

"THEOLOGY AS A VOCATION" -

ERNST TROELTSCH AS

PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGIAN.

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

This thesis attempts a systematisation of Troeltsch's work which takes as its starting point the distinctive philosophical and theological problems arising from the modern conditions of humanity and society. These centre on the fundamental conflict of autonomy and the need for authority - the impasse of the Enlightenment. The theologian's vocation is to attempt to re-integrate the individual within absolute structures of authority without denying the individual's autonomy. Troeltsch's project is seen as in some ways anticipating that of MacIntyre in *After Virtue*. Troeltsch does not attempt to recreate the medieval synthesis, nor to isolate Christianity from the world, but to combine the relative structures of the modern world with the absolute structures of authority embodied in Christianity.

The basis for Troeltsch's solution rests upon his philosophy of religion, which owes its distinctive character to Kant and the critical idealism deriving from him. Troeltsch moves beyond Kant, however, in his notion of the interpenetration of the spheres of practical and theoretical reason. This interpenetration alone allows for the survival of the autonomy of the individual.

The attempt to grasp reality *sub specie aeternitatis*, the *a priori* of religion, is restricted by human finitude. This finitude determines the shape of Troeltsch's systematic theology, which rests upon the relation of the human will to the divine will, of the relative to the absolute.

It is the responsibility of human beings to attempt to progress towards the absolute, to adopt the divine will, even in the knowledge that this can never be fully achieved. Faith and hope are realised in ethical activity. The realisation of the absolute is the creation of the most universal context for ethical action, whereby each individual might reshape reality unfettered by all finite claims on absoluteness, and thereby be united with divine creativity itself.

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"Theology as a vocation" - Ernst Troeltsch as philosophical theologian.

Abstract.

In contrast to interpretations of Troeltsch which stress a "tragic collapse" in his theology, this thesis sees Troeltsch's work as a systematic unity which addresses the distinctive philosophical and theological problems which arise from the modern condition of humanity and society.

Chapter One traces the development of the modern world and characterises its fundamental currents. The post-Enlightenment world is seen as presenting the human with a fundamental conflict of individual autonomy and the consequent isolation of the individual from previous structures of authority. This conflict is summarised as the impasse of the Enlightenment. It presents, on the one hand, a subjectivism and individualism where authority is located in the autonomous self; and, on the other hand, an increasing mechanisation of life with a consequent suppression of individuality. The theologian's vocation is to create a synthesis between the absolute authority embodied in the Christian conception of the highest good, and the autonomy of the individual. It is this conception of the highest good which separates the theologian from the sociologist. It is only with the acceptance of absolute ends that the individual's autonomy becomes identified with unconditional divine law. Autonomy and theonomy are united in divine love. Troeltsch's project is seen as in some ways an anticipation of that of Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Troeltsch does not see the solution as resting on the return to the medieval synthesis, but in the integration of the structures of authority embodied in Christianity with the autonomy of the modern world.

Chapter Two discusses Troeltsch's account of philosophical idealism and particularly his interpretation of Kant. Critical idealism, as the attempt to reconcile empiricism and rationalism, mirrors the task of overcoming the impasse of the Enlightenment. Arguing against the Marburg neo-Kantians, Troeltsch's interest is to show how the two strands of Kant's thought, the practical-historical and the theoretical, are equally necessary aspects of his system. Troeltsch shares Kant's presupposition of a faith in the possibility of a progress towards a complete understanding of reality, not through the imposition of a system, but through a constant critique of this reality itself. What Troeltsch sees as Kant's limitation, however, is his failure to provide the possibility for an interpenetration between practical and theoretical reason. Unless each is active in the other, the practical will succumb to the increasing dominion of the theoretical, and all human life will be reduced to mere cause and effect. Although Kant shows the vital need for practical reason, he has little success in integrating it within an all-embracing system. For Troeltsch, if autonomy were to survive, the practical had to be integrated within the theoretical. Troeltsch regarded this as "essential and basic in my position": what characterises the unity of his thought is his consistent application of critical idealism, together with his recognition of its epistemological limitations and the consequent move to metaphysics. Each aspect of Troeltsch's work culminates in the need for an interpenetration (*Ineinandergreifen*) of the absolute with the relative.

Chapters Three to Five present a detailed discussion of Troeltsch's *Religionsphilosophie*, that is, his application of critical idealism to the distinctive phenomenon of religion. The subject matter is divided into psychology, epistemology, the *Philosophie der Religionsgeschichte* and metaphysics. The last of these moves towards the philosophy of history, which

is discussed in Chapter Six.

Chapter Three is a discussion of the relation of empirical psychology to the rational *a priori* of religion. Troeltsch's solution is compared with those of William James, Rudolf Otto and German *Lebensphilosophie*. Troeltsch's aim is to show that any empirical psychology has to be assessed according to rational *a priori* principles. Religion cannot be founded on experience alone. This is a revitalisation of Kant under a more developed psychology, which is brought out most clearly in the theory of the religious *a priori* itself, which does not lead to a rationalisation of religion, but rather is vitally related to historical religion. Religion can thus never be an object of reason alone. The perception of the absolute - the attempt to grasp reality *sub specie aeternitatis* - is ^sre_kstricted by the limits of an epistemology which is determined by human finitude: truth can never be grasped in its fulness, but only as it stands in relation to the human being. The religious *a priori*, as the rational form of religion, can only be of value in so far as it makes contact with historical religion. Consequently, discussion of the religious *a priori* leads to the *Geschichtsphilosophie der Religion*.

Chapter Four is a discussion of Troeltsch's relationships with Ritschl and the Ritschlians. Troeltsch's quest for a synthesis between theology and and the modern world is far closer in purpose to Ritschl's task of "balance" between religion and ethics than has usually been supposed. Even if Troeltsch saw Ritschl's attempt to return to the medieval synthesis of Luther as an impossible fantasy, it at least moved in the right direction. Ritschl's successors, however, with their isolation of theology from science and philosophy, ruled out all possibility of interaction with the world from the outset, and consequently became the real object of Troeltsch's attacks. Herrmann's interpretation of Kant in particular is seen as a reflection of a diametrically opposed

conception of the tasks and limitations of theology. According to Troeltsch, it was impossible for Christianity to adapt itself to the modern era if it cut itself off from the world from the outset. The conception of Christianity as a parallel reality could only ever result in sectarianism or mysticism. For religion to remain a vital power, it had to maintain contact with the historical world.

Chapter Five surveys Troeltsch's relationship with the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* and discusses the development of the historical method in debate with the Ritschlians. Troeltsch's aim is to draw out the theological implications of the *religionsgeschichtliche* method. The discussion of the absoluteness of Christianity parallels the conclusions reached in Chapters Two and Three. If the absolute is to be recognised at all, then it must be recognised not in its absoluteness, but from the historically-conditioned point of view of the human being. Similarly, noumenal reality (the world of things-in-themselves) can only be known in so far as it makes contact with phenomenal reality (the world of appearances). Criticism leads to an ever closer approximation to the absolute, but it can never reach it: the absolute functions as a goal which makes humans aware of their finitude. Philosophy rests upon the insight that everything is to be subjected to criticism, but with an end in sight, that through continual criticism, the philosopher might achieve a better understanding of reality: "the absolute is with God, all human truth is relative...We believe in approximation". If there is to be a solution to the dislocation of supernatural authority in the post-Enlightenment world, then this requires an interpenetration of the absolute and the relative, whereby the world can progress towards the goal of its development.

Chapter Six moves to a discussion of Troeltsch's *Geschichtsphilosophie* in general, which is seen as an extension of the problems dealt with in the specific domain

of religion. Since religion is part of a universal reality, rather than constituting an alternative reality, it is unsurprising that Troeltsch's discussion should turn to the universal historical context in which religion finds its place. The quest for a synthesis between *Historismus* and *Naturalismus* is no different in kind from the interaction between the rational and the empirical in *Religionsphilosophie*. In his desire for an *interaction* between the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) and the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften), Troeltsch moves significantly beyond Windelband and Rickert who are content to remain with methodological pluralism. At the start of his career, Troeltsch regarded the problem of the interaction of the spiritual with the natural as the *Urrätsel*; in *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, it was the *bleibende Rätsel*. The riddle was overcome in *action* as the personality adopted a higher motivation: there could be no *formal* solution to *Historismus*, rather everything hinged on the material, on action for the future.

Chapter Seven discusses Troeltsch's attempt to work out the interaction between spirit and nature in terms of a systematic theology. His reformulation of dogmatics involves a restatement of Christianity in terms of the demands of the present. Theology does not deal solely with either the rational or the historical strands of reality, but rather aims to combine both in a new synthesis applicable for the present. This is made clear from an analysis of the function of religious language and myth. Systematic theology is thus an amalgam of history (the tradition) and metaphysics, which aims to revitalise religion for the contemporary situation.

Chapter Eight discusses Troeltsch's metaphysical theology, which is seen as an attempt to re-integrate the individual in a spiritual wholeness. Christianity moves beyond the impasse of the Enlightenment by allowing for absolute and unconditional motivation to be adopted in the historical

world. The completion of Christianity is the union of the divine with the human, where theonomy and autonomy are identical. The individual is thus re-integrated into the highest structure of authority, the absolute itself. This final re-integration is the Christian hope.

Although these ends of religion are clearly in view, the Christian remains a creature of two worlds. Chapter Nine investigates the need to realise the absolute in the relative. This sets the task for Troeltsch's ethics, as the practical conclusion of a theology which is founded upon the recognition of the triumphs and the limits of autonomy. The grounds for any self-legislation must be less than absolute; any decision to act must be a compromise. Nevertheless this need not be an irrational decision to adopt an arbitrary end for action, but rather can be seen as the adoption of the highest good, as the attempt to establish the Kingdom of God. Troeltsch thus moves beyond Weber in providing an answer to the question, "Which of the warring Gods shall we serve?" The human being was *responsible* for shaping the future around absolute ends, and thereby shared in the creative activity of divine life itself. That each person could reshape the structures of society meant that he or she could, at least in part, stand apart from these structures and not succumb to their total domination. The personality (*Persönlichkeit*) is thus of absolute value, and this alone is what preserves human autonomy from the depersonalising forces of the modern world.

The implications of Troeltsch's system are tolerance and experimentation with new forms of synthesis, without acquiescence to whatever it might be in the world which claims absolute significance. The responsibility of the human is that the world might be ever more transformed, where the autonomy of each personality is recognised despite the full knowledge that such a transformation would never be completed. Faith and hope are thus realised in ethical

activity. For Troeltsch, the absolute is not a lofty dream, but requires the creation of the most universal context for human action, whereby each individual might achieve the creative goal of reshaping reality unfettered by all relative and finite claims on absoluteness, and thereby be united with divine creativity itself.

Chapter One: The Impasse of the Enlightenment1.1 The Modern World as the determining factor of Troeltsch's constructive thought.

This thesis attempts a systematisation of Troeltsch's work taking as its starting point the distinctive philosophical and theological problems which arise from the modern condition of humanity and society. These problems revolve around one fundamental conflict: on the one hand, the affirmation of the freedom of the autonomous individual as the achievement of the post-Enlightenment world, and, on the other hand, the consequent isolation of the individual from previous structures of authority. Troeltsch aimed to move beyond this conflict by re-integrating the individual into absolute structures of authority without thereby denying his or her autonomy.¹

Troeltsch's work attempts to establish a coherent religious and ethical system applicable in the modern world:

The theologian, whose concerns are the formation of ethical and religious ideas for the present, finds himself confronted with one great fact: that the 'modern world' has created new foundations and presuppositions by which it is essentially differentiated from the ecclesiastical-unified period of European culture. If his

¹ The fact that Troeltsch left no completed systematic theology or philosophy has recently been called the "Troeltsch-problem" by Toshimasa Yasukata (in *Ernst Troeltsch. Systematic Theologian of Radical Historicity*, Introduction, p.xiii. For full bibliographical details of secondary literature, see below, Bibliography II). For an assessment of the so-called "collapse" of Troeltsch's theology, see below, esp. Chapter 6.11. This thesis aims to present a systematic treatment of Troeltsch's philosophy and theology on the basis of the "one great fact" of the modern world.

theology is to apply to the modern human, and if it is to be expressed using the presuppositions of its own time, then his chief task is to clarify the nature of this transformation [of the world], with its lasting gains, and construct his ethical and religious thought upon it. Both of these conditions will be the case, when the labourer himself is convinced of the truth and the necessity of that fundamental change [which characterises the modern world].²

Troeltsch does not view theology as concerned with a parallel religious reality which can exist alongside and independent of the modern world.³ Rather, the survival of religion rests upon the possibility that it can be connected with modern conceptions of truth and modern structures of authority.⁴ Only if it can be a part of the modern world can theology effect change: exclusion from this world leads to sectarianism and social and political impotence.⁵ To retain this essentially practical role, religion has to be open to critical investigation. It has to become a subject

2 "Autonomie und Rationalismus" (A1907/11) col.199. The number in brackets refers to the entry in F.W. Graf and H. Rüdiger, *Ernst Troeltsch Bibliographie*. For full publication details of all works by Troeltsch cited in the footnotes, see below, Bibliography I.

3 See below, Ch. 4.3, for Troeltsch's attack on Herrmann's isolationist method.

4 Cf. V.A. Demant, "Ernst Troeltsch", in *Christian Polity*, p.180: "Precisely because Troeltsch saw so clearly that there is a dialectical problem in all religion...the immense fruit of a truly religious and historical mind must for long be a useful antidote to shallowness and slickness in religious teaching".

5 See below, esp. Chapter 4.32.

matter for scientific and philosophical analysis: divorced from science and philosophy, religion becomes a superfluous relic. It can be explained away as an opiate or as resentment. The challenge for modern theology was thus set by Marx and Nietzsche.⁶

On Troeltsch's view, the situation requires that

the contents of our real life are to some extent capable of Christian evaluation. This is demanded if we are not to withdraw from the world like radical Christians or to erect a new centre for the orientation of life like the non- or anti-Christians.⁷

Troeltsch does not conceive of theology as founded upon the isolation of fundamental facts from their historical and causal nexus, but upon the presuppositions of the historical, philosophical and scientific methods of the modern world.⁸

Troeltsch's theology begins from the study of the modern world:

The great question is now: What are the characteristic fundamental currents of the modern world?⁹

The next sections explore the development and characterisation of the "one great fact" which is the modern world.

6 See below, Chapter 9.1.

7 Review of Wendland (A1917/12) col.297.

8 See below, Chapter 5.2.

9 "Autonomie und Rationalismus" (A1907/11) col.199.

1.2 The development of the modern world.

The presuppositions which lay behind Troeltsch's attempt to form a synthesis between religion and the modern world were the tremendous forces unleashed in the Enlightenment, which

laid down a new anti-supernaturalist foundation for theology and the science of religion, as well as for the exact sciences.¹⁰

With the Enlightenment "the seed of all the problems of the modern world had been sown".¹¹ The study of the Enlightenment showed

how the foundations of modern life with its spiritual problems had been laid by the dissolution of the ecclesiastical-confessional culture, and the liberation of an individual criticism not tied down by supernaturalism, and especially how German idealism grasped onto the legacy of the eighteenth century in a positive manner...The eighteenth century is anti-supernaturalist, destroying the former absolute divine and superhuman truths and criteria, and along with this, [it led to] the emancipation of the individual, which had previously been bound up in divine authority.¹²

With the freeing of the individual,

the Enlightenment marks the beginning and the foundation of the intrinsically modern period of European culture and history, in

10 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.40.

11 Review of Gastrow and Zscharnack (A1906/7) col.145. On the meaning of "The Enlightenment", see esp. Kant, "What is Enlightenment?", in C.J. Friedrich (ed.), *The Philosophy of Kant*; Cf. Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Enlightenment and Despair*; Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*; Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Chapters Four and Five. See below, Chapter 2.10 and 2.2.

12 Review of Gastrow and Zscharnack (A1906/7) col.145. Cf. Hawthorn, op. cit., p.8.

contrast to the hitherto dominant ecclesiastically and theologically determined culture.¹³

The Reformation, according to Troeltsch, had not fundamentally challenged the medieval ideal of a cultural synthesis, where all aspects of reality were connected into an all-embracing system, and where the individual's place in society was pre-ordained by the guild system and by obedience to a vocation.¹⁴ According to Troeltsch, the dogmatic systems of the Reformation were firmly lodged in the Aristotelian systems of the Middle Ages. However, the division of western Christendom meant that there was more than one claim on absolute truth, which of necessity weakened the dominion of the all-embracing culture and laid the foundations for the modern conception of truth.¹⁵ It was, however, only with the Enlightenment that there was a complete transformation of culture.¹⁶

13 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.40.

14 See below, Chapter 9.5, for a discussion of the medieval and Reformation synthesis. That the modern world began with the Enlightenment was the controversial view held by Dilthey and Troeltsch against those who saw Luther as herald of the modern era, and by implication this questioned Luther's relevance for the modern world. Cf. "Die Aufklärung" (A1897/14a) p.338. This idea is already present in *Vernunft und Offenbarung* (A1891/2) p.44f. On Troeltsch's view of Luther, see below, Chapter 4.22

15 Cf. "Die Trennung" (A1907/2) pp.8ff.

16 Cf. "Die Aufklärung" (A1897/14a) p.339. Cf. "Der Historismus" (A1922/22) p.739.

Troeltsch traces the development of the Enlightenment to the English sectarian movements of the seventeenth century.¹⁷ The Independents and Congregationalists had paved the way for a tolerance which was enshrined in the settlement of William and Mary.¹⁸ The example of the Levellers and other experiments in communal living "unintentionally planted the roots of liberalism".¹⁹ The English Civil War marked the end of the wars of religion and the "departure point for the modern world".²⁰ The rise of protestant sectarianism resulted in a multitude of different claims upon the truth, none of which could be accepted as absolute. Thus there arose what Troeltsch called a "polymorphous" conception of truth.²¹

17 Cf. "Englische Moralisten" (A1903/24a) p.387. Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) Chapter Four. Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.763 (Cf. p.739): "The dissolution of the confessional-absolutist state begins with the English revolution". Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.561.

