity. Demystifying critics vied with orthodox theologians and folk preachers to show who could best mediate the truths of religion. Just as Kerner could claim to represent "science," it would not have been unusual for a critic of religion in his day to claim the mantle of "Christianity." Theologians and philosophers who undermined Christian doctrines regularly asserted that they were its most faithful representatives. "Criticism"—biblical, philosophical, or historical—outlined legitimate foundations for belief as much as it proscribed its illegitimate expressions. When Johann Semler argued that much of the biblical canon was not meant for modern believers, for example, he did so to demonstrate that it still contained a core of inspired, universal moral truth.<sup>13</sup> When Immanuel Kant set limits on what people could reasonably claim about God, he sought to protect personal faith from the incursions of rationalist analysis. When Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel argued that philosophers, not theologians, were best prepared to grasp religious concepts, he explained that philosophy was the culmination of Christianity's core principles. In the dominant strains of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German philosophy, it was commonly believed that

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notes by a Pastor Gerber, followed by summaries of four other modern cases of possession from 1559–1829 (pp. 104–23). Eschenmayer's reflections make up the bulk of the rest of the work.

12. Ellenberger writes, "In spite of their shortcomings, Kerner's investigations of the seeress were a milestone in the history of dynamic psychiatry" (*Discovery of the Unconscious*, 79).

13. Johannes Salomo Semler, *D. Joh. Salomo Semlers Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon*, 4 vols. (Halle: Hemmerde, 1771–1775).

modern, secular, or scientific disciplines and forms of life evolved out of the heart of Christianity.

Such arguments reflected a widespread belief that the European Enlightenment had manifested Christianity’s own illuminating and disenchanting principles. When Kerner has his exorcist appeal to Christianity as a force “which has purified the air of all evil spirits,” for example, he echoes the actual rhetoric of his contemporaries. In the forward to the 1830 edition of his *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel presents precisely this image of demystification and exorcism. He complains that orthodox and Pietist Christians had sought to keep philosophy from laying any claim on Christian truths. But the very individuals who would excommunicate philosophers from the circle of legitimate Christians “have not carried their faith so far as to cast out devils”; he explains: “Instead, many of them, like those who have faith in the medium of Prevorst, are inclined to congratulate themselves about being on good terms with a mob of ghosts, of whom they stand in awe, instead of driving out and banishing these lies that belong to a servile and anti-Christian superstition.”<sup>14</sup> Hegel, like Kerner, plays on the valences of “demystification,” but to the opposite effect. The orthodox and Pietists in his day appeal to superstitious ideas about clairvoyants, ghosts, and exorcisms, but Christianity’s real miracles are that it “drives out” and “banishes” these illusions. In his view, Christianity is from its inception and at its core a demystifying religion. When orthodox Christians refuse to think philosophically about God and divine things, they turn aside from the underlying principle of the religion that they claim: they “deliberately and scornfully disdain the elaboration of doctrine that is the foundation of the faith of the Christian church.”<sup>15</sup> Like Luke’s sons of Sceva or Kerner’s exorcist, such Christians could appeal only to the bare “name of the Lord Christ.”<sup>16</sup> Thus the struggle between “philosophy” and “theology” is also a struggle about what Christianity is in its essence—and how it will define and be defined by a modern, secular, or rational age.

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14. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic, with the Zusätze*, vol. 1 of *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. Theodore F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 19–20.

15. *Ibid.*, 20.

16. *Ibid.*, 19.

Strauss and the *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*

If Krummacker had been pressed to name an individual as the prototype for Kerner's rationalist exorcist, he would not likely have named Hegel, however, but one of his students, Strauss. Strauss was and remains best known for the two volumes of his *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835–1836),<sup>17</sup> a pathbreaking piece of critical biblical scholarship and Hegelian philosophy. In this work, Strauss gathers together the most significant results of historical critical research on the Gospels over the preceding hundred-and-fifty years. He argues that the stories are “mythical” compositions with only a scanty basis in fact: the evangelists crafted narratives about Jesus long after his death from a well of ancient religious ideas. He undermines the dominant Enlightenment image of Jesus as a proto-modern, rational, and ethical teacher. His historical Jesus belongs to the milieu of first-century messianic Judaism—he is a deluded apocalyptic prophet who awaits God's imminent, dramatic intervention in the world. For Strauss as for his contemporaries, modern faith could not be based on such an alien, ancient figure. In the conclusion to the work, he argues consequently that the truth of the Gospels is not to be found in the person of Jesus, but in the ideas behind the narrative, which were primitive expressions of humanist philosophy. The Christian idea that God and humanity are reconciled is true, for Strauss, but this reconciliation did not occur in an individual person: it takes place in the totality of the human species over the course of its development. Humanity does not produce any supernatural miracles, but it demonstrates its “divine” quality in the great, historical wonders of science, industry, and culture.