18 "Protestantisches Christentum" (A1906/4) p.365.

19 *ibid.* p.365.

20 *ibid.* p.367.

21 Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.970f., ET p.997f. Cf. Wilhelm Schenk, "Ernst Troeltsch's Conception of History", p.26, where he quotes from the English Protestant divine, John Saltmarsh: "Our severall and distinct goings are but like so many travellers to the City of London; some travell from the north, some from the south, and from the west, some from the east, yet all thither". On Troeltsch's concept of truth, see below, Chapter 3.23.

The role of the state had changed in the face of the multitude of claims for religious allegiance. It became the guardian of human rights, the embodiment of an extra-confessional rational truth.²² Troeltsch maintained that "the ethical idea of human rights militates against confessionalism and its wars".²³ The state had become "neutral towards the churches",²⁴ and this marked the final breach with the fundamental "idea of medieval culture which saw the state and church as two harmonious organs of Christian society or as the *Corpus Christianum*."²⁵ Under the influence of Hobbes, the metaphysical foundations of the state had fallen away, and the idea of a rational "natural law" filled this vacuum.²⁶

Given this background it was but a short step to the idea of an autonomous realm for economics and trade, guided by their own rational principles. Relationships between individuals followed their own laws; the state functioned

22 "Englische Moralisten" (A1903/24a) p.385.

23 *ibid.*

24 "Protestantisches Christentum" (A1906/4) p.391.

25 *ibid.*

26 *ibid.* p.395.

merely to ensure the correct conditions for these laws to work effectively. Ethics was a matter for the individual and out of the hands of the law-giving state.²⁷ It was no longer to be grounded metaphysically, or by recourse to a supernatural revelation, but subjectively.²⁸

Religion ceased to be a matter of orthodoxy, but was instead characterised by enthusiasm and religious feeling. "The victory of the Baptist ideal marked the end of the medieval".²⁹ The "miracle" of faith was no longer located in the holy institution of the Church, but in every individual's personal experience of redemption and conversion. The influence of this strand upon Troeltsch's thought was profound. Enthusiasm and feeling were seen as preserving the "life" of religion against all rationalisations.³⁰ Alongside pure rationalism, Troeltsch recognised the vital importance of the sphere of personal religiosity and feeling for the development of the modern world. This is most clearly stated in the essay on Leibniz

27 "Englische Moralisten" (A1903/24a) p.376. Cf. "Protestantisches Christentum" (A1906/4) p.367. Here Troeltsch points to the overwhelming importance of the American Constitution as a summary of Enlightenment individualism. Cf. "Die Trennung" (A1907/2) p.29f. Cf. *Der Berg der Läuterung* (A1921/11) p.20. Cf. Review of White (A1913/11) col.273.

28 Cf. Becker, *Neuzeitliche Subjektivität*, for the idea of subjectivity as the index of the modern epoch. See below, Chapter 6.15.

29 "Protestantisches Christentum" (A1906/4) p.371.

30 "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1895/2) p.402. On Troeltsch's notion of "life", see below, Chapter 3.15.

and the beginnings of pietism:

Protestantism has adopted the modern scientific picture of the world, and at the same time, received an understanding of personal religiosity from pietism. Its great task for the future consists in balancing the two in thought (Denken) and action (Handeln).³¹

Alongside this development in religion was a parallel development in the field of the natural sciences: the final arbiter in the empirical method was the senses. However, at the same time, there was a faith that the world of the senses was not a mere confused stream of unconnected data, but rather, was guided by universal laws of reason.

The problem faced by the churches was how to react to these new developments: there could either be a "pietistic withdrawal", or a

new and more all-embracing compromise which would lead to a combination of the inner-worldly values of culture, regarded as independent ethical values, with the highest religious good. [This combination] would throw overboard the old doctrine of the radical corruption of everything natural and unChristian.³²

It was this task of combination which Troeltsch recognised as capable of answering the specifically modern problems deriving from the Enlightenment.

31 "Leibniz und die Anfänge des Pietismus" (A1902/12b) p.531. Cf. Review of Spalding etc. (A1909/5) col.245, where Troeltsch, against the Ritschlian tradition, emphasises the importance of Pietism and the Enlightenment: "The long neglected history of modern Protestantism must learn to view Pietism and Enlightenment theology not merely as episodes which have been superseded, but as the beginnings of a lasting reorientation of Protestantism in contrast to its Reformation and orthodox forms." On Troeltsch and Ritschl, see below, Chapter 4.2.

32 "Protestantisches Christentum" (A1906/4) p.371.

1.3 Individualism and integration: The problem of the Enlightenment.

Troeltsch recognises one profound change which characterises the modern world and which shapes his perception of the new task of theology. He summarised it in the formula:

The liberation of the individual, and the reliance of the individual upon itself. Individualism with its ever-increasing attraction (Reizung) against what remains of the world of authority (Autoritätswelt) in memory and life; Individualism with its ethical demand for veracity (Wahrhaftigkeit) and uniqueness (Eigenheit). That is the formula of the modern world.³³

Troeltsch summarised the essence of the Enlightenment as drawing out the

contradiction involved in the previous division of reason and revelation, and in the practical dominion of supernatural revelation over life. [The leading tendency] was an immanent explanation of the world using universally valid means of knowledge and a rational ordering of life in the service of universal practical purposes.³⁴

It was a "liberation through the annihilation of supernatural forms of tradition and the unleashing of powers which had previously been subjugated."³⁵

The Enlightenment was "suspicious of all tradition" and

33 "Autonomie und Rationalismus" (A1907/11) col.200.

34 "Die Aufklärung" (A1897/14a) p.339.

35 *ibid.* p.340. Cf. Rendtorff *Christentum ausserhalb der Kirche*, p.14: the Christian Enlightenment was "the protest against such clerical doctrines and pronouncements, which could no longer make sense to the rational human".

thereby "removed the semblance of divinity from the past".³⁶ It was marked by a subjectivism and an individualism, together with an unlimited optimism inspired by a trust in a reason which had been liberated from its supernatural bonds.³⁷ "Science was no longer to be corrected by dogma".³⁸ In short, there was a faith in the individual as the final source of authority, and a belief in the rational structure of the world. As empiricism and rationalism these two strands are what developed into the leading philosophical tendencies of the Enlightenment.³⁹

Although the individual was liberated from supernatural authority, and from a life of humble servitude, at the same time it was also the case that

authorities and objective powers in fact remain, and the ethical claim for the inclusion of the individual in the service of the whole, works in actual fact no differently from the demand for authority...If individualism is not to be an unbounded anarchy, something has to be conceived along with it, which binds the individual and gives it laws for communal living and for unification in something objective...The individual is only freed

36 "Das Wesen des modernen Geistes" (A1907/8b) p.327.

37 Cf. "Die Aufklärung" (A1897/14a) p.340.

38 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.62.

39 Cf. MS *Einführung* pp.13ff., where Troeltsch traces the course of development of these two philosophical systems, which he sees as running right through history from the very dawn of philosophy. See below, Chapter 2.10. For details of these and other unpublished lectures, see below, Bibliographical Appendix.

from the external, earthly and super-worldly authority because it contains within itself an inner law, the free thought and the free recognition of the value of humanity...Autonomy is the great human right and the most inspired confession of the modern world.⁴⁰

Individualism yields new authorities,

admittedly not founded upon supernatural and absolute authorities, but such authorities as are founded upon the trust in the objectivity of scientific and moral security (Kredit) and of relative value (relativer Geltung), function in fact as absolute.⁴¹

Troeltsch thus faced the problem of how to achieve a *balance* or a *synthesis* between individualism and the need for authority, recognising that this too was the fundamental problem which had confronted nineteenth century philosophers:

It must not be overlooked that the whole sociological (soziologische) reaction to the eighteenth century continues and still defines today's problem of how to balance (Ausgleich) the achievement of individualism with the need for universality (Gesamtheit) and firm order.⁴²

40 "Autonomie und Rationalismus" (A1907/11) col.201f. This need for the integration of the individual as the problem of the Enlightenment has recently been re-affirmed by MacIntyre, op. cit., Chapter Five, esp. p.58f.: "[We] need to remember that if the self decisively separates itself from inherited modes both of thought and practice in the course of a single and unified history, it does so in a variety of ways and with a complexity that it would be crippling to ignore. When the distinctively modern self was invented, its invention required not only a largely new social setting, but one defined by a variety of not always coherent beliefs and concepts. What was then invented was the individual". Troeltsch's attempt at synthesis provides an anticipation of MacIntyre's recognition of the dislocation of ethics and the need for a new St. Benedict.

41 "Autonomie und Rationalismus" (A1907/11) col.203.

42 "Die Restaurationsepoche" (A1913/38a) p.613.

The development of modern 'individualism' which as liberalism, democracy and capitalism profoundly determines the cultural formations of modernity is one of the greatest historical problems which has scarcely been solved.⁴³

Individualism might be the great achievement of the Enlightenment, but nevertheless, the individual was still called upon to create order in the chaos (Wirrnis) of sense data.⁴⁴ The problem was the

conflict of critical insecurity, of contemporary manifoldness, and of the many contradictions of historical reality, with the need for security, unity and peace.⁴⁵

The great problem was to bring together in thought (zusammenzudenken) the

rational-universal and the individual-factual currents of reality; at one and the same time, the rational-deductive and the irrational-original.⁴⁶

Christianity had previously provided this unity and balance between the individual and the structures of authority. The question which Troeltsch addressed was whether something in the Christian tradition could still satisfy the demand for meaning and authority. Could contemporary religious strivings be given a centre?⁴⁷ Could

43 Cf. Review of Pribram (A1913/28) col.596

44 Cf. "Die wissenschaftliche Lage" (A1900/7) p.11.

45 Letter to von Hügel of 10/3/1903, (G1974/1) p.65f.

46 Review of Raich (A1906/15) p.681f.

47 "Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert" (A1913/36a) p.649.

God, the world and the human, be brought back into our field of vision?⁴⁸

The problem for Troeltsch was one of creating a new unity analogous to that unity which had characterised the Middle Ages, but one which recognised the achievement of the liberation of the "free spirit" and did not clamour for the hierarchical servitude of Catholic culture:⁴⁹

The ideal which characterised antiquity and the Middle Ages - the thought of a unified culture filled with the religious spirit - is

48 "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.239.

49 Troeltsch was not alone in his perception of the rise of individualism and the disintegration of the former consensus. There is a distinct parallel to be drawn between the Troeltsch and Durkheim. The question addressed by Durkheim in *The Division of Labour in Society* mirrors that addressed by Comte and Tönnies before him: "If pre-industrial societies were held together by common ideas and sentiments, by shared norms and values, what holds an industrial society together?" (Stephen Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, p.141). Durkheim was answering Tönnies' call for a strong central authority which could recreate the historical-organic virtues of *Gemeinschaft* in the modern *Gesellschaft* which was founded on contract and strong organisation (Cf. Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, esp. p.46, p.47). Durkheim did not recognise the need for such a powerful centralised authority to create a harmonisation between the social whole and the individual. Rather solidarity would develop *organically*. Exactly how such a harmony of interests would develop was left open to question: "What we must do to relieve this anomy is to discover the means for making the organs which are still wasting themselves in discordant movements harmoniously concur by introducing into their relations more justice by more and more extenuating the external inequalities which are the source of the evil...In short, our first duty is to make a moral code for ourselves" (*Division of Labour*, p.409). G.D.H. Cole with his affirmation of guild socialism likewise calls for a re-integration of the individual into society, without strong bureaucratic control, and without a denial of individuality: "In the spiritual, as in every other sphere, the individual remains as the ultimate reality in which all association is built, but whom association can never exhaust or completely express" (*Social Theory*, p.179).

for the time being in the distant blue horizons of the past. Its renewal on the soil of free spiritual agreement, is something which the wearisome individualism of the present will long for in ever greater degrees, but which for the moment is likewise in the distant blue horizons of the future.⁵⁰

Troeltsch sees his task, not in destroying individualism through a restoration of the past,⁵¹ but as the attempt to *limit* individualism through the perception of a unifying whole, a structuring authority.⁵² Indeed to see the individualism of the modern world as such a "deadly poison that kills culture" would be to "despair of the fundamental demand of morality".⁵³ Rather, the duty was "to discipline ethically and thus to transfigure the natural powers of individualism":⁵⁴

50 "Protestantisches Christentum" (A1906/4) p.451.

51 Cf. "Die Restaurationsepoche" (A1913/38a) p.611f.

52 *ibid.* p.614. Cf. MS *allg. Ethik*, p.29: "The problem of freedom is bound up with the problem of responsibility".

53 "Das Wesen des modernen Geistes" (A1907/8b) p.335.

54 *ibid.* p.335. Troeltsch felt that any return to the Middle Ages and the Reformation era was pure self-deception. There could be no going back on the Enlightenment without profoundly dangerous repercussions. Cf. Troeltsch's review of Hirsch (A1923/1) col.23, where he is deeply critical of Hirsch's critique of the Enlightenment, which he sees as a "crass impossibility". "Someone who recognises the infinite complexity and the real conditions of life and the spiritual mixture of modern peoples (Völker), just has nothing to say to those who make these generalisations".

It is not the nursing and pampering of the subject, but the devotion to objects, to firm truth, exact observation, and gallant achievement, that alone allows a personality to develop.⁵⁵

What Troeltsch saw as essential was a solution which recognised the capacities of the creative personality and the "ideal of the ethical community of personalities" against the social-eudaemonism of pure individualism.⁵⁶

1.4 The modern world: The impasse of the Enlightenment.

Troeltsch's task was set by these developments. However, the problems confronting him were even more pressing than they had been during the Enlightenment. By Troeltsch's time, there had been profound developments in traditions which had grown out of the Enlightenment: the crisis of individualism and integration had grown ever deeper and more demanding. Empiricism had developed into a fully-fledged view of the world which challenged the very existence of the spirit, and rationalism had become identified with a view of the world which recognised unity merely in an aestheticising naturalism. What had begun as a "liberation and an elevation" had very quickly become a "burden and a confusion":⁵⁷

55 *Der Berg der Läuterung* (A1921/11) p.13.

56 "Protestantisches Christentum" (A1906/4) p.435.

57 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.10.

Before our eyes is a great period of the European world during which the imperialistic-capitalistic, sovereign and bureaucratic states have been deeply shaken.⁵⁸

We are today in an era of nationalistic power politics and of advanced capitalist forms of economics which creates irritations and tensions for Christian social teachings as never before.⁵⁹

In a pessimistic essay written in 1903, "Die theologische und religiöse Lage der Gegenwart",⁶⁰ Troeltsch described his own *Zeitgeist* as "the coldest and most desolate that the church, theology and the science of religion had yet experienced".⁶¹ Amongst the cultured there was a feeling of having been "definitively freed" from the primitive spiritual illusions and drawn away from thought of the "inner person". Religion appeared to be nothing more than an abstraction of poor savages (Wilden). The great unity of thought experienced under Schleiermacher and Hegel had become "materialist" under the influence of Feuerbach and Strauss, the "gravediggers of theology in Germany".⁶²

58 *ibid.* p.724.

59 Review of Wendland (A1917/12) col.297.

60 "Die theologische und religiöse Lage der Gegenwart" (A1903/16a).

61 *ibid.* p.3.

62 *ibid.* p.10. On Strauss, see below, Chapter 5.12.

What materialism led to was a loss of "all freedom, all life and spontaneity", and it consequently became a "hotly sought after entry into a world of mere necessity which barred the world of creative freedom and new life".⁶³ Materialism had destroyed all thought of the spirit. Troeltsch had earlier discussed this problem in his essay written to counter the German populariser of evolutionary theory, Ernst Hückel.⁶⁴ According to Troeltsch, Hückel had dissolved psychology into physiology, and his theory "of the emptiness of the spirit mirrors the actual emptying of our spiritual life".⁶⁵ The theologian's task was to fight against materialism and reawaken interest in the "imagination (Phantasie) and the heart, the soul (Gemüt) and the passions".⁶⁶ The survival of the spirit was vital for any meaningful existence. Indeed,

whoever has confidence in the kingdom of the spirit is never far from the kingdom of God.⁶⁷

63 "Die theologische und religiöse Lage der Gegenwart" (A1903/16a) p.10.

64 "Moderner Halbmaterialismus" (A1897/3 & 6). Cf. "Die christliche Weltanschauung" p.242f.

65 "Moderner Halbmaterialismus" (A1897/6) col. 161.

66 *ibid.* In attacking monism in his lectures on philosophy, Troeltsch places Hegel on the opposite pole to Hückel. Hegel had created a unity in diversity, which in reality was an end to monism. "On the other hand, if you, like Hückel, turn from the concrete and the multifarious and plunge into divine necessity, then you cease to desire yourself" (MS *Einführung* p.11).

67 "Moderner Halbmaterialismus" (A1897/6) col. 162.

According to Troeltsch, evolution "had taken the place of what had previously been divine", but it lacked any conception of absolute truth.⁶⁸ In short, the modern world was characterised by a "formlessness".⁶⁹ Materialism recognised no authority beyond the causal law: under such conditions the very survival of the autonomous individual was threatened. According to Troeltsch, Dante's fight to reconcile the various Florentine parties spoke to us as a sign of the power and the independence of the spirit, and a protest against the soul-destroying superstition of the present, that all spiritual life is merely a mirror of social relations and class-based interests.⁷⁰

In such a situation the theologian had to assert the need for religion as the ground for all unity against the "mechanical-technical-capitalistic" world.⁷¹

Individualism and the faith in reason had undergone profound change.⁷² In the essay, "Das Wesen des modernen

68 "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.236. Cf. pp.234ff.

69 *Der Berg der Läuterung* (A1921/11) p.11.