The *Life of Jesus* generated a storm of controversy and had enormous literary success. Strauss intended the work only for trained theologians, but it soon became notorious among the broad sweep of educated Germans. Its readership surpassed that of contemporary works by Hegel and even Schleiermacher, for example. The work also had a significant influence on modern historical science. It shaped the historical critical study of the Gospels from Ernst Renan to Albert Schweitzer. Strauss showed that Hegelianism could be used in support of humanism and historical criti-

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17. David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu: kritisch bearbeitet*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Osiander, 1835–1836), cited hereafter as *LJ* 1835 and *LJ* 1836; idem, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Macmillan, 1892), cited hereafter as *LJ* 1892.

cism; the work stood alongside contemporary writings by Ludwig Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer,<sup>18</sup> for example, that influenced Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and other critical readers of Hegel. His later works continued to be widely read, and he came to identify himself as a representative of the bourgeois reading public.<sup>19</sup> But it was the *Life of Jesus* that had defined him as a demystifying theologian *par excellence*. Krummacher was among those who made Strauss’s name synonymous with the philosophical drift toward atheism.

The *Life of Jesus* models perfectly the confluence of “science” and “Christianity” that Kerner and Krummacher caricatured. On the one hand, it is expressly scientific. In the preface to the first edition, Strauss declares his commitment to the “seriousness of science” in opposition to the “frivolity” and “fanaticism” that he sees in contemporary studies of the Bible.<sup>20</sup> He claims that he is best prepared to investigate the Gospels, because he had experienced an “internal liberation of the feelings and intellect from certain religious and dogmatical presuppositions” through his study of the philosophy of Hegel. He then adds, “If theologians regard this absence of presupposition from his work, as unchristian: he regards the believing presuppositions of theirs as unscientific.”<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, he assures his readers that his findings by no mean oppose Christian faith. On the contrary, he claims to have saved these truths by liberating them from their entanglement with the mere facts of history: “The supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension, remain eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts.”<sup>22</sup> Strauss believed he had protected Christianity from the negative tendencies of the Enlightenment by translating it into a philosophical, humanist form.

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18. Especially Ludwig Feuerbach’s 1840 *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper, 1957), and Bruno Bauer’s *Kritik der Evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Wigand, 1841–1842).

19. He does so most notably in David Friedrich Strauss, *A New Life of Jesus* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1865); trans. of *Das Leben Jesu: Für das deutsche Volk bearbeitet* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1864); and in idem, *The Old Faith and the New: A Confession*, trans. Mathilde Blind, 2 vols. (New York: Holt, 1873); trans. of *Der alte und der neue Glaube: Ein Bekenntnis*, 6th ed. (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1872). Hereafter cited as NLJ 1865, OFN 1872, and OFN 1873, respectively.

20. LJ 1835, 1:vi–vii; LJ 1892, xxx.

21. LJ 1835, 1:vi; LJ 1892, xxx.

22. LJ 1835, 1:vii; LJ 1892, xxx.

Strauss also knew Kerner personally and wrote about his life and work. He visited Kerner and Hauffe for the first time in 1827, while he was studying theology at the Tübingen seminary. He witnessed one of Hauffe's trances, during which she told him he would never know unbelief. He later teased Kerner with this recollection, but he wrote of Hauffe with admiration and remained friends with Kerner until his death in 1854. Soon afterward, he wrote an appreciative essay, which remains an important account of the physician's life and character.<sup>23</sup> During the 1830s, he also composed a number of short critical pieces in response to Kerner's studies of clairvoyance, ghost seeing, animal magnetism, and possession.<sup>24</sup> His first publication, in 1830, was a critical review of recent explanations of the "Seeress's" otherworldly powers. In these writings, Strauss praises Kerner's research but rejects his religious conclusions. In a response to Kerner's 1834 *Accounts of the Modern Possessed*, for example, he argues that although Kerner's writings are exacting as empirical studies, they fail to theorize rigorously the events in question.<sup>25</sup> Kerner neglected to follow out his own principles of psychological and physiological analysis. Strauss took these instead as the grounds for a remarkably materialist psychophysical approach: the demoniacs' illnesses did not have to do with spiritual activity in the outside world, but with the disordered state of their own brains, nerves, and "ganglionic systems."

Strauss later gathered together these writings under the heading "On the Science of the Nocturnal Side of Nature" ("*Zur Wissenschaft der Nachtseite der Natur*"). The phrase originated with the romantic physician Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert, to whom Kerner dedicated the *Seeress of Prevorst*. It refers to what we now think of as "occult" or "paranormal" matters. Schubert intended it to describe observed empirical phenomena that stand beyond the horizon of our quotidian, "everyday" or "enlightened," rational understanding of the world. These phenomena would

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23. David Friedrich Strauss, "Justinus Kerner," in *Kleine Schriften* (Berlin: Duncker, 1866), 298–332. See also idem, "Justinus Kerner," in *Zwei Friedliche Blätter* (Altona: Hammerich, 1839), 1–57.

24. Strauss collected and republished these in 1839 under the heading "Zur Wissenschaft der Nachtseite der Natur" in his *Charakteristiken und Kritiken: Eine Sammlung zerstreuter Aufsätze aus den Gebieten der Theologie, Anthropologie und Aesthetik* (Leipzig: Wigand, 1839).

25. David Friedrich Strauss, "Kerner, Geschichten Besessener neuerer Zeit," in *Charakteristiken und Kritiken*, 301–27.

include the clairvoyant powers of people who enter into somnambulatory trances, dreams, and marvelous healings effected through obscure magnetic forces. For Kerner and Strauss, it also included demonomania.

Strauss's works on the nocturnal side of nature are striking for a number of reasons—because Strauss, who became infamous as a skeptic, earnestly engages people's beliefs in ghosts and demons, for example, and because they presage insights in the modern study of neurology and behavioral psychology. Also remarkable is the extent to which their concerns resemble those of his better-known writings on early Christianity. Strauss's personal familiarity with cases of possession and other paranormal phenomena in the German countryside shaped his analysis of Jesus's miracle-working activity in the Gospels—beginning, of course, with the various stories about demons and exorcisms.<sup>26</sup> But Strauss's writings on psychology also engage questions that stand at the heart of the *Life of Jesus*—questions about the conditions for objective knowledge, for example, about the limits and intersections of souls and bodies and about the nature of divine action in the world.

### The *Life of Jesus* and the Scientific Study of the New Testament

The *Life of Jesus* stands at the apex of a long history of Enlightenment biblical criticism. From the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries onward, scholars brought tremendous critical, philological, philosophical, and historical resources to bear on analyzing the texts of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. They did a great deal in the process to undermine Scripture's status as an authoritative, inspired account of revelation and sacred history. By the early nineteenth century, critics had shown that much of this “history” was unhistorical; the stories were riddled with contradictions and their texts had been cobbled together from a mass of earlier manuscripts. The miracle stories were simply impossible, the Gospels were not altogether trustworthy as eye-witness accounts of Jesus, and the books of the Pentateuch were not authored by Moses. In addition, the Bible reflected the morals and rarefied concerns of a distant, ancient world. Some stories were unethical; others were irrational. English deists and

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26. In a 1982 monograph on Strauss, Jean-Marie Paul knowingly writes that “one gets the impression in reading the critical treatment of the demon possessions [in the *Life of Jesus*] that Strauss could speak of demoniacs in familiar terms” (*D. F. Strauss et son époque* [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982], 144).

French *philosophes* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sought to turn their contemporaries away from this primitive collection of texts altogether. Many argued it had been crafted by an ancient priestly caste to bring people into submission.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, in Germany in particular, the historical critical study of the Bible also helped to preserve and augment its authority, albeit in new idioms. To transplant oneself imaginatively onto the theater of ancient history could appear as an act of piety, for example; to cull the sacred history's husk of supernatural or parochial elements was to expose its universal, rational core. Critical interpretation also had an irenic function: when critics called into question the authoritative, revealed status of Scripture, they kept the Bible safe from the divisive, sectarian controversies that began in the Reformation and wars of religion.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, they redefined it as a new kind of historical and cultural authority. The Bible offered a unique set of poetic, literary, and political resources for reflecting on human history and culture and on the life of the modern state.<sup>29</sup> Thus scholars transformed the Bible from a sacred Scripture into a uniquely privileged cultural text. Their work defined the university, in the place of the church, as the proper sphere in which to understand religion and Scripture; it helped to shore up civil authority against religious insurrections and to shape the secular state.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, German biblical criticism stood at the center of debates about the relation between science [*Wissenschaft*] and faith [*Glaube*]. The Bible was an important testing ground for modern scientific methods. An empirical or philosophical

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27. In the introduction to the *Life of Jesus*, Strauss credits attacks by “deists and naturalists” on Christianity and the Bible with setting the stage for early nineteenth-century German biblical criticism and for his work in particular. He mentions the English writers John Toland, Henry St. John Bolingbroke, Thomas Morgan, Thomas Chubb, and Thomas Woolston (*LJ* 1835, 1:12–14; *LJ* 1892, 45–46) as well as the German deist Hermann Samuel Reimarus (*LJ* 1835, 1:14–15; *LJ* 1892, 46). Strauss later wrote an appreciative piece on Reimarus (*Hermann Samuel Reimarus und seine Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1862) in which he also credited Baruch Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1677) and Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697) as important precedents for his work.