70 *ibid.* p.10f.

71 This future task envisaged by Troeltsch was along the lines suggested by Paul de Lagarde, to whose memory the second volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften* is dedicated. He was the man who, above all, yearned for a deeper insight into personal life against a profound scepticism and mere utility. See below, Chapter 5.12.

72 Cf. "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.321. Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.721.

Geistes",⁷³ Troeltsch paints a vivid picture of the forces at work in the modern world: he emphasises the anonymity of pure market forces which destroy the worker's sense of personal involvement, and reduce the human being to a mere machine.⁷⁴ According to Troeltsch, capitalism had a profound effect upon the creativity and autonomy of the individual, since it attempted "the reconstruction of the whole of our existence according to economic laws".⁷⁵ Capitalism no longer appeared as a temporary phenomenon, but had become "an organic constituent of modern existence".⁷⁶ The idea of human rationality had been transformed into the sense in which actions could be predicted or bureaucratically controlled.⁷⁷ Capitalism flowed into "every pore of our

73 (A1907/8b).

74 Cf. Durkheim's concept of *anomie*, of normlessness and meaninglessness, developed in the third book of *The Division of Labour in Society* (pp.353ff.). Cf. Robert Blauner, *Alienation and Freedom*, for a discussion of the mechanisation of work and the consequent lack of integration, which results in "anomic alienation".

75 "Das Wesen des modernen Geistes" (A1907/8b) p.309. Cf. "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.321f. On the development of capitalism in the western societies since Troeltsch's time, see esp. Anthony Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*².

76 "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.321. Cf. col.324.

77 Cf. MacIntyre, op. cit., Chapter 8.

being" but its effects were depersonalising:

The acquisition of technology appeared for some to be a colossal progress, but for others, a unbearable mechanisation of life.⁷⁸

Indeed, large scale capitalistic concerns created analogues to the slavery of antiquity, but without any trace of a human element. In short:

Capitalism's main effect...is an abstract, de-personalised rationalism, coupled with the principle of the survival of the fittest (Recht des Stärkeren).⁷⁹

The Enlightenment principle of humanity, with its optimistic estimation of the capacities of the natural endowments of the human, had reached its term in the

inequalities of life or in the difficulties of its realisation. It thus evokes the opposition of an entirely different conception of nature which sees in nature only the fight for survival, inequality and the triumph of force.⁸⁰

This had profound effects upon morality and politics, to which religious people had to respond. They had

to seek an eternal world of the spirit...in spite of all parties, in spite of the overwhelming mass of power-hungry and fanatical theologians, and in spite of all power politicians (Realpolitiker) and pan-Germans.⁸¹

78 MS *Einführung*, p.7.

79 "Das Wesen des modernen Geistes" (A1907/8b) p.310f. Cf. Graf, "Religion und Individualität", pp.213ff. Cf. Bouquet, *Is Christianity the Final Religion?*, p.30: "It is difficult to see how a people bred among collieries and blast furnaces, and living in the smoke-begrimed barracks of a northern industrial town, can retain any very keen spiritual concepts".

80 "Das Wesen des modernen Geistes" (A1907/8b) p.312.

81 "Die Religion im deutschen Staate" (A1913/37a) p.89f. For an analysis of the modern power-states and the absence of ethics in the modern world, see esp., *Politische Ethik und Christentum* (A1904/6) pp.7ff.

What was needed was steadfastness against all "disturbances and chaos, in the midst of all ambition and demagogic rhetoric".⁸²

This strain of thought carried with it the seeds of an "aristocratic" individualism, "a resigned wisdom that everywhere seeks and honours greatness but accepts the unfathomable and unpredictable variety of human life as a dark fate".⁸³ There was no question about higher ends, but rather, there was

a metaphysics of immanence, the inclusion of everything sensual in the spiritual, of everything finite in the infinite...the majestic right of genius to impose its style on nature, the mere artistic expression of the ethical personality in the unity of its sensual and supersensual aspects.⁸⁴

Troeltsch is particularly critical of the *Schönheitsevangelium*.⁸⁵ Although he recognises that artistic creativity moves beyond materialistic denials of the spirit, it merely replaces this with an inner-worldly good of pure aesthetic pleasure. Indeed he says of the intellectual classes in Germany, if one were to ask the question whether Germany is still a Christian land, it would be difficult to

82 "Die Religion im deutschen Staate" (A1913/37a) p.90.

83 "Das Wesen des modernen Geistes" (A1907/8b) p.318.

84 *ibid.* p.320. Cf. "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.237n.

85 Cf. "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.250ff. Cf. "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.118.

answer in the affirmative. He went on:

Whoever knows only German *belles-lettres* and the spirit (Wesen) of the university, would say, completely justifiably, that he would no longer recognise the Christianity of his own country.⁸⁶

Such a world-view was under the influence of France, "that European country most broken with Christianity".⁸⁷

From a more pessimistic angle, some saw the world as purely monistic and beyond all change. There could be no possibility for ethics, since the person was impotent before the world. This was characterised by an interest in Buddhism and the formation of other groups which withdrew completely from the world.⁸⁸ Troeltsch sums up the world-view of contemporary monistic movements as marked by

an aestheticising naturalism, a relativism that changes anything into everything and robs every particular of its direct relationship to the absolute, and a pessimism that sublates individual striving and leads to self-transcendence through culture.⁸⁹

According to Troeltsch, the *Schönheitsevangelium* and Schopenhauer's pessimism were but two sides of the monistic coin.

The artistic view of life was, however, "by no means

86 "Die Religion im deutschen Staate" (A1913/37a) p.74.

87 *ibid.* p.73.

88 "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.270ff. See below, Chapter 8.6.

89 "On the possibility of a liberal Christianity" (C1910/11) p.28.

favourably disposed towards the other fundamental elements of the modern world". Although the ethical effects of such a refined egoism were often negative, "the way was constantly being prepared for mystical and religious ideas".⁹⁰ The human being was still regarded as capable of shaping the world. What was lacking, however, were ends around which activity could be orientated: there appeared no ultimate authority to shape the individual's activity. The artists were "virtuosi, who need something external to develop their individuality, but lacking this, fall into the void".⁹¹

What had developed from empiricism, as the individual's trust in the senses, was a popular belief in the efficacy of science. This had led to an all too prevalent readiness to be satisfied with facts alone, "and a universally plausible utilitarianism".⁹² There was a mechanical explanation for everything in the world

which fully satisfies the need for rationality, despite the fact that it collides with every aspect of actual life and is absurd to the profound thinker.⁹³

The task confronting Troeltsch was to present an opposition to this prevailing culture which

90 "Das Wesen des modernen Geistes" (A1907/8b) p.321.

91 "Die Kirche im Leben der Gegenwart" (A1911/8a) p.99.

92 "Das Wesen des modernen Geistes" (A1907/8b) p.323.

93 *ibid.*

was distinct from science and social-utilitarian morals, and summoned up other-worldly and super-human powers, in its unfolding of the imagination and in its direction to what is beyond the senses.⁹⁴

This led to the final problem Troeltsch discussed in the essay on the essence of the modern spirit: the problem of religion and morality. It was evident that if God was removed from the scene, then morality had to stand on its own.⁹⁵ The diligent might attempt reconstructions of morality but there appeared no universal standard. The world-view which was individualistic and "infinitely fragmented",⁹⁶ threatened the very existence of Christianity. Troeltsch presents a genuine morality as something opposed to naturalism and utilitarianism. It rested on the goals of forming (*Herausarbeitung*) the personality "into a work of moral freedom and establishing relations (*Verbindung*) among humans as moral persons".⁹⁷ This was "the challenge to lift human existence to the level of a higher necessity, to eternity",⁹⁸ "the faith in a

94 "Die Kirche im Leben der Gegenwart" (A1911/8a) p.104.

95 See below, Chapter 9.1. Cf. MacIntyre, *op. cit.*, esp. Chs. 1 and 2 for an analysis of the dislocation of moral language from its previous status as divine law.

96 "Die Religion im deutschen Staate" (A1913/37a) p.94.

97 "Das Wesen des modernen Geistes" (A1907/8b) p.326.

98 *ibid.* p.326f.

purpose and meaning for life...which keeps on crying out for religion".⁹⁹ In short, the individual was to be integrated into the highest purpose.

In the sphere of religion, the modern world had done its work of "destruction of the old religious ties with great thoroughness. But it had not produced any genuinely new force."¹⁰⁰ Troeltsch's task was to pick out

the deepest and strongest religious forces, [which were] to be found in Christianity in its dual form (Gestalt): the ecclesiastical faith, and the free fusion with elements of modern life, which was achieved by the poets and thinkers of German idealism. No other future development is thinkable than that both adjust to each other and, instead of attacking each other, learn to stimulate each other.¹⁰¹

Troeltsch's task was to overcome the impasse of the Enlightenment by a reaffirmation of what he saw as the highest Christian value: the autonomy of the person. His vocation was that of "elevating the person out of the mere natural condition to a union with God".¹⁰²

99 *ibid.* p.327.

100 *ibid.* p.329. Cf. Review of Dorner (A1905/10) p.761: "The present is not a good time for the philosophy of religion".

101 "Das Wesen des modernen Geistes" (A1907/8b) p.329.

102 *ibid.* p.330. Cf. "Protestantismus II. Protestantismus im Verhältnis zur Kultur" (A1913/19) col.1920.

1.5 The vocation of the theologian: overcoming the impasse of the Enlightenment.

Troeltsch thus experimented with the possibility of constructing a theology which rested upon human autonomy. His life-work can be unified around the attempt to find solutions to the problem of human individuality and its integration in a higher purpose. He does not deny the Enlightenment recognition of the critical powers of the human being, but rather points to the need to order criticism in terms of a higher end.¹⁰³ For Troeltsch, the fundamental problem of the modern world was the need to find structure for the liberated individual, whereby individualism could be turned to a higher end, and life could be given meaning:

An epoch that truly understands itself...can act with respect to itself, only if it furthers what is great and recognises the dangers of this task...Nothing is left but to adapt (einzurichten) ourselves to the given, which from all appearances is very far from exhausting its vital powers, and, to repeat this principle, devotedly to further the elements of greatness and to counteract the dangers with ever-vigilant self-criticism.¹⁰⁴

The context of Troeltsch's thought as philosopher and theologian rests in the impasse of the Enlightenment. The profoundly disintegrating effects of the liberation of the individual called for a re-integration: the individual had

103 See below, Chapter 2.10.

104 "Das Wesen des modernen Geistes" (A1907/8b) p.337.

to be re-located within structures of authority. Religion, with its recognition of the highest good and goals for the individual, could alone provide the basis for integrating the individual within structures *beyond* the individual, which in turn were not identified with any of the finite structures of the world. As will be discussed in Chapter Nine, the problem of the impasse of the Enlightenment was equally profoundly recognised by Max Weber,¹⁰⁵ but his failure to conceive of the highest good as something beyond the plethora of worldly values, led to the tragedy of his abnegation of moral responsibility and his irrational acceptance of the values of power politics.

Troeltsch's theology and philosophy gain their relevance not through their order or systematic completeness, but purely as more coherent and plausible attempts at a solution to the impasse of the Enlightenment than the alternatives discussed below, which appear to deny either the positive achievement of the modern world, the truth of religion, or the possibility of a synthesis. If religion is to survive as a potent moral force, capable of effecting change in the world through the free activity of individuals for the common good under the highest end, then a theology of synthesis or compromise becomes necessary. Anything else results in world-denial, the identification of the finite with the absolute, or complete meaninglessness.

Troeltsch's problem was thus to retain a view of the human which allowed for the possibility of higher meanings. It was

105 See below, Chapter 9.9. Cf. MacIntyre, *op. cit.*, p.103: "The contemporary vision of the world...is predominantly, although not perhaps always in detail, Weberian".

this that sought to provide a solution to the problems of contingency: the sense of a lack of purpose and the inability to shape the future.¹⁰⁶ Essentially this was the doctrine that the human should be free, yet not lacking direction. The only authority which could be accepted was the "authority of freedom".¹⁰⁷ That each individual should be seen as a creative "personality", capable of acting under higher motives, and each respected as such, is what Troeltsch sees to be at the heart of the Christian gospel.¹⁰⁸

Troeltsch thus recognised that the task of theology in the modern world

106 Cf. H. Lübbe *Religion nach der Aufklärung*, p.149, who sees the function of religion as "the practice of mastering contingency" (Kontingenzbewältigungspraxis). See below, Chapter 2.3.

107 Cf. Trutz Rendtorff "The Modern Age as a Chapter in the History of Christianity" p.499: "Theological thought should be guided by the 'authority of freedom', which was shaped by the historical profile of Christianity in this world. Consciousness of this freedom has given birth to the modern age, but, as we can now clearly see, it has also made us aware of its limits, which call for theology to view the modern age as a chapter within the history of Christianity".

108 This interpretation builds on undeveloped ideas suggested by Graf in "Religion und Individualität" in T.S. III, pp.207-230. Graf sees Troeltsch's theology and *Religionsphilosophie* as resting on the "connection of the freedom of the individual subject with the transcendental ground of that freedom" (p.229). Cf. "Friendship between Experts", where Graf sees Troeltsch as concerned with both the affirmation of individuality (in the doctrine of the personality), and its *limitation* through the integrative and structuring powers of religion. R.S. Sleigh likewise (in *The Sufficiency of Christianity*), felt that the free relationship of the individual to God (the grounds of that freedom) was what characterised Troeltsch's theology and philosophy and the attempt to overcome relativism: "Thus the religious metaphysic which delivers us from the bondage of historical accident and naturalism as well as from the clutches of mere tradition, is a type of philosophical mysticism which makes room for real development and real personality" (p.47).

required a new foundation: instead of authority and humble self-abnegation (Selbstbeugung), a reliance on individual conviction and the dedication of the personality (Persönlichkeitshingabe). But individual conviction and the dedication of the personality do not yield a rational religious body of thought which is everywhere identical, but only an individual and subjective (innerliche) position to what has been handed down. [Theology requires] criticism of the tradition, the balancing of religious ideas with the rest of life (Gesamtleben) which is ever changing, as well as inclusion in a broader perspective with new practical and theoretical problems, and a wider comparison with other religions and free metaphysical speculations. [This leads to the recognition] of the many possibilities in different positions, and to giving up what in religion is not compatible with advances in knowledge. Certain elements of foreign religions are included and indeed other elements of culture are forged with religion. [This leads] as far as the retreat to the purely inner ethical and religious positions of Christianity, which cannot be attacked, and to simply modifying the tradition, and to placing the authoritative faith in revelation itself upon autonomous convictions of experience and of feeling. However, in such a task, the point of departure always remains in the given constitution of the mind (Bewusstseinskonstitution), in the religion which has been handed down to us, which cannot be denied or replaced, altered or preserved (konserviert). What characterises all this is still the striving forward from what is given, to obtain the most comprehensive knowledge possible of the whole sphere of religion and ultimately, to take a position towards this in an irrational, spontaneous value-judgement. If this analysis of the powers of history leads to a strong affirmation of Christianity or shows its decisive importance, then it is against the whole spirit of the modern era. Autonomy can be very revolutionary, but also very conservative. [This conservatism] is justified in respect of religion, if in fact the ethical and religious powers of Christianity have this decisive importance, and if the modern world has brought forth no greater revelation of life. If it is affirmed [that there is no greater revelation], then theology will be understood as something which forms (herausgestaltend) the religious idea out of the historical material (Bestand), whatever else might appear alongside.¹⁰⁹

109 "Autonomie und Rationalismus" (A1907/11) col.209f.

By comparing Troeltsch with his critics and contemporaries, the system and the logic of his thought emerge as powerful answers to the lack of integration, to the absence of moral purpose in the modern world. Troeltsch's work as a *whole* is assessed from the point of view of his attempt at a synthesis of the highest good with the modern world, a synthesis made all the more problematic by the relocation of authority in the individual. The various aspects of his work, from his *Religionsphilosophie* (Chapters 2-5), through his *Geschichtsphilosophie* (Chapter 6), to his dogmatic theology or *Glaubenslehre* (Chapters 7-8) and ethics (Chapter 9), concentrate on the attempt to locate the autonomous individual within structures which provide absolute authority for this autonomy. In accepting absolute ends, the individual's autonomy becomes identified with unconditional divine law. Consequently, autonomy and theonomy become one in divine love.¹¹⁰

110 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) sect. 14.3.

Chapter Two: Troeltsch's philosophical programme.2.11 Introduction.

This chapter surveys the philosophical method which provided the background to Troeltsch's attempt at a synthesis which aimed to overcome the impasse of the Enlightenment. What will be shown is that Troeltsch adopts a critical idealism which owes its distinctive character to Kant. Everything is to be subjected to criticism, but with an end in sight: that through continual criticism, the philosopher might achieve a better understanding of reality. This critical spirit was a distinctive feature of post-Enlightenment European culture:

The historical-critical attitude of the soul, like the natural-scientific, has become a constituent of the distinctively European Ethos...In order to free ourselves from history and obtain sovereign dominion over it, we dive into the ocean of historical criticism and construction...[This] frees us from dogmas which have gradually become a hardened dogmatics and an unspiritual power.¹

Such a philosophy does nothing more than set limits to what can be said or thought, thereby freeing humanity from primitive spiritual illusion. However, philosophy does not aim to set limits to, or restrict *reality* itself.² That through criticism reality can gradually be better understood, is the end which guides the pursuit of philosophy, yet it is an end beyond criticism. Philosophy thus builds upon a faith in reason and in rationality. This is summarised

1 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.722f. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.92. Cf. "Autonomie und Rationalismus" (A19007/11) col.206. On this point, see esp. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, pp.275ff.

2 Cf. Becker, op. cit., p.130.

metaphorically by Troeltsch in his talk of the "absolute", as the unrealisable spur to knowledge and understanding. Once absolute knowledge is reached then all criticism, and hence life itself, must cease. Troeltsch thus shared Kant's presupposition of a faith in the possibility of progress towards a complete understanding of reality, not by the imposition of a system, but through a constant critique of this reality itself.