28. Michael Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

29. Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

critic could demonstrate scientific neutrality by overcoming the temptation to treat a biblical text as an immediate, inspired authority. At the same time, historical criticism defined specific problems for belief. In the older religious view, the historical truth of the sacred history was part and parcel with its religious truth. But early modern critics questioned the historical truth of Scripture in its own right. David Hume famously argued, for example, that miracle stories could never be credible.<sup>30</sup> The numerous deist writings that were translated into German in the eighteenth century raised the question of whether faith should depend on the historical content of the texts. In 1774, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing began publishing a series of pieces from a work by Hermann Samuel Reimarus, although he did not identify the author, in which Reimarus claimed among other things that Jesus was a failed political messianic enthusiast and that Moses was an impostor.<sup>31</sup> For Lessing, this proved that Christian truth should stand apart from scientific, historical investigation.<sup>32</sup> Kant echoed these claims and argued that the real truth of the Bible could not be the object of historical investigation.<sup>33</sup>

Others tried to reconcile faith and historical science. Many German theologians reinterpreted the Gospels on strictly natural and historical terrain, for example, in order to present Jesus as a unique, great personality. One could argue that the supernatural and otherwise disturbing elements of the text were only the time-conditioned way in which ancient people conceived of him. In Strauss's day, Schleiermacher and many of those who embraced his theology maintained that although the results of faith and historical science were distinct, they led to the same conclusions.<sup>34</sup> Hegel

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30. David Hume, “On Miracles,” in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Other Writings*, ed. Stephen Buckle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 96–116. Originally published in 1748.

31. *Fragmente des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungennanten* (1774–1778). The fragments were from Reimarus's *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*. Lessing claimed to have discovered them in the Herzog-August-Bibliothek in *Wolfenbüttel* in order to avoid censorship.

32. He famously wrote, “Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason” (Gotthold Lessing, *Lessing's Theological Writings*, trans. Henry Chadwick [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957], 53).

33. Immanuel Kant, “Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason,” in *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 39–216.

34. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. and ed. H. R. Mackin-

argued that both could come under the auspices of speculative philosophy.<sup>35</sup> Strauss was inspired by Schleiermacher's commitment to historical science and took up Hegel's philosophy, but he rejected the mediating tendency of their approaches to theology. In the *Life of Jesus*, he argued that faith could not depend on the results of scientific or historical investigation, on the one hand, and that it should be replaced entirely by the concepts of philosophy, on the other. This argument liberated the ruthless historical critique that constituted the bulk of the work, as well as its final philosophical and theological conclusion on the humanist significance of Christian dogma.

### The Ghosts and Demons of the *Life of Jesus*

One could analyze Strauss's scientific contribution by juxtaposing it to any number of influences. In the introduction to the *Life of Jesus*, he acknowledges his debt to a range of historical-critical interpreters, from contemporaries like Schleiermacher, Heinrich Paulus, and W. M. L. de Wette, to neologians<sup>36</sup> and deists in earlier centuries. He studied at Tübingen

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tosh and James A. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928); trans. of *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Berlin: Reimer, 1830–1831).

35. Hegel's mediating view appears in his earlier work—in, for example, the sections on religion in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—but takes its most apologetic religious form in his later works, especially the 1821–1831 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. In Strauss's day, the major interpreters of Hegel often appealed to his work in defense of the eternal truth of orthodox religion. See the third volume of David Friedrich Strauss's *Streitschriften zur Vertheidigung meiner Schrift über das Leben Jesu und zur Charakteristik der gegenwärtigen Theologie*, 3 vols. (Tübingen: Osiander, 1837); translated by Marilyn Massey as *In Defense of My Life of Jesus against the Hegelians* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1983).

36. "Neologians" (*Neologien*) were German theologians who attempted to articulate Christian faith in a modern, rational idiom in the middle of the eighteenth century. They believed that rational inquiry could serve to identify and clarify revealed religious truth. Neologian biblical critics developed novel historical and philological methods to defend the historicity of revelation, in contrast to both orthodox interpreters who rejected these methods and deists who argued that the truths of religion did not lie in the realm of history. Michaelis and Johannes Semler are often identified as the most prominent neologians, although neither adopted the label for himself. Semler's canonical criticism exemplifies the general orientation of neologism. In his four-volume *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon* (1771–1775), he identi-

with Ferdinand Baur, who introduced him to Schleiermacher’s scientific approach to theology and history, which was shaped in turn by Baruch Spinoza’s immanent theology.<sup>37</sup> He also engages seriously the arguments of contemporary “supernaturalists”—apologists who defended the veracity of the Gospel miracle reports—like Hermann Olshausen. De Wette’s application of “mythical interpretation” to the Hebrew Bible modeled for Strauss the analytical rubric that he would apply to the Gospels. This mode of interpretation was developed in turn by romantic theories of myth in the works of Schelling and Johann Gottfried Herder.<sup>38</sup> Kant’s writings on the Bible were important for Strauss, because they separated religious truth from historical content. Finally, Strauss claimed the philosophy of Hegel had laid the basic foundation for his studies.<sup>39</sup> Hegel’s notion that reli-

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fies parts of the Bible that reflect the concerns of ancient people and no longer apply to the world of modern Christians. He attempts thereby to liberate the kernel of eternal, universal truth in the text from its time-conditioned chaff.