Philosophy consequently aims to grasp and understand the whole of reality:

As soon as one moves towards the whole, one is no longer within an individual discipline, but one is philosophising.³

It has no distinctive subject matter as such, but is merely directed at criticising the presuppositions which undergird the various disciplines.⁴

A philosophical understanding of reality does nothing more than point out the limits to what could be understood, "the rest belongs to life, not to philosophy".⁵ To overcome the limitations of critical philosophy is to overcome human finitude itself. Philosophy thus has to arrive at a dualism: the dualism of the absolute realm of things-in-themselves and the critical treatment of this realm. To overcome this dualism requires a move to metaphysics, a sphere where there

3 See the unpublished lectures, *Einführung in die Philosophie* given at Heidelberg in the Wintersemester, 1911-1912 (hereafter, MS *Einführung*) p.27. For details of these and other unpublished lectures, see below, Bibliographical Appendix.

4 *ibid.* p.1. Cf. p.3 "Only its criticism is important."

5 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.10. For Troeltsch's concept of "life", see below Chapter 3.15.

can be a *relation* or a *synthesis* between these two sides of reality, and for this, a "pure attachment to pure transcendentalism is not possible".⁶ Philosophy as criticism is thereby distinguished from "metaphysics" which moves beyond criticism to an analysis of absolute reality, the realm of things-in-themselves.⁷ Metaphysics seeks to answer the question of how the absolute form of reality is to be connected with the human perception of this reality. Metaphysics is thus intended by Troeltsch to help fulfil the "longing for a unified conception":⁸

I believe that only metaphysical theories will offer a way out of these difficulties which concern the relationship of the empirical-psychological to the logical subject.⁹

Troeltsch's object was thus to move beyond philosophy understood in this sense of criticism, and attempt to overcome its inevitable dualism where the human was made ever more aware of its limitations. Only in this sense could life be given a sense of absolute meaning. This was the

striving to connect the positive-factual to the inner logic (Vernunft) of human development, or better, to a divine ground of life, and bring the mere continuation of the traditional substance of life (überlieferte Lebenssubstanz) into a universal context,

6 *ibid.* p.20. Cf. Review of Marshall (A1903/10) col.1017.

7 In Kantian terms, metaphysics talks of a *transcendent* reality. It concerns the realms of things-in-themselves, rather than reality as interpreted by the critical powers of thought (Denken).

8 *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (A1922/22) p.5.

9 Review of Max Frischeisen-Köhler (A1916/28) col.548.

that is, into our theoretical and practical picture of life. That is what is essential and basic in my position...My theory might have its failings, but the intention is correct.¹⁰

Troeltsch aimed to move beyond the limits of critical philosophy and ground reality in the absolute itself. This metaphysical turn is absolutely vital for any interpretation of Troeltsch. To dismiss his metaphysical statements as mere idle musings is to rob his system of its very heart.

In recent years there have been several attempts to show that there is a unity in Troeltsch's thought characterised by a consistent approach to philosophy and metaphysics which runs through his entire corpus.¹¹ It is clear that Troeltsch's thought is marked by a consistent application of critical idealism, together with a recognition of its

10 Review of Günther (A1916/22) col. 450.

11 See especially Reitsema, "Einheit und Zusammenhang"; Graf and Ruddies, "Ernst Troeltsch: Geschichtsphilosophie in praktischer Absicht" and Becker, *Neuzeitliche Subjektivität*. Reitsema sees Troeltsch's work as characterised by an "essential and fundamental unity" (p.1) deriving from his attempt at a "tense combination" (spannungsvolle Verbindung) between normativity and factuality, between formal and material thought (p.2). Importantly he sees Troeltsch as concerned not merely with pointing out the dualism of reality, but with the attempt to overcome this with the metaphysical doctrine of interpenetration (Ineinander). Reitsema points to similarities with Husserl and the "relational function of correlative intentionality". In their article, Graf and Ruddies emphasise the importance of philosophy in Troeltsch's system, especially in relation to the mass bureaucratisation of the modern world (pp.139ff). *Religionsphilosophie* is seen as the key to Troeltsch's answer to the crisis of historicism. Becker shows the crucial role that philosophy plays in the presentation of Christianity to the modern world, although he equates metaphysics too closely with mysticism and consequently fails to see the vital role of the cult and the historical in Troeltsch's system.

epistemological limitations and a consequent move to metaphysics. This is the theme that marks a vital link between the discussions which led up to the appearance of *The Absoluteness of Christianity*, the work on the religious a priori, and the late works culminating in *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*.¹²

Troeltsch himself, writing in 1916, and recognising that his task had proved more difficult than he could ever have imagined, nevertheless saw that this particular philosophical system stood behind all his work:¹³

In the course of events I discovered that the move from psychological analysis to the recognition of the nature of reality was more difficult than I had originally envisaged, and also that the problem of development was far more complicated. In spite of this I have maintained my basic starting point: the overcoming of the historical psychological through the acceptance of modern criticism.¹⁴

12 Cf. Graf and Ruddies, op. cit., p.158.

13 Cf. H.R. Niebuhr's *Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion*, p.87. "While Troeltsch did not contemplate the possibility of producing a system of philosophy, he nevertheless regarded his thought as having a systematic connection".

14 Review of Günther (A1916/22) col.448. Cf. Review of Huber (A1904/3) col.159, where in criticising Huber's concentration on apparent inconsistencies in Schleiermacher's work, Troeltsch sees a distinct parallel between Schleiermacher and himself: "Some great leading themes (Hauptkonzeptionen) always remain."

2.12 Troeltsch's idealist roots.

The modern world, as was shown in the previous chapter, was characterised by two distinctive and apparently irreconcilable trends, loosely defined as empiricism and rationalism. These two trends were mirrored in the dualism of critical philosophy. Both contained elements of the truth, yet neither could adequately explain the whole of reality: both longed for a unification in an all-embracing system. This problem of unification or synthesis was the problem which had been faced by the great figures of German idealism, and it was upon their foundations that Troeltsch built. The need for a solution to the impasse imposed by the Enlightenment was still very much a live issue for Troeltsch, and the study of previous attempts at synthesis was not undertaken out of merely antiquarian interest, but provided the basis for Troeltsch's philosophical enterprise.¹⁵ Troeltsch shows the necessity of both the rational and the empirical for any philosophy.¹⁶

15 On this point, see esp. Garrett Paul's dissertation, *Religionswissenschaft: the Development of Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion*. Paul points out the importance of "synthesis" as the leading theme of Troeltsch's writings: "The purpose of the methodological synthesis of empiricism and rationalism, indeed, was to formulate an approach to religion which would neither despair of finding order nor attempt to deny individuality" (p.244). The interpretation of Troeltsch's philosophy offered here is in broad sympathy with Paul's intentions.

16 Cf. Niebuhr, op. cit. "It almost seems as if he carried the dualism of rationalism and anti-rationalism, of relativism and absoluteness, of pluralism and monism only a step further back." (p.270).

For Troeltsch, it was primarily idealism, as the philosophy which had developed particularly in Germany after the Enlightenment, which set about trying to find a way out of the impasse generated by the competing strands of empiricism and rationalism:

Here is a great line of thought from Locke and the Scottish philosophy of common sense (Gefühlsphilosophie), and from Leibniz and Lessing to the whole massive phenomenon of German idealism, which deepened and expanded the ideas of the Enlightenment beyond measure.¹⁷

On the one hand, empiricism, which reached its climax with Hume,¹⁸ presented massive opportunities for scientific knowledge, and on the other hand, rationalism provided a *priori* structure. However, neither gave an adequate account of the whole of reality. Reason alone could not explain the contingency and arbitrariness of empirical phenomena. Likewise, empiricism, by grounding everything in feeling and sensation, failed to account for rational necessity and a *priori* structure.

In his lectures on the introduction to philosophy, Troeltsch gives a caricature of the two positions. Firstly, there was radical empiricism best represented by the pragmatists, which aimed to collect and amass data with no assessment of the universal laws of reality. Secondly, there were the monists who spoke of the

17 "Protestantisches Christentum" (A1906/4) p.434.

18 Cf. "Der Deismus" (A1898/20a) pp.464ff. Cf. Review of Günther (A1916/22) col.488: acceptance of scepticism seemed tantamount to "spiritual suicide".

block universe (Blockuniversum), whose fanatics were only content when everything was changed into a unified block, where the personality was nothing.¹⁹

Only if there could be a synthesis between the two could experience be given a meaningful structure. Troeltsch saw the history of German idealism as the attempt to arrive at this synthesis and thereby "overcome the spirit of the Enlightenment".²⁰ Idealism was the attempt to arrive at a "mediating position (Vermittlung)"²¹ between these two conflicting principles. Troeltsch saw this as the continuing task of contemporary philosophy:

The ideas of Hume and Leibniz must once more be brought into relation with the continuation of Kant's work, and the combination of the Anglo-Saxon sense for reality, with the German sense for the speculative is still the task for the new century as well as for the century past.²²

19 MS *Einführung*, p.5.

20 "Der deutsche Idealismus" (A1900/12a) p.544.

21 MS *Einführung*, p.6.

22 "Main Problems in the Philosophy of Religion: psychology and theory of knowledge in the science of religion" (C1905/1) p.288. Troeltsch also prepared this lecture for publication in German: *Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie*, (A1905/7). There are considerable differences between the two texts, although the substantive points made are similar. The English edition is probably closest to the contents of Troeltsch's original lecture. (See the note in the Graf and Ruddies bibliography, p.221.)

With German idealism the specifically modern problems

of the relation of spirit and nature, together with the problem of epistemology, which, from the side of the spirit is rational and constructive in form, and from the side of the object is empirical and analytic...entered the foreground.²³

From the very beginnings of his career, Troeltsch saw the problems of theology and philosophy as centred around the resolution of the conflict between the worlds of nature and of spirit, as is made clear in the essay "Die christliche Weltanschauung und die wissenschaftlichen Gegenströmungen", published in 1894.²⁴ This essay argues for an idealism which recognises the world of the spirit against the positivistic and naturalistic ("wissenschaftliche") world-views which dominated the sciences.²⁵ Troeltsch affirms that all credible philosophical systems "worth their

23 "Der deutsche Idealismus" (A1900/12a) p.543.

24 (A1894/1). The quotations are from the reprint in G.S.II (A1894/1a). Troeltsch made few changes to the essay for the reprint in G.S.II. He does, however, indicate in footnotes where his views had changed in the intervening twenty years (p.227n.).

25 On this point, see the essay "Moderner Halbmaterialismus" (A1897/5 & 6) written in response to Häckel: "The fundamental character of modern science is the denial of an independent worth and content for the spirit". Unless there is a higher world then there can be nothing other than a struggle for existence. For theology, the real struggle was "to fight against a disbelief in the spirit" (A1897/6 p.161f.), without which no life was possible. "Whoever has confidence in the realm of the spirit is never far from the Kingdom of God" (ibid. p.162). See above, Chapter 1.4.

salt" have always asserted this:

Every astute (scharfsinnig) philosophical achievement recognises the portrayal of the spirit before nature, where the seemingly so dead and deadly mechanical rigidity of the facts of nature embodies the warm and restless life of the spirit.²⁶

An idealistic philosophy thus "makes room for religion to breathe".²⁷ In its analysis of the dualism of the human condition as a creature, at one and the same time, of both nature and spirit, idealism points to "the universal human problem", the relationship between the two spheres of reality.²⁸

The task of idealism was to show how the "dominion of the spirit and of spiritual purposes in the universe could be maintained without a denial of natural scientific knowledge".²⁹ This theme is echoed throughout the pages of *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*:

The battle between natural philosophy and the philosophy of history (Geschichtsphilosophie) is one of the great themes of the modern spirit.³⁰

26 "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.247.

27 *ibid.* p.248. Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.139: Every claim of religion "expresses... the stimulus of an objective world of the spirit". Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 4.4, p.58f.: "As religion presupposes the dominion of the spirit and the goals of the spirit above the world, it can only maintain this along with a fundamental ideological (ideologisch) and teleological metaphysics".

28 "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.320.

29 "Religionswissenschaft und Theologie des 18. Jahrhunderts" (A1903/21) p.46.

30 *Der Historismus* (A1922/17) p.11. In this context "Geschichtsphilosophie" is regarded as the problem of the "unity, goal and meaning" of life.

It was the most "difficult and pressing problem"³¹ which had occupied the great philosophers. Some denied the realm of the spirit altogether (like the materialists) and others set the two spheres in a monistic equilibrium which could not account for contingency and change (like Spinoza). However,

the most influential (like Locke and Leibniz) maintained a belief in divine and spiritual purposes present in the world, together with finite evil and imperfection as necessary concomitants of the finite world. The belief in spirit and the purposes of the spirit against the natural scientific view of the world was the meaning of the English doctrine of the coincidence of the moral with the physical ordering of the world, and the Leibnizian doctrine of the best of all possible worlds. In their theories, the thinking of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reached its conclusions and delivered its problems to the nineteenth. Kant's splendid solution set the agenda (Ausgangspunkt) for the new battles over the spirituality and meaningfulness of the world, which are not yet complete.³²

Idealism allowed the possibility for the creative powers of the spirit against the soul-destroying forces of unbridled individualism, which was the concomitant of radical empiricism.³³ The idealist solution as initiated by Kant affirmed the

autonomy of reason against all mere physical and psychological causality, and against all merely pragmatic relativism.³⁴

31 "Religionswissenschaft und Theologie des 18. Jahrhunderts" (A1903/21) p.46.

32 *ibid.* p.46f.

33 "Der deutsche Idealismus" (A1900/12a) p.534.

34 "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori" (A1909/31a) p.763. Troeltsch was guarding against the "relativising psychologism of a Hume" (Mundle, "Das Religiöse Apriori", p.428).

Idealism was the liberation of the "*Weltanschauung* from intellectual-deterministic deductions", which allowed for

rationally necessary practical goals of the personality...On the last analysis,...the *Weltanschauung* is determined in the personal act of freedom...The value of the personality does not rest in material intellectual culture, but in the absolute universal value of the personality.³⁵

Idealism ensured the

overpowering impression of the productive power of the consciousness, the liberation from materialism and psychogenesis, the recognition of the unfathomable (*unergründlichen*) creative depths of the human spirit.³⁶

Troeltsch's motive in adopting idealism was to overcome the spirit of the Anglo-French Enlightenment which had led to an unfettered individualism characterised by

dogmatism, empiricism, common-sense and scepticism, by utilitarian and individualistic-atomistic ethics, by a subjective-critical conception of history, by a mechanistic-atomistic view of nature and the dominating influence of naturalism in all aspects of thought.

On the other hand, German idealism was marked by

criticism of knowledge...a universally valid ethics of universal rational values (*Güter*)...a genetic-objective view of history and an organic-dynamic concept of nature which orders the whole of nature under the spiritual purposes of the universe.³⁷

However, in "overcoming" the Anglo-French Enlightenment,

35 "Der deutsche Idealismus" (A1900/12a) p.544f.

36 *ibid.* p.547.

37 *ibid.* p.532f. See above, Chapter 1.3.

Troeltsch did not wish to undervalue its positive aspects. He wished merely to regulate it by bringing it under spiritual purposes.

Idealism thus aimed at a "middle path" (Mittelweg),³⁸ the task of synthesis. This was, however, a process which would never be brought to a close, which derived from the very nature of human life itself:

The fundamental problem (Urproblem) is not the rational and the irrational themselves, but the discovery of the limits to them both.³⁹

The rational order created in thought (Denken) had to be brought into contact with the irrational contingencies of life (Leben):⁴⁰

Dualism is the key to all philosophical thought. Without it there would be no distinction between a Helmholtz and some kind of blithering idiot.⁴¹

The solution to this dualism rested in the attainment of a final lasting synthesis, which required moving beyond critical philosophy into the realms of metaphysics.

38 MS *Einführung*, p.6.

39 *ibid.* p.7. Cf. Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p.32: "Troeltsch traced this dualism...to the metaphysical constitution of man, as a citizen of two worlds, finite and infinite, and refers the final solution of the problem, which can be solved on earth only in compromise, to a life after death."

40 On the concept of "life", see below, Chapter 3.15.

41 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.52. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.174, p.293.

Consequently Troeltsch could say, "our position is not that of transcendental idealism, but this is its presupposition."⁴²

Whether in its absolute Hegelian forms or in its critical Kantian forms, idealism affirmed the autonomy of the person against the impersonality of the modern world. Troeltsch did not

believe that this problem has basically changed over the course of the development of idealism. The extraordinary power (*Uebermacht*) and the vast amount (*Uebermasse*) of the impersonal and of the subpersonal remains the same, whether the subject matter is a representation (*Vorstellung*) or the thing-in-itself.⁴³

He thus regarded German idealism as an essentially unified phenomenon. The problem of achieving a synthesis between the contradictory strands of Enlightenment thought could be approached from a number of different directions which Troeltsch did not believe to be necessarily contradictory. This is expressed most clearly in the essay "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori", where he suggests that the problem of relating the rational to the empirical

is - without the coincidence of the creaturely and divine life-process and therefore without the dialectic - the idea of Hegel, or - without determinism and pre-established harmony - the idea of Leibniz.⁴⁴

42 MS *Einführung*, p.26.

43 "Kant bleibt im Ansatz" (A1907/13) p.232f.

44 "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori" (A1909/31a) p.764. In modifying Kant's system in order to overcome its inherent dualism, Troeltsch approaches a metaphysical system which resembles Leibniz's, but which lacks the notion of a pre-established harmony. See below, Sect. 2.3, and Chapter 6.24.

Troeltsch saw himself as embracing the whole of idealism from Leibniz onwards, and wished merely to rid it of its excesses, and thus to draw out its lasting contribution for establishing a philosophical synthesis.