37. Dietz Lange, *Historischer Jesus oder mythischer Christus: Untersuchungen zu dem Gegensatz zwischen Friedrich Schleiermacher und David Friedrich Strauss* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1975) frames Schleiermacher as Strauss’s primary point of reference. Hans Frei, “David Friedrich Strauss,” in *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, ed. Ninian Smart et al., 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1:215–60, nuances this view and argues that Schleiermacher replaces Hegel as a key reference point for Strauss only after 1837.

38. Christian Hartlich and Walter Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der modernen Bibelwissenschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1952); George Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

39. Debates over the extent to which Strauss should be read as a Hegelian have dominated much of the commentary on his work. These began soon after he published the first edition of the *Life of Jesus* (Strauss, *In Defense of My Life of Jesus*, 7–8). In the twentieth century, Gotthold Müller, *Identität und Immanenz: Zur Genese der Theologie von David Friedrich Strauss, eine theologie- und philosophiegeschichtliche Studie mit einem bibliographischen Anhang zur Apokatastasis-Frage* (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1968) has argued that Strauss’s youthful immersion in the world of Swabian Pietism and mysticism led to a flawed, too-monistic, and one-sided reading of Hegel. A more balanced assessment of Strauss’s engagement with Hegel appears in Jörg F. Sandberger, *David Friedrich Strauss als theologischer Hegelianer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972) and Hans Frei, “David Friedrich Strauss.” Marilyn Massey, “David Friedrich Strauss and His Hegelian Critics,” *JR* 57 (1977): 341–62, defends his status as a Hegelian. As in Müller’s work, much of the discussion has centered on the value of his contribution to critical thought in philosophy, theology, or history. Where for Müller Strauss was not legitimately Hegelian, however, others have asked how his

gious “representations” (*Vorstellungen*) and philosophical “concepts” (*Begriffen*) captured the same truth enabled Strauss to argue that the Christian dogmas anticipated humanist philosophical ideas and that nothing was lost as modern culture transitioned from one mode to the other.

The writings on psychology add a crucial supplement to these influences. Commentators have often treated Strauss’s acquaintance with Hauffe and Kerner as a reflection of his early flirtation with romantic and mystical ideas. This passing interest serves in turn to explain Strauss’s choice, in the third edition of the *Life of Jesus*, to place some of Jesus’s miracles in a new category “unusual powers of nature,” that he compared to somnambulism, animal magnetism, and clairvoyance.<sup>40</sup> Few, however, have considered in

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Hegelianism might affect his contributions to history or theology (Robert Morgan, “A Straussian Question to New Testament Theology,” *NTS* 23 [1977]: 243–65; Van A. Harvey, “D. F. Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* Revisited,” *CH* 30 [1961]: 191–211). There are in addition a number of studies that emphasize specific elements of Strauss’s engagement with Hegel (e.g., his attempt to set historical criticism at the avant-garde of secular modernity, Ward Blanton, *Displacing Christian Origins: Philosophy, Secularity, and the New Testament* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007], 25–66; his contribution to the scientific study of history and theology, Johannes Zachhuber, *Theology as Science in Nineteenth-Century Germany: From F. C. Baur to Ernst Troeltsch* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], 73–95). Others situate Strauss within a broader field of critical theologians, literary authors, and philosophers in the German *Vormärz*, many of whom were grappling with Hegel’s philosophy in particular. His *Life of Jesus* regularly appears among works by “Young Hegelians,” for example, such as Arnold Ruge, Ludwig Feuerbach, Bauer, Max Stirner, and the young Marx, who interpreted, critiqued, and altered Hegel’s philosophy in a religiously or politically radical fashion (William Brazill, *The Young Hegelians* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970], 95–132). John Edward Toews (*Hegelianism: The Path toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985]) and Warren Breckman (*Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999]) establish his important position among these critical readers of Hegel as well as alongside other “fellow travelers” such as Friedrich Richter, August Cieszkowski, and Heinrich Heine who were critical of the *Vormärz* era Prussian state and church. Marilyn Massey (*Christ Unmasked: The Meaning of the Life of Jesus in German Politics* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983]) offers a thorough portrait of Strauss’s work in its social and historical context. She considers his work and his Hegelianism in the light of the contemporary literature of Young Germany. Her introduction to the *In Defense of My Life of Jesus* summarizes clearly Strauss’s own position on the question as of 1837.