What was essential in idealism was the priority of the transcendental subject. This was the Copernican revolution initiated by Kant, whose achievement lay in overcoming Hume's scepticism, and in recognising that the

world of nature is only formed by the world of freedom...Kant's *a priori* means that before any content of consciousness can be attained, there must first be the consciousness itself; before every experience of the spirit, the ordering spirit is first present.⁴⁵

Troeltsch stood closest to Kant, whom he saw as the father of idealism.⁴⁶ He was interested in the Kant of "real criticism" who had established the intelligible world of freedom alongside the categories of pure reason which found their application in the natural, scientific world.

45 MS *Einführung*, p.17.

46 Cf. Review of Lasson (A1917/1), where Troeltsch suggested that Kantian and Hegelian idealism had to be made more vital (*beweglich*) and more productive. He recognised that Hegel had arrived at a synthesis of the logical and the empirical in the doctrine of the dialectic, but in fact this led to a "petrification in all-pervasive rationalism. Kant's recognition of the multifarious character (*Mehrspältigkeit*) of reason is closer to the realities of life than Hegel's unification of reason". In short, Kant retained a doctrine of "real freedom", and thus stood "closer to reality" (col. 16f.). Cf. Review of Marck (A1918/18) col. 259, where Troeltsch affirms the need for the recognition of relativism, rather than attempting to fit everything into an all-embracing system. Cf. Review of Dörner (A1905/10) col.768.

According to Troeltsch, the essence of Kantian idealism was the fundamental difference between the psychological-factual and the epistemological-validating (which) has remained as the final basic act of all spiritual reality.⁴⁷

Troeltsch's reliance on Kant is clear from his introductory lectures on philosophy. The consciousness, as that which structures reality, is placed in the foreground. Philosophy is seen as attempting "not a psychology, but a phenomenology of consciousness".⁴⁸ The "essence" of idealism was encapsulated in this fundamental proposition:

The primary object is the spirit itself. Everything is given in the first instance to the consciousness - the insight of the statement 'everything is immanently given in the consciousness' is valid.⁴⁹

A second fundametalⁿ proposition aimed to overcome the problem of excesses of subjectivism or objectivism:

Knowledge does not depend on what a thing is, but on the logical treatment through ideas.⁵⁰

Troeltsch recognised that "the concept of nature cannot be *read from* the objects, but is our creation".⁵¹

47 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.150.

48 MS *Einführung*, p.4.

49 *ibid.*

50 *ibid.* Cf. p.18: "Criticism is the attempt to take up both sides and to go above (*erheben*) an objectivising and subjectivising philosophy to a higher position."

51 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.51.

Consequently, "being and consciousness are correlates":⁵²

The North Pole is not the cause of the fact that we find it, but we find it because we have it in our consciousness.⁵³

Through the *a priori* ideas presented to consciousness, the human structures the chaos of experience and thus arrives at knowledge. Human life is thus defined by the ability "to stand against the flow of life (Sich-gegen-den-Strom-stellen)".⁵⁴

Without Kant and his epistemological method, all *Religionsphilosophie* became, in Troeltsch's eyes, "just as crass superstition as the papal encyclicals".⁵⁵ What Kant offers, according to Troeltsch, is a regulative method for controlling the excesses of empiricism and rationalism. He thus became of vital importance for Troeltsch as he developed his own *Religionsphilosophie* and *Geschichtsphilosophie*.

52 MS *Einführung*, p.21.

53 *ibid.* p.24.

54 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.51.

55 "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori" (A1909/31a) p.763.

2.2 Troeltsch's interpretation of Kant.

2.21 "Kant bleibt im Ansatz".¹

At the beginning of this century there was great enthusiasm for themes deriving from Kantian philosophy, and for a study of Kant himself, partly in response to the hundredth anniversary of his death. However, there had been Kantian revivals in the nineteenth century, the most important of which was the "back to Kant" movement.² This movement was discussed by Troeltsch in a review of the nineteenth century.³ It was characterised by a return to the

1 "Kant remains the starting point". This title stems from a short discussion article Troeltsch prepared for the Z.Th.K. In answer to the question "Wo bleibt Kant?", he answered, "Kant bleibt im Ansatz" (A1907/13) p.232f. Cf. MS *allg. Ethik*, p.27: "Der Ansatz Kants ist richtig".

2 The first use of this phrase was by Otto Liebmann, in his book, *Kant und die Epigonen* of 1865. Kant had never entirely departed from philosophical discussion in 19th century Germany, interest being kept alive by the philosophical historian, Kuno Fischer, especially in his volume *Kants Leben und die Grundlagen seiner Lehre* (1861), and by Eduard Zeller with his call for a return to epistemology in an influential 1862 lecture. From a more physicalist perspective, Kantian themes were developed by Lange with his critique of materialism and Helmholtz with his theory of perception, even though their ideas developed into the German positivism of Mach and Schick. Cf. M.S. Fisher, *Revelatory Positivism*, Chapter One, for a discussion of the influence of Helmholtz and Hertz, particularly in relation to the Marburg neo-Kantian, Herrmann Cohen.

3 "Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert" (A1913/36a) pp.629ff. See also, Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant: the Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought (1860-1914)*. Willey emphasises the importance of Herrmann Lotze in keeping interest in Kant alive. For Troeltsch, Lotze was an important early influence: he had engaged him closely in an early (Latin) prize dissertation. (See H. Renz, "Eine unbekannte Preisarbeit über Lotze" in T.S. I., pp.33-47). After the turn of the century,

metaphysical problems which had most occupied Kant, while, at the same time recognising the development of biology and psychology, "sciences which Kant hardly knew":⁴

The burning issue was...the problem of freedom, which was continually in conflict with the principle of the conservation of energy.⁵

Kant's problems had not disappeared, rather what was tackled in the revivals of Kantianism were the age old problems of the relationships "of rational and irrational, fact and idea". Indeed the problems were more pressing:

Today, even more so than in the time of Kant, the crucial point is the meaning of philosophy for culture.⁶

A return to Kant was nothing other than a return to the perennial problems of philosophy. According to Troeltsch, philosophy was nothing other than a renewal of the task of Kant under the influence of a more developed psychology.⁷

Interest in Kant was heightened by the centenary of his death.⁸ In Troeltsch's Heidelberg there had been a revival

Troeltsch's critical idealism moves to a more direct engagement with Kant himself. Cf. Niebuhr, op. cit., p.23, who suggests that Troeltsch's enthusiasm for Kant was first aroused by Lange.

4 "Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert" (A1913/36a) p.630.

5 *ibid.*

6 *ibid.*

7 Troeltsch first recognised this as early as 1895 in "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1895/2) p.433.

8 See especially, Hans Vaihinger, "Das Kantjubiläum im Jahre 1904", pp.105-155: "Celebratory articles and *Festschriften* have appeared in vast droves (Hülle und Fülle)" (p.105). The impact of the anniversary was massive: no fewer than 56 articles, together with six important German *Festschriften* are listed by Vaihinger (pp.146-150). Most interesting are the accounts of the almost religious acts of veneration

of Kantianism particularly under the influence of Windelband, who had succinctly summarised the role of Kant, with the following maxim: "Kant verstehen heisst über ihn hinausgehen".⁹ Max Weber and Troeltsch were deeply affected by his neo-Kantian methodology for the social sciences with its distinction between nomothetic and idiographic sciences. However, there was no uncritical "annexation of the Baden school of philosophy".¹⁰

This section assesses Troeltsch's participation in these discussions of Kant, and how he adopted and expanded Kant's basic method in developing his own philosophical synthesis. However, whatever his criticisms and modifications of Kant's method, Troeltsch continued to assert that "the Kantian answer remains in principle the right solution".¹¹ He was at the basis of all subsequent philosophy:

which accompanied the February 12th. celebrations. Vaihinger's judgement was that "what has been gathered together here is ample proof that Kant is nowadays a vital force" (p.105). Troeltsch's essay on Kant's philosophy of history (A1904/4a) appeared in one such collection entitled *Zu Kants Gedächtnis. Zwölf Festgaben zu seinen 100jährigen Todestage*, 1904, pp.21-154.

9 Windelband, *Präludien*, p.vi.

10 Ritzert, *Die Religionsphilosophie Ernst Troeltschs*, p.19. Cf. Sykes, "Troeltsch and Christianity's Essence", p.164f. See below, Chapter 6.22.

11 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.149.

The problem was put by him in a fundamental way, and his solutions need nothing more than modification and completion.¹²

Kant did for philosophy what Luther did for religion.¹³

Kant's practical philosophy was the "attempt to form a coalition (Koalitionsversuch) between the empirical and the rational"¹⁴ which would overcome the contradictions of the modern world.

2.22 Troeltsch and Kant's "Religionsphilosophie".

Troeltsch's extended essay, "Das Historische in Kants Religionsphilosophie",¹⁵ gives his clearest exegesis of Kant's philosophy. The primary object of this essay was to show that Kant's *Religionsphilosophie* was not something purely rationalistic which paid little regard to the empirical phenomenon of religion, but rather, Troeltsch aimed to show that Kant regarded concrete historical religion as of greater importance than had previously been recognised.¹⁶

12 "Main problems" (C1905/1) p.288.

13 Review of Paulsen (A1900/1) col.158.

14 "Das Historische in Kants Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/4a) p.60.

15 (A1904/4).

16 Even the Ritschlian, Reischle, was able to concede that Troeltsch's exposition of Kant was successful: "The chief point is correct: the philosopher of 'pure reason' had grasped the importance of the historical development of rational ideas, and of the rational ideas of religion far more than had hitherto been conceded. Thus he became the departure point for the most modern problems" (Review of "Das Historische" in T.L.Z., 26, 1904, cols.714-716). This view has more recently been restated by Klaus Weyand in "Kants Geschichtsphilosophie: Ihre Entwicklung und ihr Verhältnis zur Aufklärung": "In spite of Dilthey's pioneering work, we

The secondary purpose was to show that the *a prioris* of pure practical reason, those of critical aesthetic judgement and of morality, played a vital part in Kant's system, and that the restriction of Kant to the realm of logical judgement prevalent in the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism was untrue to the master's intentions. Beyond this, Troeltsch aimed to show that Kant had made a serious attempt to grasp the whole of reality including religion, and that consequently the value-judgement theory of religion was untrue to his intentions.¹⁷ Running parallel with these objectives was Troeltsch's constructive task of outlining the basis for his own *Religionsphilosophie*.¹⁸

Troeltsch's emphasis on Kant's priority of practical

meet even today philosophers who refuse to acknowledge the importance of history for the philosophy of the Enlightenment" (p.21).

17 See below, Chapter 4.31.

18 The importance of this essay for Troeltsch's own *Religionsphilosophie* was recognised in a review by Felix Krueger (D.L.Z., Nr.39, 1905, cols. 2371-2). It succeeded in making Troeltsch "more accessible". In a perceptive report compiled on 22. Jan. 1909 when it was first suggested that Troeltsch should be offered a Berlin Chair, Alois Riehls noted that "Troeltsch's philosophical view proceeds from Kant understood in the sense of Fichte...For his characterisation as a philosopher, his researches into the historical in Kant's *Religionsphilosophie* are far more important than his own *Religionsphilosophie*". Cited in Pretzel, "Ernst Troeltschs Berufung an die Berliner Universität", p.510. Cf. Wyman, *The Concept of Glaubenslehre*, Chapter VI, for an assessment of the importance of this essay in Troeltsch's work.

reason worked as an effective criticism of those who reduced all realms of judgement to the logical. For Troeltsch, there had to be a distinctive sphere for "logical thought, for ethical judgement and for aesthetic contemplation", each of equal worth, in order to ensure that they were appearances of a primary rather than a secondary sort.¹⁹ To remove the sphere of "das Geltende und das Seinsollende" from Kant's system was to rob it of its very heart. The impossibility of an all-embracing scientific rationalism derived from the characteristic dualism of the human life:

The impossibility of a unified reconstruction of the universe does not rest with the limitations of our thought, but in the ceaseless stream of life which is never fully self-identical.²⁰

This stress on the importance of the *a prioris* of practical reason led in turn to a reawakening of an interest in history:

The more philosophical thinkers of the present give up the tendency to achieve a one-sided world-view from natural laws, and see...the contents and values of the spiritual as at least as important for the formation of the total view (Gesamtanschauung), so the philosophical treatment of history, as the sphere of values, will become all the more important.²¹

Troeltsch saw his task as that of showing how

from Kant's basic view-point (Grundanschauung), a doctrine of the principles of historical research and the epistemological value of history can be attained.²²

19 Cf. "Das Historische" (A1904/4a), p.151.

20 MS *Einführung*, p.10.

21 Review of Medicus (A1903/6) col. 244f. Cf. Review of Lempp (A1913/7) col.215.

22 Review of Medicus (A1903/6) col. 245.

Troeltsch's chief concern in "Das Historische in Kants Religionsphilosophie" was with the manner in which Kant linked the empirical organisations of the state, the university and the church, with the "rational" principle which lay at the basis of such organisations and which regulated their empirical development. The leading problem he addresses is the regulative function of reason in relation to the empirical.²³ What guided Troeltsch's interpretation was his insistence that for Kant, rational religion could certainly regulate religious practice, but it could never replace it.

Troeltsch interprets Kant's chief work on *Religionsphilosophie*²⁴ in terms deriving from the polemical essay "Der Streit der Fakultäten".²⁵ Kant's problem

23 Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.31, p.32 where the question asked was how absolute norms were to be connected with history.

24 *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*; ET: *Religion within the limits of Reason alone*. For a reappraisal of Kant's rational theology, see Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*. The longest treatment of Kant's *Religion* is that of Josef Bohatec, *Die Religionsphilosophie Kants in der >Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft<*. Bohatec emphasises the fact that Kant founded his theory of religion as an answer to the question, "What can I hope?", and shows that for Kant, faith is an essential characteristic of humanity. Troeltsch also emphasises this need for a faith in the *Endzweck* of reason, and it is this alone that can overcome scepticism.

25 Kant, "Der Streit der Fakultäten"; ET in H. Reiss (ed.) *Kant's political writings*. Troeltsch draws out this connection explicitly in "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.59. Particularly relevant for Troeltsch is Chapter II: "Kirchlichen Glaubenslehren vs. Vernunftgelehrte" (pp.30ff). For a history of the controversy which led to the publication of *Der Streit*, see Karl-Heinz Crumbach, *Theologie in kritischer Oeffentlichkeit: Die Frage Kants an das kirchliche Christentum*, pp.11-19.

revolves around the question, how far and in what way can the philosophical faculty regulate the higher faculties of medicine, theology and jurisprudence, by connecting its rational findings with their practical and positive teachings?²⁶ According to Troeltsch, this problem is

deeply rooted in Kant's thought, in his philosophy of history, in his political-judicial as well as in his scientific-rational convictions, in his idea of vocation in the century of progress.²⁷

This idea of the need to relate the findings of critical philosophy to empirical institutions was already present in Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?", published in 1784.²⁸ Here Kant showed the importance of academic freedom to allow critical scholarship to influence the institutions which controlled the higher faculties, which would thereby assist in "man's release from his self-caused immaturity, primarily in matters of religion".²⁹ The human being had to be

26 Cf. *Die Trennung* (A1907/2) p.3f.

27 "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.60.

28 A useful collection of translations of the relevant essays by Kant is that of C.J. Friedrich (ed.), *The Philosophy of Kant: Immanuel Kant's Moral and Political writings*, which contains (among others) the essays "What is Enlightenment?" (1784) (pp.132-139), "Idea for a universal history with cosmopolitan intent" (pp.116-131), "Theory and Practice..." (1793), (pp.412-429), "Eternal peace" (1795), (pp.430-476).

29 Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" in Friedrich (ed.), op. cit. p.138f. Crumbach saw this essay as Kant's attempt to put things in high profile, as setting the agenda for debate (p.101). Cf. William A. Galston, *Kant's Philosophy of History*, where Kant is viewed as the first to discuss the crisis of historicism.

allowed to use its conscience and reason. Kant says that under this rule,

venerable clergymen could, regardless of their official duty, set forth their opinions and views even though they differ from the accepted doctrine here and there; they could do so in the quality of scholars, freely and publicly.³⁰

All tradition is subjected to criticism in the public domain (*Oeffentlichkeit*). Everything, however sacred, is to be subjected to criticism by a "reasoning public". Free discussion would lead to the development of more rational institutions.³¹ Theology, rather than remaining a theology *intra muros*, becomes a *public* theology. Kant thus provides the basis for an Enlightenment theology.³² By subjecting theology to public criteria, revealed absolutes were subjected to criticism. For Troeltsch, this was not a threat to the survival of religion, but rather "gives us freedom, peace and confidence".³³ Criticism would lead to an ever closer approximation to the absolute truth, but it would never reach it. The absolute thus functioned merely to *limit* the claims of human knowledge:

The absolute is with God, all human truth is relative...We believe in approximation.³⁴

30 Kant in Friedrich (ed.), op. cit., p.139.

31 Cf. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Oeffentlichkeit*.

32 Cf. Crumbach, op. cit., p.104, and Bohatec, op. cit., pp.625ff.

33 Review of Mezger (A1913/24) col.502.

34 Review of Kaftan (A1912/8) col. 728. See below, Chapter 5.22. Cf. Trutz Rendtorff, *Christentum ausserhalb der Kirche*, esp. p.91, for an exemplary account of a "public theology". Tolerance and the future become the leading concepts of the concretion of the Enlightenment in theology. Rendtorff's view of the absolute bears a striking similarity to Troeltsch's - it functions as a reminder of the limits of human

Religion would be reformed by the impact of criticism on traditional beliefs. For religion, just as for law and medicine, the exercise of free-thought would help regulate and reform concrete institutions to create a coalition (Koalition), where the mutual interests of each would be served by the other, in the connection of theory and practice.³⁵ The relationship between the positive institution and its rational guiding principles was discussed by Kant most succinctly in the essay, "Theory and Practice: concerning the common saying 'this may be true in theory but does not apply in practice'", of 1793:

It is evident that a link and a transition is needed between theory and practice no matter how complete a theory may be.³⁶

Guided by the principles delineated in these late essays by Kant, Troeltsch views the work, *Religion within the limits*

capability. This view is also held by Y. Yovel in *Kant and the Philosophy of History*. Absoluteness merely functions to make the human aware of the finitude of reason (p.24). This was Kant's great achievement. Consequently, "when the history of philosophy (as enlightenment) is consummated, the destiny of man is not yet achieved. Instead, for the first time, man now understands the meaning of his own history, and thereby he becomes aware of the immense - even infinite - historical fact that still lies ahead of him - to shape the world itself as a 'highest good'" (p.270).

35 Cf. "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.60.

36 Kant, "Theory and Practice: concerning the common saying 'this may be true in theory but does not apply in practice'", in Friedrich (ed.), op. cit., p.412.

of Reason alone, as a similar attempt to form a coalition between theory and practice. Contrary to much Kantian criticism which has seen this work as the epitome of a pure rational religion, Troeltsch recognised the important role that was played by historical religion.³⁷ The rational explication of religion

shows the fundamental propositions which lie in pure science for the judgement of the religious problems of church and state.³⁸

Kant's outline of a purely rational religion functioned only together with the church and state. Apart from these institutions, it was mere word-play. Consequently there had to be an interplay between the theologian (as the representative of the Church) and the philosopher, as the representative of free-thought:

The philosopher needs a connection with theology in order to make the pure religion practical, and the theologian needs a connection with *Religionsphilosophie* in order to make biblical theology scientific.³⁹

Each discipline thus restrains the other. Unrestrained rational religion was shown to be empty for practice, and unrestrained ecclesiastical supernaturalism was excluded by the principles of enlightenment as a means to genuine scientific knowledge. However, instead of continual warfare between the two, there was another option which provided for

37 For a recent (and independent) re-appraisal of this view, see Michel Despland, *Kant on History and Religion*.

38 "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.62.

39 *ibid.* p.63.

middle way (Mittel Linie). This allowed for the possibility of progress within the Christian state Churches as they gradually embodied more of the rational truth in their empirical institutions and structures. In this way the "ideal future church, the pure family-like religious community of humanity"⁴⁰ is made actual:

One of Kant's distinctive marks was that he noticed the difference between the dogmatic religion of the people (*Volksreligion*) and the progressive religion of the theologian (*Bildungsreligion*), and saw it to be ineradicable.⁴¹

Kant always maintained a faith in a "rationally controlled church".⁴² According to Troeltsch, in drawing out the relationships between theology and philosophy, Kant had established the vocation of the philosopher of religion regarding the religious and clerical problems of the new era.⁴³

40 *ibid.* p.72.

41 Review of Kalweit, (A1905/8) p.167. See below, Chapter 7.12 for a discussion of the relationship between *Volksreligion* and *Bildungsreligion*.

42 Review of Kalweit (A1905/8) p.169. Cf. Crumbach, *op. cit.*, for a recent reappraisal of Kant's view of the Church: "Kant does not lose sight of the fact that both biblical and philosophical theology are both constitutive moments of the one unity...In dialogue with all positions he aims to make Christianity present also in an era of criticism" (p.102f). Crumbach concludes: "Kant's own doctrine of religion does not therefore aim at a religion of reason, but rather at reforming of the faith of the church in so far as it can be made to approximate reason in the practical situation of the present" (p.169).

43 "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.63.

Troeltsch goes into some detail in his discussion of Kant's portrayal of the religious community. It was only in the community that there could be a breakthrough of the Kingdom of God. Unless there was some concrete means of expression, the idea of the Kingdom of God, the highest good, could only ever remain an empty postulate of reason. Content was given as the community attempted to put the idea into practice. The classical illustration for this union of the rational idea with the empirical was in the symbol of Jesus in the Bible: he was the "classical illustration and embodiment of the good despite all moral indifference".

On Troeltsch's view, Kant's doctrine of Radical Evil symbolises the impossibility of the human ever fully to arrive at a complete realisation of the highest good: this was part of the human predicament, it was the "animal indifference" which prevented humankind from realising its ethical ends.⁴⁴ Consequently radical evil is ever-present, as in every moment the final ethical goal remains only incompletely realised. Although the human can certainly recognise something of the full rational content of religion, when it comes to putting this into practice, human ignorance and frailty mean that all historical religions will only

44 On this point, see Susan Mead Shell, *The Rights of Reason. A Study of Kant's Philosophy of Politics*: "Kant's philosophy begins with a recognition of man's fearful and humiliating helplessness" (p.183). Shell links Kant's speculative philosophy with his politics and sees the most important theme to be that of "the stranger who must appropriate and so transform the world if it is to be his own" (p.185). By realising these ultimate ends, the human being extends control over the world. This dualism which recognises the opposition of the world to moral purposes is a central theme in Troeltsch's ethics. See below, Chapter 9.3. Cf. Bohatec, op. cit. p.636, for the concept of tension (*Spannung*)

ever be "a more approximate goal".⁴⁵

Troeltsch thus saw himself as developing the Kantian dictum that "the historical serves only as illustration, not as demonstration",⁴⁶ since a complete realisation of the highest ethical or religious principles was impossible except at the end of history.⁴⁷ It could only be pure supernaturalism to believe that Jesus represented the rational ideal in its fullness.⁴⁸ The world is a battle

in Kant's thought.

45 "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.82. Cf. Review of Medicus (A1903/6) col.246.

46 "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.154.

47 See below, Chapter 8.6. Cf. Yovel, op. cit., p.24: "The history of reason has no end, except one might say, in the end of man himself."

48 See below, Chapter 8.4. Again there is a marked continuity with the conclusions of the *Absoluteness*. The absolute can only be in the future, however much the past might reflect it. Cf. Emil Fackenheim, "Kant's Concept of History", pp.381-398: "History, despite whatever progress it may exhibit, is merely 'glittering misery', fact without value" (p.397). However, by showing that facts have value, by introducing the absolute into the relative, the personality (the good will) is adopting an ethico-theological view of the universe. "In other words a good will is that whereby man's existence can alone possess an absolute worth, and in relation to which the existence of the world can have a final end" (Kant, *Critique of teleological Judgement*, p.109). Cf. Yovel, op. cit., pp.125ff., here p.133: "Man's task is not to disclose harmony but to produce it", and Bohatec, op. cit., p.637: "Without ethico-teleology there is no systematic unity in universal occurrence (Geschehen), no philosophy of history. Without ethico-theology there is no unity of church history, no Christian philosophy of history". Kant goes beyond his own principle of criticism by showing the need for a set of laws founded upon freedom and only in the process of realisation.

between the good and evil principles - a battle which is necessarily present wherever the development of the ethical personality remains incomplete. The notion of redemption is found in the development towards the ethical end. It is "the overcoming of evil in human development itself", in the "supersensible possibility of freedom".⁴⁹ The ethical *a priori* which Kant believed was at the heart of religion was only ever partially realised in practice: it was the religious hope that it might be fully realised in the future.

2.23 The importance of schematism.

Perhaps the most important interpretative point this raises with regard to Kant is the notion of the need for a sensualising (*Versinnlichung*) of reason, which is analogous to the notion of "schematism" developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁵⁰ Troeltsch summarises the position: *a priori* postulates of reason have to do with empirical data alone and,

if employed apart from and beyond them [they] remain altogether empty - a use of them which results in a futile metaphysical hypostasis, such as was fabricated by Plato, and, in a more cautious and covert manner, by Leibniz.⁵¹

49 "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.85f.

50 *Critique of Pure Reason*, A137/B147ff. This short section is crucial for the interpretation of Kant. Cf. L.Chipman, "Kant's categories and their schematism", in: *Kant on Pure Reason*, (ed.) R.C.S. Walker.

51 "Kant" (A1914/15) p.655. Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A51/B75: "Thoughts without concepts are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is therefore, just as necessary to make our intuitions intelligible, that is, to bring them under concepts...Only through their union can knowledge arise."

Kant's practical philosophy shows analogies with this notion of schematism. There is a necessary connection between

critical research into the consciousness and its transcendental laws and the historical-psychological reality of the consciousness [which is analogous to the] critical transcendental principles of natural science and the concrete realities of nature.⁵²

Troeltsch repeats this idea in a criticism of Paul Kalweit, who, he maintained, had failed to grasp the importance of the relationship between the rational *a priori* and historical reality for Kant:

One can only understand the theme [of Kant's philosophy of history], once the problem of the relation of the *a priori* to the psychological in Kant's practical philosophy has been raised.⁵³

Just as the *a priori* laws of nature are nothing without an empirical world to be subsumed under ~~their~~ rules, so the *a priori* laws of practical reason require historical concrete elements to be regulated by these laws.

The ethical *a priori* is made known *through* the institutions it regulates and cannot be known apart from them. Consequently history can be viewed as the development and realisation of this ethical ideal.⁵⁴ For Kant, the whole of history is to be judged under the point of view of the ethical ideal:

52 "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.100.

53 Review of Kalweit (A1905/8) col.169.

54 This is Kant's idea of universal or (weltbürgerlich) cosmopolitan history. See, for instance, the essays "Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent" and "Eternal Peace" in Friedrich (ed.), op. cit.

Therefore it is said 'Seek ye first the kingdom of pure practical reason and of its righteousness, and your end (the well-being of eternal peace) will be added unto you'.⁵⁵

Troeltsch saw the heart of Kant's practical philosophy to rest in the historical development of the free personality in the community of free beings (*Gattungstotalität*). He saw this as a fundamentally religious idea, and although Kant explicitly equated positive religion with superstition, he valued quite differently the role of Christianity in the future of humanity.⁵⁶ It was only through the Church (as the community of ethically orientated individuals) that there could be a realisation of the ethical goal: the ethical *a priori* had to be schematised by contact with the empirical institution. Hence, according to Troeltsch, Kant does not want and cannot have a religion of pure reason, "but wishes to purify the positive religions through the religion of reason":⁵⁷

55 Kant, "Eternal Peace" in Friedrich (ed.), op. cit., p.466. Kant saw human destiny as the realisation of freedom and reason. Such freedom and reason could not be imposed from outside, but could only come from the human itself, if they were to be genuine freedom and reason. In history the human makes itself what it ought to be. Cf. Fackenheim, op. cit., p.397: Hegel and others, in moving beyond the limits of critical philosophy saw "history as the march of God through time...But if Kant failed in his construction of history, it was because he recognised the true nature of the march. It was the death march of human freedom". Cf. Weyand, op. cit., p.198f: "For Kant, the present is merely a transitional stage on the road to the cosmopolitan goal...This religiously founded theological final thought runs through his whole philosophy of history".

56 Cf. "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.130.

57 *ibid.* p.130.

Kant's own doctrine of religion does not therefore look to an unconditional religion of reason, but rather to a transformation (Umbildung) and approximation (Annäherung) of the faith of the Church to the religion of reason, as this is demanded by the present situation.⁵⁸

The critical tools of Kantian idealism thus prove an extremely valuable weapon for Troeltsch's criticism of the Christian tradition, and in particular that tradition which relies on an exclusive supernaturalism. Kant's method thus provided the bridge to the modern world.⁵⁹ Rather than being fixed and immutable, the tradition was ever open to new developments: "What will happen in a thousand years time nobody can know".⁶⁰

No religion could sever its links with the empirical, since

religion is not a freely created product of the understanding, but an expression of the fundamental laws of reason. It has rational necessity but is never an independent reality cut off from all sensibility and psychological intensity...It needs an anthropomorphic picture, or schematism of analogy, or sensory symbols through which it is first mediated, is given the power to motivate, is organised and is lived.⁶¹

In a review of Herrmann Cohen, Troeltsch re-affirms his

58 Review of Kalweit (A1905/8) col.169.

59 "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.153.

60 *ibid.* p.150.

61 *ibid.* p.140.

criticism of the futility of attempting to create a religion founded on reason alone:

From my side I cannot agree that [Cohen's] construction of Kant's *Religionsphilosophie* on formal ethical-theistic rationalism is correct. I find that the historical-psychological realities of religious life are not properly understood in this rationalism. Every *Religionsphilosophie* strives to be above confessionism, otherwise it would not be philosophical. But in its constructions there must always be something alive on the ground (Boden) out of which it grows...[Without this basis] one is left hanging in the air, that is, in the realms of brochures and books. This is the case with all the new religious creations of 'pure science'.⁶²

No religion can survive ^{only} in the dark recesses of the individual soul:

Without a means of expression (Vehikel) there is no community; without an organised community there is no durability, and no power for life for the pure religion.⁶³

Troeltsch admits that Kant was often unaware of the full implications of his practical philosophy, and often used the regulative critical canons of reason for a destructive criticism of all empirical institutions, especially the churches. Thus for many, Kant himself was the enemy of true

62 Review of Herrmann Cohen (A1915/12) col.385. Cf. MS *Einführung*, p.3: "There is no way that philosophy can take the place of emotional (gefühlsmässigen) experience".

63 "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.143. Troeltsch recognised this need for a schematisation from the very beginnings of his career. In "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.414, he recognised that the experience of God and the experience of the sensible world "only take place within one another". There was always the need for a means of expression (Vehikel) if God was to enter the world. "Pure philosophical religion can never grasp the livingness of God" (ibid. p.427). Troeltsch traces the need for historical religion to the influence of Semler - only in concrete religion could the universal be disclosed (Cf. Review of Gastrow (A1906/7) p.147). Cf. Bohatec, op. cit., esp. p.636, where the reciprocal interaction of the "mere empty idea" and the phenomenal world is emphasised: "Kant's theory is characterised by Platonism in conflict with Protestantism".

religion, since he was guilty of the charge of a pure rationalism, yet, Troeltsch argued, careful interpretation yielded only a criticism of Kant's actual practice rather than of his principles for the critical yet constructive use of reason.

2.3 Troeltsch's critique of Kant.

Despite his admiration for Kant and his appreciation and utilisation of his critical idealism, Troeltsch recognised one fundamental flaw in Kant's system. Although a schematisation had been shown to be necessary, Kant's system did not seem to allow for a connection between the noumenal and the phenomenal.¹ Free action had been asserted as necessary, but it could have no effect upon the world of appearances. The modifications to Kant which Troeltsch adopts to achieve a schematisation of reason which can be effective in real time move him far beyond critical idealism into the speculative realms of Leibnizian monadology.²

In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the relationship between the phenomenal ego (the subject which experiences the world of appearances) and the intelligible ego (the subject of free action) remains problematic. The two egos appear to do nothing other than exist side by side, each dominant in its own sphere, yet neither able to exert any influence upon the other. Troeltsch felt that if there was to be a genuine connection between the empirical and the rational, then the two should lie "in and over one another".³ The isolation of

1 Cf. Yovel, op. cit., esp. p.21, who echoes Troeltsch's criticism of Kant, that on the basis of Kant's theory of time, no mechanism between reason and empirical history is conceivable. Schematism is indispensable but not *coherent* in Kant's philosophy. Cf. Chipman, op. cit., p.115. See also below, Chapter 6.22 for Troeltsch's critique of Rickert's psychology.

2 See below, Chapter 6.23.

3 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.284.

one sphere of reality from the other appeared completely artificial.⁴

Troeltsch viewed this notion that the one ego should be active in the other as a genuine alternative to parallelism, since it meant that the personality, the unified ego, could be the centre of both experience and free action. The creative personality was formed as reality was shaped and given meaning in the union of the two spheres of the rational and the empirical:

Within the phenomenal ego by a creative act of the intelligible ego in it, the personality should be formed and developed as a realisation of the autonomous reason, so that the intelligible issues from the phenomenal, the rational from the psychological, the former elaborates and shapes the latter, and between both, a relation of regular interaction, but not of causal constraint, takes place.⁵

Mundle summarises Troeltsch's modification of Kant:

The intelligible ego is not a shadowy *Doppelgänger* as in Kant, but rather it reaches into the empirical ego and is realised in it.⁶

This criticism of Kant was already present in Troeltsch's earliest works, where he criticises Kant's limitation of inner experience to the phenomenal world which seemed to allow no room for the "affirmation of spiritual realities", for the self-determining will. This will, which unites the different spheres of reality, leads to the concept of the

4 Cf. "Religionsphilosophie" (A1907/4) p.151.

5 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.284.

6 Mundle, op. cit., p.438. Walter Köhler (*Ernst Troeltsch*, p.145) suggested that this idea of the participation of the supersensuous in the empirical is the modern equivalent of the Platonic idea of *Methexis*. See below, Chapter 8.6.

"personal individuality" or "personality (Persönlichkeit)",⁷ which moves beyond the antinomies of the transcendental dialectic.⁸ In "Die Selbständigkeit", Troeltsch's distinct philosophical method was already clearly stated: what was important was the *relation* of phenomenal reality to the ideal motivation.⁹ He was not content that the ideal or the noumenal should merely run parallel to the phenomenal, but rather the important point was the *connection* between the two.

This connection is brought about in the personality: the human is not merely subject to the natural world, but is at the same time subject of a spiritual world, which instils the natural world with a "power, freshness and individuality".¹⁰

In the personality, as the unifying ego, there was an interpenetration (Ineinander) between the noumenal and the phenomenal. This interpenetration was not a mere postulate, rather the two sides of reality were vitally active in one another.¹¹

7 "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.390.

8 Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Second Division, Book II.

9 "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.391.

10 *ibid.* (A1896/1) p.80.

11 *ibid.* p.82.