40. For example, Theobald Ziegler, *David Friedrich Strauss* (Strassburg: Trübner, 1908); Peter Hodgson’s introduction to *The Life of Jesus: Critically Examined*, by

detail the intersections between his work on the nocturnal side of nature and the Gospels.<sup>41</sup> Admittedly, Kerner’s name does not appear in the *Life of Jesus*. Strauss only mentions his own psychological writings once, in a footnote to the section on demon possession that he added to the 1840 edition of the *Life of Jesus*.<sup>42</sup> But this single footnote rests on a network of threads that connect his writings on and encounters with possessed people in the German countryside to central, defining features of his vision of critical science and his *Life of Jesus*.

To begin with, the psychological works reflect Strauss’s early and ongoing fascination with the margins of Christian belief. His image of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet in the *Life of Jesus* and his writings on demon possession both focus on elements of Christianity—apocalypticism and exorcism—that mainstream theologians disdained, although they remained popular among the broad sweep of German Christians. Commentators have long recognized that eschatology was a driving obsession throughout Strauss’s career.<sup>43</sup> He began writing on the kingdom of God, resurrection of the dead, and immortality of the soul as early as an 1828 essay on the “Resurrection of the Flesh” and returned to the subject in his 1830 dissertation on the doctrine of the “Restoration of all Things.” Strauss did not hold any expressly eschatological beliefs himself; on the contrary, by 1830 he explicitly rejected ideas about the immortal soul and future resurrection of the dead. Nevertheless, just as he earnestly took up Kerner’s work on demon possession, he took very seriously the importance of apocalypticism in the history of ancient and modern Christian faith. If eschatology

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David Friedrich Strauss, ed. Peter Hodgson, trans. George Eliot (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

41. Paul, as an exception, focuses on their relevance for understanding the passages on miracles and exorcisms in the earlier and fourth editions. In *Identität und Immanenz*, Müller considers his later work in light of his early interest in mysticism and romanticism, but argues that these elements of Strauss’s thought invalidate his contribution to a truly scientific theology. They prove that he was a bad or one-sided reader of Hegel who neglected the latter’s insights into “history.” Müller neglects as such to consider the specific, critical ways in which Strauss engages and alters the beliefs and ideas that he encountered in his youth.

42. Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu: kritisch bearbeitet*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Tübingen: Osian-der, 1840), 2:18 n. 34, cited hereafter as *LJ* 1840.

43. Hodgson writes, for example, “The great offense of the faith of Christianity was for Strauss its futuristic eschatology, yet his fascination with eschatology and his struggle against it continued to the end of his career” (introduction, xvi.).

was a problem for faith, it was a central, crucial problem. He set eschatological ideas at the heart of his Christology, dogmatics, and image of Jesus and his earliest followers. This engagement stood in marked contrast with the work of liberal theologians and rationalists, who marginalized these beliefs at each corresponding point. It brought Strauss into a strange proximity with Pietism.

In addition, Strauss's interest in eschatology converged with his interest in exorcism in that both concerned the operation of "spirit" and "spirits" in nature and history. Strauss's theory of mind was bound up with his theory of revelation. The claim that bodies and souls were united and coextensive stood behind his analysis of exorcisms in the Gospels and German countryside, but also his reflections on Jesus's resurrection, the immortality of the soul, and the future reconciliation of God and humanity. Even more, these concerns shaped his scientific, historical method. As in the history of psychological medicine, Strauss's secularizing approach to historical criticism formed in religious and theological debates that can only seem esoteric from our twenty-first century perspective. Strauss understood anachronistic views on Jesus and the Bible, for example, in terms of his immanent view of God's operation in the cosmos and spirit's movement in material bodies. People who read modern ideas into ancient texts had, in effect, a flawed, dualistic understanding of spirit and matter. Those liberal theologians and rationalists who treated Jesus as a proto-modern, ethical rationalist for example, were little better than modern ghost seers or the ancient disciples who experienced visions of his return during the "resurrection event."

At the same time, Strauss sought to describe and understand the states of consciousness behind these deluded views of history and physiology. The limits that he set on the operation of spirit in nature opened onto the experience and state of mind of those who could imaginatively transgress them. The science of the nocturnal side of nature and the science of biblical criticism took distinct "mentalities" as their object. When Strauss acknowledges Hauffe and Kerner's sincerity in his writings on ghost seeing and possession, he follows a principle that also features in his "mythical interpretation" in the *Life of Jesus*: Stories about supernatural events do not result from the mendacity or credulity of eyewitnesses or storytellers. In the *Life of Jesus*, Strauss famously rejects the deist argument that the Gospels are intentional fictions, as well as the more moderate, "rationalist" argument that the disciples were duped when Jesus allowed them to believe he had worked miracles. One could explain the stories'

extraordinary aspects by radicalizing the rationalists’ main insight, that is, that they emerged out of a distinct, ancient mode of consciousness. Rationalists like Paulus believed that this mode of thought colored the eyewitnesses’ understanding of events; under their mythical shell, however, the narratives still contained a baseline of historical truth. Strauss held, on the contrary, that the events themselves, including their historical frame, were only the expression of the mentality that crafted them. There was no universally accessible, objective field underneath their confused reports. Like possessed people speaking of demons or ghosts, the authors of the narratives represented their symbolic world in the terms that were ready to hand. Jesus’s followers in the first century thought the appearance of a messianic figure could only be accompanied by dramatic, miraculous signs and events. Whether or not eyewitnesses reported events accurately was beside the point; the accounts turned on the religious categories people used to express their ideas.