Traditionally conceived, the seat of this interaction was the soul, where creative ideal motivation worked together with the psychomechanical structures of the body.¹² In the soul, the natural world is "grasped" (ergriffen) by the absolute and ^sintilled _Lwith religious power. The unconditioned and infinite of the spiritual world is forged together (verschmolzen) with the conditioned and the finite of the natural world:

Faith in this absolute is the essence of the Christian faith, that is, devotion of the whole soul to an eternal truth which renews and completes humanity.¹³

That this sphere of the unconditioned might gain ever closer contact with the world is reflected in the Christian idea of hope, as the personality grows to share ever more in unconditioned creativity.

The dualistic nature of the human being is seen as reflected in the traditional theological paradoxes of, for example, theonomy and autonomy, creator and created and freewill and predestination. Thus, theology has its roots, not in any particular experience or in any revelation of the absolute, but rather in the "original riddle" (Urrätsel) of human nature.¹⁴ It is only in religion that this dualism

12 *ibid.* p.83f.

13 *ibid.* (A1896/2) p.212.

14 Cf. Rainer Beer's dissertation, *Selbstkritik der Geschichtsphilosophie bei Ernst Troeltsch* esp. p.107. According to Beer, Troeltsch aimed to "refound humanity and reason on the basis of a new doctrine of the nature of the human being". However, there was nothing new in Troeltsch's doctrine of the nature of humanity: rather than "refounding", Troeltsch was merely clarifying what had always been the case.

can be overcome, since it alone recognises an interaction or an interdeterminedness (Füreinanderbestimmtheit) between nature and spirit.¹⁵ Religion rests upon faith in a world of the spirit which breaks into nature in the personality. Thus it is in this

sphere of the personal-ethical life that the highest tasks (Aufgaben) and goods of Christianity reside, together with the sense (Sinn) and purpose of the world.¹⁶

Troeltsch's task is thus "set for the effort and labour which constantly makes the rational penetrate the empirical."¹⁷ His concern is with an "interpenetration" (Ineinandergreifen), a unity of the supersensuous and the empirical. Troeltsch thus uses the method he derives from Kant to attempt to establish a philosophical basis for his doctrine of the personality. The personality shapes the whole of reality into a meaningful unity as it allows the highest values of a supersensuous reality to gain a foothold in the empirical. The absolute can thus penetrate the relative. This is what lies at the heart of religion. Indeed,

Kant had himself often enough practically felt this, and spoke of freedom as an experience of communion with the supersensuous as a possible but unprovable affair, [which, however, as a consequence of his] strict adherence to the phenomenality of time and theory of the empirical ego...is completely impossible.¹⁸

15 "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.259.

16 *ibid.* p.320.

17 "Main problems" (C1905/1) p.284.

18 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.283 (amended).

Kant, although restricting it to a mere postulate, *desired* some real and observable relationship of the unconditioned and the conditioned.¹⁹

The "intelligible ego", which stood beyond time, is active, not alongside, but *within* the phenomenal or empirical ego, and consequently in real time. A synthesis between rationalism and empiricism gives "life" to the otherwise empty *a prioris* of rational necessity, and avoids the anarchy of an uncontrolled stream of sense-data.²⁰ Such a philosophy is founded upon the recognition of a fundamental "polarity of life and thought, of mythos and logos".²¹ This fundamental dualism of free-will and determinism, of irrationality and rationality, could be overcome in the synthesis undertaken by the personality which shaped its finite world around absolute ends.

Troeltsch emphasises "freedom" as the basis of his solution. This is not an arbitrary freedom devoid of purpose, but a freedom to orient action around ends beyond the mechanical and causal world of nature.²² This is the

19 Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.87.

20 "Logos und Mythos" (A1913/8a), p.136.

21 "Logos und Mythos" (A1913/8a) p.135. See below, Chapter 7.12.

22 Cf. "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.249.

"religious longing to be free over and against natural determination".²³ In freedom, the two worlds of nature and spirit "belong together". This freedom does not lead to an escape from the world of nature, but to a spiritualisation of this world as the two spheres are united.

The problem was how this notion of free (schöpferisch) action, of "creativity", could find its place in a world determined by causal laws.²⁴ So much of modern thought, including Kant's work itself, could not adequately explain "the new". For Troeltsch, the answer to the problem was in the very nature of human life itself:

To make the recognition of anything dependent upon its rationalisability is no more than an enormous prejudice that is being successfully resisted, today as always, by life itself.²⁵

Troeltsch regarded this as summed up in the problem of contingency, the "term now used to signify the irrational factor beside and alongside the rational".²⁶ In analysing reality, philosophy was bound to arrive at a set of antitheses: it could go no further, since

23 "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a), p.332. In a footnote he added for the second edition of "Die christliche Weltanschauung" in GSII, Troeltsch refers the reader to the article "Contingency" which he had since written for the E.R.E. (A1910/20a), where he had stated that this problem of freedom is at the centre of all philosophy (A1894/1a p.249n.).

24 Cf. "Contingency" (A1910/20a) Sect. 5. Cf. MS *Einführung*, p.8f.

25 "On the possibility of a liberal Christianity" (C1910/11) p.29.

26 "Contingency" (A1910/20a) p.88.

[t]he actual thinking activity of man consists in a continuous combination of the antitheses.²⁷

Troeltsch, however, aimed to move beyond antithesis, to reach a synthesis. A final synthesis, however,

does not lie within the scope of human thought, and all attempts to reach it lead to contradiction.²⁸

Antithesis and contradiction were necessary features, the "continuing riddle (bleibende Rätsel)" of human life.²⁹

The task of synthesis was reiterated in *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*. The philosopher of history was concerned with a "synthesis of natural conditions and value or meaning or freedom".³⁰ To accept the irrational as active within the rational world of cause and effect meant that history had to be so conceived that "the personality could come forth from oppressive forces".³¹ Creative power had to be seen as at work throughout history, and in the present.³²

27 Cf. "Contingency" in E.R.E., (A1910/20a) p. 89

28 *ibid.* (A1910/20a) p.89.

29 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.88.

30 *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (A1922/22) p.40. Cf. Review of Wobbermin (A1903/22) where Troeltsch relates the interpenetration of nature and spirit in the personality to the interaction of the divine and the human spirit in history.

31 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.51.

32 Troeltsch regards this as having recently been reaffirmed by Nietzsche and Bergson. See "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.237n. Between the two editions of the essay, there had been revived interest in the creative capacities of the will.

Troeltsch moves beyond Kant with his synthesis between individualism, the reliance on subjective powers, and the need for objectivity and order. The personality, as the union of subjectivity and objectivity, abstracts from empirical reality, and thereby instills it with meaning. In the very process of individuation itself, the synthesis of the unconditioned with the conditioned is made actual. Thus to pick out individuals is to create meaning out of chaos.³³ Indeed, in "every act of thought (Denkarbeit) there is something unconditioned".³⁴

Troeltsch saw philosophy as concerned with human life itself, with analysing its contradictions and dualism. It could do no more than mirror life itself:

The religious life of our time is like the needle of a compass, which does not find the pole and trembles and totters. But in the arena of philosophy, there is also much that trembles and fumbles around, and all theories alter nothing of the circumstances of life.³⁵

The synthesis which Troeltsch sought to establish aimed to ensure the survival of the creative capacity of the personality over and against unbridled individualism, the impotence of monism, and the depersonalisation of capitalism which characterised the modern world. The ground for this

33 Cf. "Contingency" (A1910/20a): "The fact of individuality plays havoc with every system of thoroughgoing rationalism". Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) pp.29ff, and p.211ff.

34 "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.431.

35 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.70.

unity of spirit and nature in the personality did not come from philosophy itself, but rather came from outside, from the recognition of the divine ground to all existence. To be meaningful, human life itself required an absolute ground at its basis. A solution to the antitheses of philosophy could thus only be found in religion.³⁶

The next Chapter looks at how Troeltsch applies his modifications to Kantian critical idealism in his discussion of the psychology and epistemology of religion.

³⁶ See below, esp. Chapter 6.24.

Chapter Three: Troeltsch's "Religionsphilosophie".3.1 Part One: The Psychology of Religion.3.11 Introduction: The meaning of "Religionsphilosophie".

The previous chapter showed how Troeltsch developed Kantian idealism which he saw as the philosophical system best capable of expressing the dualism inherent in the human condition. This dualism had been shown most clearly in the contradictions of the competing philosophical traditions of the Enlightenment. This chapter moves on from these broader principles which underpinned Troeltsch's philosophical system to a discussion of his *Religionsphilosophie*, where he most clearly put them into practice.

What Troeltsch understood by the discipline of *Religionsphilosophie* is problematic, not least because he left no systematic work which might have done for *Religionsphilosophie* what *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* did for *Geschichtsphilosophie*.¹ However, Troeltsch left a number of programmes which indicate what would have been the

¹ Troeltsch often expressed the intention of writing a systematic *Religionsphilosophie*. In a letter to von Hügel, talking of *Die Soziallehren*, he suggests that "when seen from the point of view of the whole, [this was] merely a preparatory work and not my distinctive work. This will have to be a *Religionsphilosophie* and an *Ethik*, followed by a *Glaubenslehre* and a *christliche Ethik*. This is my plan" (G1974/1 p.93, cf. p.63f. Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23) ET p.43). Even as late as October 1922, when volume one of *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* was first published in its entirety, Troeltsch expressed the hope "to be able to carry out my *Religionsphilosophie* which touches all disciplines" (A1922/17 p.viii). In a letter of the same period he laments not being able to start work on this project owing to the exigencies of the time: he was forced into "working purely for financial reward (*mancherlei reine Geldarbeit*)" (*Briefe* (G1974/1) p.122).

content of such a work. His unpublished lectures also provide a systematic treatment of the subject.² On the basis of these sources, it is possible to give a coherent account of Troeltsch's *Religionsphilosophie*.³

Although Troeltsch regarded *Religionsphilosophie* as a very diverse subject,⁴ he offered a clear programme for his own understanding of *Religionsphilosophie*. This is given concisely in "Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft",⁵ and in the lectures on *Religionsphilosophie*.⁶ The discipline is divided into four separate areas: first, the scientific treatment of the psychology of religion (*Religionspsychologie*). Secondly, this is assessed as to its validity (*Erkenntnistheorie der*

2 Troeltsch lectured on the subject of *Religionsphilosophie* from the Summer-semester of 1902 onwards. The lectures were given four times weekly and lasted for one semester. They were repeated in the following years at Heidelberg: S-S, 1904; S-S, 1906; S-S, 1908; S-S, 1910; S-S, 1912; S-S, 1914. From 1910 he also had teaching commitments in the Philosophy Faculty. Troeltsch's teaching commitments at Berlin also included *Religionsphilosophie*, and he lectured on the subject twice a week in the following years: W-S, 1915-16; W-S, 1917-18; W-S, 1919-20; S-S, 1922. For details of the lectures referred to, see below, Bibliographical Appendix.

3 Cf. Niebuhr, op. cit., p.11: "To collect and systematise, as best we can, is the best possible way of understanding his thought as a whole".

4 Cf. "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.108: "*Religionsphilosophie* is a collection (Bündel) of all sorts of (verschiedenartiger) problems and methods, which is very difficult to bring together to a unified treatment".

5 (A1906/5b) pp.492ff., ET "Religion and the Science of Religion", pp.114-120.

6 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.16.

Religion). Thirdly, the philosophical assessment of historical forms of religion (*Philosophie der Religionsgeschichte*). Finally, *Religionsphilosophie*, like all branches of philosophy, moves to metaphysics as it attempts a solution to the problems of philosophy. Thus for Troeltsch, the "first task of a *Religionsphilosophie* is a phenomenology", that is, the attempt to subject all aspects of religion (psychological, epistemological and historical) to philosophical analysis and criticism.⁷ Consequently *Religionsphilosophie* is philosophy *about* (über) religion.⁸

Troeltsch undertook a philosophical appraisal of the history and the psychology of religion, but he did not see this task as something divorced from the philosophical assessment of the rest of reality, but merely that of applying the canons of critical philosophy to the distinctive

7 Cf. Review of Dorner (A1905/10) p.765. Cf. "The dogmatics of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*" (A1913/2), and "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7). This latter essay does not so much attempt to outline the tasks of the specific discipline of *Religionsphilosophie* as to offer a criticism of competing philosophies as applied to the phenomenon of religion. Cf. Pannenberg, "Toward a theology of the history of religions", pp.78ff.

8 Cf. *Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie* (A1905/7) p.1. Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1895/2) pp.363ff., esp. p.376, where Troeltsch sees Schleiermacher as redefining the philosophy of religion along these lines. Cf. W. Trillhaas, "Religionsphilosophen" in R.G.G.³ where *Religionsphilosophie* is seen as the "methodische Beschäftigung der Philosophie mit der Religion" (col. 1014). Karl Barth in his early *Ideen und Einfällen zur Religionsphilosophie*, gives a similar definition of the term. (See Barth in M.S. Fisher, op. cit., App. II, p.1). It has been suggested by Fisher that notes taken at Troeltsch's Heidelberg lectures on *Religionsphilosophie* found their way to Marburg and were studied by Barth. (M.S. Fisher, private correspondence).

phenomenon of religion.⁹ The word "Religionsphilosophie" has usually been left untranslated in order to differentiate it from the narrower use of the term "philosophy of religion" in English, which tends to concentrate more on attempts to prove the existence of God or the possibility of miracles, or more recently, to show that religion is a distinctive "form of life".¹⁰ Troeltsch's concerns are not with religion divorced from the rest of reality, but of showing that religion is a *necessary constituent* of any meaningful reality. He does not aim to isolate religion from the rest of reality, by showing that it has a unique form not amenable to philosophical investigation, but rather sets about an appraisal of the particular phenomenon by relating it to the whole of reality.

Troeltsch viewed philosophy as something which had to immerse itself in the description and analysis of reality. Unlike in the past, however, when the *whole* of reality could be grasped by the polymath, contemporary learning had advanced so far that only a very small part of reality could be understood in anything approaching its fullness:

9 Cf. Garrett Paul, op. cit., p.10, who equates *Religionsphilosophie* with *Religionswissenschaft*. Although both *Religionsphilosophie* and *Religionswissenschaft* are concerned with the appraisal of the phenomenon of religion, only the former is concerned with the *meaning* and *validity* of religion, rather than merely scientific investigation.

10 Such occupations account for less than one paragraph of Troeltsch's lectures on *Religionsphilosophie* (MS *Religionsphilosophie*, Para.9, pp.54ff). Cf. Review of Marshall (A1903/10) col.1017: "I feel it is more important to direct epistemological reflection towards the concrete facts of religion than towards abstract conceptions of God".

The philosopher could no longer hover like God above the waters, but had to sweat and work within a distinctive sphere.¹¹

For Troeltsch this sphere was religion.¹²

This chapter assesses the first two aspects of Troeltsch's "philosophy about religion", that is, his application of critical idealism to the phenomenon of religion. The third aspect of *Religionsphilosophie*, the philosophy of *Religionsgeschichte* is the subject of the next two chapters. Metaphysics, as the fourth aspect of *Religionsphilosophie*, points to Troeltsch's enduring concern with the future, and the relation of the absolute to the relative, with development towards an ideal, which forms the basis for his theology and ethics.

3.12 The psychology of religion.

This section describes the function of empirical psychology of religion which constituted the first aspect of Troeltsch's *Religionsphilosophie*. The notion of a synthesis between the empirical and the rational is again a vital theme, since neither empirical psychology nor rational epistemology could alone explain the phenomenon of religion. Only if the two

11 MS *Einführung*, p.1.

12 Cf. Review of Biedermann (A1903/12) col.1214: "The problem of universal epistemology and of metaphysics with which it is intimately connected must be left to the professional philosophers who have more training than we theologians. Our real interest is in the psychology and the epistemology of religion in the narrower sense".

were brought into contact could dualism be overcome. A synthesis required the possibility of an interaction between the rational and empirical spheres of reality.

What is conspicuously lacking in Kant's thought is a serious assessment of empirical psychology. Any adoption of critical idealism would have to account for the massive advances in psychology in the hundred years following Kant's death. This section discusses how Troeltsch develops the ideas of Kant under a more advanced conception of empirical psychology which results in an "improvement in the critical system under the influence of modern psychology".¹³

Although accepting that Kant's appreciation of empirical psychology was extremely primitive, Troeltsch did not intend to reject his method, but merely wished to modify it, since,

with the most fundamental coherence Kant undertook the analysis of consciousness in general making it his fundamental proposition and under this allocation, religion was given a defined place in the economy of consciousness.¹⁴

Troeltsch's investigations into the psychology of religion, however, are merely a preliminary to the investigation of the validity of religious feeling.

The advances in psychology had made their impact in all fields of human activity, not least in religion. On both sides of the Atlantic during the first years of this century, the theological journals were concerned particularly with the psychology and history of religion, and journals devoted

13 "Main problems" (C1905/1) p.288.

14 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.143. Cf. Mundle, op. cit. p.438.

purely to the psychology of religion had been established.¹⁵ In Germany, interest in the psychology of religion was aroused particularly by the publication of the fourth to sixth volumes of Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie*, which dealt with religious themes.¹⁶ American pragmatist psychology of religion was popularised in Germany after Georg Wobbermin's translation of William James' Gifford lectures of 1902-3.¹⁷ Indeed Troeltsch regarded psychology of religion as the "favourite study of our time".¹⁸ The beginning of the century had also seen the production of two massive encyclopaedias aiming to provide an all-embracing scientific account of religion.¹⁹

Although Troeltsch never entered the debate at anything

15 See, for example, *The American Journal of Religious Psychology and Education*, ed. G.S. Hall, Worcester, Mass., and the *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie*, hrsg., von Rinze and Bresler, Halle, first published in 1907.

16 W. Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, Leipzig, 1905-9. For Troeltsch's assessment of Wundt, see his review of Lipsius (A1901/2) col.72: "[Wundt] provided a scientific presupposition for the possibility and the discussion of the specifically religious".

17 William James, *Die religiöse Erfahrung in ihrer Mannigfaltigkeit. Deutsche Bearbeitung von Georg Wobbermin* (1907). Translation of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Also influential were E.D Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion*, and J.H. Leuba, *A Psychological Study of Religion*.