Ancient religion resembled modern mental illness, then, in that both were equally incommensurate with educated philosophical and historical reason. In his reflections on Hauffe and the ancient followers of Jesus, Strauss constructed mental illness and mythical consciousness as two distinct antitheses to the modern, rational mind. Scholars in a number of fields have shown that Enlightenment discourses on delusion and unreason helped to define modern notions of subjectivity, autonomy, and rationality. Foucault famously argued in *Madness and Civilization* that the “age of reason” could only take shape by defining “madness” as its other—and separating and confining “mad” people in the process.<sup>44</sup> Discourses on “religion” and religious mentalities also played an essential role in this process. Registers of patients in the first asylums in Germany abound with diagnoses of religious disorders, including demonomania.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, notions of religious “enthusiasm” and “fanaticism” were key topoi in the rhetoric of modernity from John Locke and Martin Luther to Kant, Voltaire, and Strauss.<sup>46</sup> In Germany, this rhetoric took shape in Protestant

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44. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Pantheon, 1965).

45. Ann Goldberg, *Sex, Religion, and the Making of Modern Madness: The Eberbach Asylum and German Society, 1815–1849* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 37.

46. Anthony La Vopa, “The Philosopher and the ‘Schwärmer’: On the Career of a German Epithet from Luther to Kant,” *HLQ* 60 (1997): 85–115; Peter Fenves, “The

polemics against *Schwärmerei* (“fanaticism”), for example. Luther popularized this term as a means to caricature rival spiritual leaders and movements, whom he claimed suffered from demonic influence.<sup>47</sup> It later came to feature in late eighteenth-century debates about the medical sources of illegitimate religious and philosophical ideas; it could be used in particular to denote forms of religious intolerance. Apocalyptic beliefs were a primary object of both demonological and psychopathological versions of this discourse on *Schwärmerei*. In the *Life of Jesus*, Strauss identifies other writings on the New Testament as results of both *Fanatismus* and “intolerance toward heresies” (*Ketzereifer*),<sup>48</sup> but also takes up the question of whether Jesus, who believed that he would soon be taken by angels to the right hand of God where he would judge the living and the dead, was a *Schwärmer*. In the process, he distinguishes religious from fanatical mentalities even as he defines both over and against modern reason.

We can see a similar dynamic at work in the history of discourses on “fanaticism” and of those on “possession” between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Strauss and others who wrote on philosophy, theology, and psychology gradually put aside old religious ideas about moral contamination, demonic influence, and supernatural evil. They focused instead on the psychological and physical health of the individual “fanatic” or “demoniac.” Nevertheless, they carried on certain features of religious polemics against false belief. As Kerner suggested in his anecdote, demystifying discourses took over the older forms of spiritual authority with which they also stood in competition. Strauss’s writings fell within a series of Enlightenment analyses of demon possession, which claimed to represent both scientific truth and correct theological belief. Fifty years

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Scale of Enthusiasm,” *HLQ* 60 (1997): 117–52; Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (London: Verso, 2010); Jordana Rosenberg, *Critical Enthusiasm: Capital Accumulation and the Transformation of Religious Passion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

47. Luther’s various polemics against competing reform movements and ideas in the early 1520s formed the early modern use of the term in Germany. Thomas Müntzer and the peasant rebellion qualified as *Schwärmern*, for example, as did Ulrich Zwingli for his views of the Eucharist. See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1523*, trans. James Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 137–95; John S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964).

48. *LJ* 1835, 1: vii; *LJ* 1892, xxx, translation modified.

earlier, the biblical critic Semler took up medical explanations of possession in explicit defense of orthodox Christianity in writings on Gassner and other exorcists and possessed people. As medical explanations displaced their religious competitors, they defined specific forms of cultural practice, training, and education as the requisites for any discourse on spiritual health. Strauss's writings on apocalyptic belief can be analyzed in a similar light. They consolidated the spiritual authority of a modern culture and modern critical methods. And they defined "religion" in a distinctly modern way. Strauss ultimately defines a hierarchy of culture and spiritual authority, which underwrites in turn the ethos and rhetoric of critical science.

#### The "Nocturnal Side" of the Scientific Criticism of Religion and History

Strauss's early writings on psychology and Christianity present an opportunity to trace the relation between modern scientific disciplines and the regions of esoteric religious thought in and against which these disciplines defined themselves. In the fields of history, religion, and psychology, Strauss's approach was ahead of its time. His work in the 1830s presents a strikingly modern blend of methodological agnosticism and openness to foreign, unsettling phenomena.

It presages a wide field of social and psychological research as well as major aspects of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century study of religion. In particular, Strauss sets the tone for later scholarship by refusing to reject strange beliefs outright; on the contrary, he takes them utterly seriously and struggles to understand them on their own terms. And he does so within a materialist cosmology that he has defined in advance. Nevertheless, this cosmology and approach only become possible for Strauss by way of romantic medicine and natural philosophy. He places exorcistic rituals and apocalyptic beliefs in a close, explicit relation to demystifying science. Strauss repeats throughout his writings of the 1830s and early 1840s that the progress of modern culture and education, *Bildung*, only occurs as we pass in full self-awareness through the fields of nonmodern religious mentalities. Practices of scientific critique mirror and secure this passage. As he carves out a disenchanting path to a modern age, Strauss must wander into strange territories. His work reflects a painstaking awareness of the difficulties involved in announcing the advent of modernity and completing the labor of disenchantment. To return to his work is to recall those difficulties.

In the following four chapters, I consider how Strauss engaged esoteric religious themes in his scientific and critical writings on religion and history in the 1830s. In the first chapter, I consider his lesser-known writings on the nocturnal side of natural science and discuss his early ventures into the German countryside, including his early meetings with Kerner and Hauffe. This chapter establishes Strauss's complex affinity for esoteric and mystical beliefs and practices that pervaded early nineteenth-century Germany. The succeeding chapters examine the ways in which his engagement with these beliefs and practices shaped his better-known work on the New Testament Gospels. In chapters two, three, and four, I focus on three major, well-known critical and scientific contributions of the *Life of Jesus*: Strauss's historical critique of the Gospel miracle stories; his adaptation of "mythical interpretation"; and his image of the historical Jesus and Christian origins, respectively. In each of these three areas, I explore the role played by romantic cosmology and medicine. I emphasize in particular those moments at which his studies of the nocturnal side of natural science had an impact on his conclusions and methods. In the third and fourth chapters, I demonstrate how they helped him to define categories that continue to play a central role in the modern secular discourse of disenchantment and criticism: "religion" and "fanaticism."

In the conclusion, I consider the significance of this analysis as a contribution to a genealogy of modern scientific criticism. When dealing with modern notions of "religion," "fanaticism," and "mental illness," the imperative to undertake genealogical analysis stems from the formative influence that these concepts have had on social and political realities in the modern era. The rise of secular science from the Enlightenment to the present is bound up with the troubled lives of modern institutions—the state, the university, the asylum, and capitalism. Strauss undertook his early work out of sincere religious and scientific interests, and, in the context of *Vormärz*-era Germany (ca. 1830–1848), the *Life of Jesus* includes certain subversive elements.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, it influenced

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49. A number of recent studies have emphasized the radical implications which Strauss's work would have had for his contemporaries. The standard term for the period in which he wrote, the *Vormärz*, or "pre-march," suggests the fragile political situation leading up to the March revolution of 1848. Massey focuses in *Christ Unmasked* on elements of Strauss's image of Jesus that would have appeared subversively democratic in this context. She highlights points of continuity between his approach to the Gospel narratives and the modes of critical irony that had developed

important contributions to the fields of social and historical theory in the succeeding centuries. Nevertheless, his systematic worldview and attendant practices of scientific critique contributed to defining the divergent, unhealthy subjects of a modern age—and to obscuring the challenges that they might pose to it. Esotericism and fanaticism have provided recurring foils for modern, rational religion and science.<sup>50</sup> In return, I wish to recall how the spiritual claims and experiences of demoniacs and clairvoyants in the German countryside, figures like Hauffe, shaped the fields of scientific and religious discourse that developed in the writings of Strauss.

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in the literature of Young Germany. Like the Young German writers, Strauss struck out against the ideological foundations of the restoration state, but did so in the field of theology. In *Origins of Radical Social Theory*, Breckman argues that Strauss’s humanistic conception of the incarnation formed part of a wide-ranging attack on the concept of “personality,” a theopolitical notion that served during the restoration era to legitimate monarch, property owner, and personal God. Toews’s *Hegelianism* highlights the connections between theological and political themes in Strauss’s writings. At the same time, Massey, Toews, and Blanton emphasize areas in which Strauss presses back against the democratic implications of his own work. Blanton takes his cue in part from Nietzsche’s critique, in the first of his *Untimely Meditations*, of Strauss’s later posturing as a modern, “scientific man” (*David Friedrich Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer*, vol. 1 of *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997]; trans. of *David Friedrich Strauss, der Bekenner und Schriftsteller*, vol. 1 of *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen, erstes Stück* [Leipzig: Fritsch, 1873]). I revisit Nietzsche’s critique in the conclusion.

50. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).