18 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.17 (Sect.4).

19 Cf. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, (ed.) James Hastings, and *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, (ed.) Max Schiele. Troeltsch contributed to both.

other than a superficial level,²⁰ he saw the need for the inclusion of the empirical findings of the psychologists in a theory of religion suitable for the modern world.²¹

3.13 The function of empirical psychology of religion in Troeltsch's "Religionsphilosophie"

In the lecture Troeltsch gave to the Congress of Arts and Sciences at St. Louis on his tour of the USA with Max Weber in 1904, he boldly affirms the importance of empirical psychology in the study of religion:

The science of religion keeps in touch with that which without doubt factually exists and is the object of actual experience: the subjective religious consciousness.²²

In the attempt to form a synthesis between the empirical and the rational aspects of religion, Troeltsch could not afford to undervalue the scientific explanation of religious experience. The advances since Kant's day, especially in the USA, were extraordinary, and could not be ignored.²³

20 He did however review a number of books on the psychology of religion. See esp. his review of James (A1904/13). He also published two essays devoted in part to a discussion of modern psychology: *Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie* (1905/7), and "Empiricism and Platonism" (A1912/6).

21 The most detailed account Troeltsch gives of the role of psychology in his system was given in the lectures on *Religionsphilosophie*. MS *Religionsphilosophie*, Sect.4. Cf. "Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft" (A1906/5b), p.492f, ET. 114-116.

22 "Main problems of the philosophy of religion: psychology and theory of knowledge in the science of religion" (C1905/1) p.275.

23 William James, however, maintained that succeeding generations of psychologists would be related to him in the same way as chemists were related to alchemists. (Troeltsch cites this reference in his lectures. MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.17.)

Consequently it was in the field of psychology that Troeltsch was most willing to criticise and move beyond Kant.

Troeltsch was attempting to show how the mass of data collected in empirical researches could be used in a philosophical system.²⁴ Empirical psychology of religion merely set about the delineation and codification of religious phenomena. Alone it could say nothing as to their value or truth. It was, however, of vital importance in *Religionsphilosophie*. Indeed, Troeltsch suggested that the first aspect of a *Religionsphilosophie* was the "enquiry into the factual world of the religious consciousness":²⁵

Any real theory of religion must keep itself much more independent of all metaphysical presuppositions and must admit that the essence of the religious *a priori* is extracted from a thoroughly impartial psychological analysis.²⁶

This clearly echoes the American desire for a value-neutral

24 Cf. Georg Wobbermin, *Aufgabe und Bedeutung der Religionspsychologie*, p.12: "in the work of the psychology of religion, American empiricism, which is of such great merit, must be expanded by epistemological criticism...and by transcendental psychological procedures". For a good introduction to the state of *Religionspsychologie* in Troeltsch's time, see Wobbermin, "Der gegenwärtige Stand der Religionspsychologie", pp.488ff. Cf. Günter Irle, *Theologie als Wissenschaft bei Georg Wobbermin*, pp.144ff. For a contemporaneous discussion of Troeltsch's *Religionspsychologie*, see Günther, *Die Grundlagen der Religionsphilosophie Ernst Troeltschs*, pp.76ff., who suggests that, in affirming that the core of all religion is the feeling of the presence of God, Troeltsch oversteps the limits of empirical psychology by introducing his own rationalist presuppositions (p.79), and thereby is guilty of a rational proof of God. See below, Section 3.28.

25 "Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft" (A1906/5b), p.460, ET p.87.

26 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.282.

study of religious phenomena, as expressed by James and Coe.²⁷

Troeltsch recognised the importance of empirical study of the phenomenon of religion in his earliest works:

At their very basis religions are pure fact and derisive (spotten) of all theories. Only they themselves give information about themselves.²⁸

He went on:

Although logical thought is infinitely important for the conception (Auffassung) of all things, and also for religious life itself, it is however, not its basis (Grund) or its simple origin.²⁹

However, Troeltsch could not rest content with a purely empirical analysis of the phenomena, but wanted to show how critical idealism could regulate these otherwise disordered empirical findings, to "withdraw from the irrationality of the multifarious to a rational criterion".³⁰ Troeltsch continued:

By this rationalism alone may the true validity of religion be founded, and by this alone the uncultivated psychical life may be critically regulated.³¹

27 Cf. G.A. Coe, *The Spiritual Life*. Troeltsch was aware of most of the important writings of the American psychologists of religion. See the bibliography to "Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft" (A1906/5b) p.453n, ET p.122.

28 "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.379.

29 *ibid.* p.384.

30 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.288.

31 *ibid.* Cf. Dyson in *History in the philosophy and theology of Ernst Troeltsch*: "Troeltsch thinks Kant has oversimplified the problem by expecting that his rationalism could deliver assured knowledge. It should serve to limit and repress illusion, and to provide continuing clarification and orientation before the confusing stream of psychological data" (p.250).

Troeltsch saw this as a mediation between Kant and Schleiermacher. He regarded Kant as too deist, since he undervalued the role of religious experience in favour of a moral religion which did not allow for a separate sphere for religion except as a means of affirming the eternal worth of the ethical. A distinctive "religious experience" was thus severely restricted.³² However, there were certain elements in Kant's theory which could provide the basis for a theory of religion which took religious experience seriously. On the other hand, Troeltsch believed Schleiermacher had corrected Kant's underplaying of experience, but had moved too far in the opposite direction, having failed to find an adequate means for the critical evaluation of this experience. For Troeltsch, unregulated religious experience could never function as an adequate world-principle.³³ Devoid of some form of critical regulation, experience alone was too vague to be of use in establishing an all-embracing theory of religion.³⁴

32 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.287.

33 Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.373f. In attacking Schleiermacher on this point, Troeltsch is at the same time attacking Herrmann. See below, Chapter 4.31 and 7.17. In a polemical attack on pragmatism, Otto Scheel traces the history of an over-reliance on experience from Schleiermacher to William James. (Z.Th.K., 1908, pp.1-38.) He sees it as imperative that all serious philosophies of religion must include a rational assessment of religious experience.

34 Cf. "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.282. Cf. W. Günther, op. cit., p.25: "First one must look at the phenomenon in its factuality and individuality before making any assessments as to its epistemological content and validity. Kant only partly recognised this, whilst Schleiermacher certainly carried out fine psychological observations but assessed them with inadequate epistemological and metaphysical

3.14 Troeltsch and William James.

In the German version of his 1904 St. Louis lecture, Troeltsch stated that his appreciation of William James did not merely arise from the fact that he was visiting America at the time, but out of a genuine admiration.³⁵ Troeltsch's admiration for James was most clearly demonstrated in his essay published in the *Harvard Theological Review* in 1912.³⁶ In this essay, Troeltsch outlined the importance of empirical psychology for the study of religion. James' psychology was important in that it treated religious phenomena as realities irreducible to any other psychic form.

Unlike many from a similar philosophical tradition, James treated religious experience in "its full vitality",³⁷ and

principles".

35 "Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie: Untersuchung über die Bedeutung der Kantischen Religionslehre für die heutige Religionswissenschaft" (A1905/7) Vorbemerkung, p.3. Troeltsch had favourably reviewed James' *Varieties* in the D.L.Z., 25 Jg, Nr.49. (A1904/13). Cf. MS *Einführung*, (p.4) where Troeltsch considered James to be a philosopher of the "highest freshness and originality". James had acquired many disciples in Germany. For instance, G. Vorbordt (in Z.Th.K. 1908, pp.60-67), saw pragmatism as a means for overcoming the "perpetual oscillation between subjectivism and rationalism" (p.61).

36 "Empiricism and Platonism in the philosophy of religion - to the memory of William James" (A1912/6).

37 "Empiricism and Platonism" (A1912/6) p.412. James loathed the "medical materialists" who attempted to discredit religion by pointing to its origin in some diseased bodily state.

was not guilty of succumbing to the temptations of a materialism or positivism deriving from Comte and Spencer.³⁸ According to Troeltsch, to explain everything according to the positivistic methods of natural science was in fact "the last evil remnant of a Platonism become natural science".³⁹

Positivism had reified the guiding principles which underlay scientific investigation into a kind of Platonic Idea, whereas Troeltsch saw them as nothing more than regulative principles for the investigation of empirical data. Positivism hypostatized its *a priori* presuppositions derived from natural science, and limited the whole of reality to what could be explained in these terms. Troeltsch did not aim to limit reality, but rather aimed to explain it in its fulness.⁴⁰

Psychology of religion, according to Troeltsch, had to treat religion as an independent sphere of reality not reducible to any other.⁴¹ Hence,

the importance of the questions of psychology rests in the

38 Cf. "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.236, pp.242ff. At another stage however, Troeltsch places James in a direct line of descent from Comte. However he also asserts that "radical positivism has never been completely held" (MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.4).

39 "Empiricism and Platonism" (A1912/6) p.412.

40 Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.384.

41 Cf. *ibid.* Pt.II.

question as to whether the religious state or condition of the soul is only a combination of other conditions, or whether it had its own independent essence like logical thought, ethical judgement or aesthetic appreciation, that is, whether it is secondary or primary.⁴²

James had attempted to counter reductionist tendencies in psychology, but at the same time, he was determined to evaluate religion on strictly pragmatic lines. For James, religion "must run the gauntlet of confrontation with the total context of experience".⁴³ It was to be evaluated according to the pragmatic principles which guided his epistemology, that is, in so far as it furthered the practical needs of human existence.

Troeltsch congratulates James on his scientific approach to the study of mysticism and the various other types of religious experience, especially that of conversion, yet he considers that if we adhere fully to James' epistemology, "all we can have is a highly indefinite, relative description which piles up various characteristics".⁴⁴ He had merely arrived at a "purely provisional description and analysis of the phenomena".⁴⁵

According to Troeltsch, James' theory of pragmatism lacked

42 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.151.

43 James, *The Varieties*, p.426.

44 "Empiricism and Platonism" (A1912/6) p.413. James certainly recognised the vagueness of much of what he discussed. See the final chapter in *The Varieties*.

45 "Empiricism and Platonism" (A1912/6) p.421.

an adequate epistemology, restricting the activity of human beings to "the vital movements and adjustments which contribute to the self-preservation and self-expansion of the race".⁴⁶ Within these epistemological confines there was a severe restriction of free-will, since all action was defined beforehand as in accord with certain empirically observable ends (i.e. that we might not perish). For Troeltsch, this was an unnecessary restriction on an otherwise valuable theory.

Despite its severe limitations, Troeltsch saw James' work as an important counterbalance to what he called the "Platonic" theories of psychology prevalent on the Continent.

In this context "Platonic" is synonymous with those rationalistic theories which allowed little function for the role of religious experience in a theory of religion. Against these, James maintained that "a vital intercourse with God", a genuine feeling of conversion and redemption, is possible. However, just as "Platonism" recoiled from the world of appearances into the realms of pure reason, so James' theory lost touch with reason. These two traditions of empiricism and "Platonism" provided the polar extremes out of which Troeltsch attempted to create his *Religionsphilosophie* of synthesis, capable of explaining both the rational and the empirical-historical aspects of the phenomenon of religion.

On the one hand, reason was indispensable for religion since it regulated the empirical by giving it a "relation to a whole, to an absolute, to something possessing inner

46 James, *The Varieties*, p.415.

necessity".⁴⁷ On the other hand, empiricism fulfilled a vital function. It could instil the empty *a priori* of pure reason with "life". It was this that Troeltsch regarded as James' most significant contribution to the psychology of religion:

The impression of James' presentation as living, unprejudiced, saturated with reality, grows on me.⁴⁸

Troeltsch's task then in formulating his own *Religionsphilosophie* was how "to adopt into Platonism, the element of truth which pragmatism holds".⁴⁹ Troeltsch's interest was in ensuring that the real "life" of religion survived despite all attempts at rationalisation.⁵⁰

Troeltsch's account of the role of psychology in the discipline of *Religionsphilosophie* emphasises the point that the rational can have no independent existence apart from the empirical: a "schematisation" is needed. The rational merely

47 "Empiricism and Platonism" (A1912/6) p.418. According to Troeltsch, James recognised that there was a "reaction upon the cosmos" and had thus surreptitiously introduced the notion of the "whole" back into what was ostensibly a pragmatic theory. James introduced his famous "piecemeal supernaturalism" to account for the way in which "the higher art of the universe" affects the sensory world. (*The Varieties*, pp.516-520.) However, he stopped short of identifying this with the God of traditional theistic belief.

48 "Empiricism and Platonism" (A1912/6) p.420.

49 *ibid.* Cf. Mundle, *op. cit.* p.477.

50 Cf. "Autonomie und Rationalismus" (A1907/11) col.204.

helps to correct and regulate

the intricacies and narrowness, the errors and false combinations of the psychical situation.⁵¹

Thus

the irrational and purely fact-contents must remain or must be restored to their rights. So we shall always have the 'mixed universe' of which James speaks.⁵²

3.15 "Lebensphilosophie" and the move to epistemology.

Whatever its insights, "in the area of explanation, the American method has achieved nothing".⁵³ According to Troeltsch, all James had shown was that we *have* a particular idea:

*That we have an idea says nothing about whether it is true...Truth or non-truth is no longer a psychological question.*⁵⁴

At another point Troeltsch suggests

total relativism results where there is merely psychology and no criterion of the validity of religion, since there is neither supernatural revelation nor rational criteria and necessity.⁵⁵

51 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.286.

52 "Empiricism and Platonism" (A1912/6) p.421.

53 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.32.

54 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.49.

55 Review of Hèbert, (A1907/12), col.1907.

Troeltsch recognised a similarity between the American method and a strand of European thought which emphasised the primacy of experience in the concept of "life" (Leben).⁵⁶ The work of Dilthey, in particular, had begun to re-invigorate Kantian idealism by instilling it with life:

The more contemporary German thought represses Hegel's comprehensive substantial doctrine of the "objective spirit", and re-acquires Kant's method of idealism, and fills it with living content, so it becomes more and more clear that it moves in the direction of Dilthey's work...This direction of thought illuminates problems and possible results which for the most part have been successfully harvested.⁵⁷

Among Troeltsch's contemporaries, Simmel, in his *Lebensphilosophie*, best exemplifies the primacy of "life" over knowledge. Life was far greater than what could be empirically known. In specific world-forms, (e.g. religion), the human shapes the content of reality in terms of higher ends. In his discussion of Simmel's contribution to *Religionsphilosophie*, Troeltsch's praises and criticisms mirror those he gives to James:

I can only say that I hold [Simmel's] form of religion as a distinctive psychological category, and above all his incisive concept of the immanence of this category in all kinds of medium to be correct and extremely fruitful. Yet I can only say that it seems to me impossible to work with pure psychology alone...Psychologism certainly has the advantage for *Religionswissenschaft* in being able to evaluate religion as a psychological phenomenon, and does not need to reduce it through rationalistic dogma; but it also has the disadvantage of making

56 Cf. "Autonomie und Rationalismus" (A1907/11) col.207f: autonomy always needs a balance between reason and the irrational. On this point, see Becker, op. cit., p.130, who emphasises this "irrational" aspect of Troeltsch's thought.

57 Review of Dilthey (A1916/1) col.15. For Troeltsch's relationship with Dilthey, see below Chapter 6.121.

its inner necessity and validity, and its developmental drive which arises from these, into a matter of mere chance. Therefore religion is profoundly related to epistemological rationalism...which admittedly always leaves a vast field unexplained and beyond conceptuality. However, psychological analysis always remains as a fruitful basis in experience which, in this case, has presented important and interesting observations.⁵⁸

He put this more succinctly in a later review of Simmel:

In so far as the moderns exclude the idea of God from the outset, or in their conclusions, they know neither substance nor absoluteness any longer. Some kind of organising idea is needed in the flow of life.⁵⁹

For Troeltsch, supernaturalism could no longer provide this "organising idea", and consequently, to rectify the inadequacies of a purely psychological approach, a transcendental philosophy was needed which could penetrate deeper, and assess the claims of religion to truth and knowledge. According to Troeltsch, as soon as we ask,

how Kant would have formulated an *a priori* for psychology, we lose natural reality and wander into the garden of epistemology.⁶⁰

For Troeltsch, psychology can never be pure science. It "admittedly needs extensive natural-scientific data, but it is not natural science".⁶¹ This is brought out most clearly in the introductory lectures on philosophy.⁶² The boy who

58 "Zur modernen Religionsphilosophie" (A1907/15) col.841. Cf. Review of Simmel (A1919/31) col.207.

59 Review of Simmel (A1921/17) col.212.

60 MS *Einführung*, p.31.

61 *ibid.* p.29.

62 *ibid.* pp.28ff.

correctly calculates the sum, $2 \times 2 = 4$, does so not because of anything in his past experience, or because of any feeling of compulsion, but because it is *correct*. He has acquired the ability to multiply correctly. *How* he acquired such an ability is irrelevant to the fact that he can do his sums. The question of truth is thus of a different kind from the questions of psychological causation. The two must remain separate: the psychological explanation of the acquisition of the particular ability to apply the criteria for correct multiplication, or a description of the brain processes involved, is not equivalent to calculating correctly. According to Troeltsch, this mirrors the distinction between freedom and determinism which philosophers such as James failed adequately to appreciate:

The ego of the personality can never be explained by psychology alone since it cannot be formed (erformen) by an historical-reproductive or a natural-scientific method.⁶³

The problem which confronts the philosopher is how to link these two distinct spheres. On Troeltsch's view, even though his solution was inadequate, Kant had at least grasped the need for an inter-relationship between freedom and determinism, by showing that

epistemology is not possible unless we previously have psychology, and psychology is not possible unless we first have epistemology.⁶⁴

Thus, on Troeltsch's view, an adequate *Religionsphilosophie*

63 *ibid.* p.30.

64 MS *Einführung*, p.30. Cf. p.38. See below, Chapter 2.3, for a discussion of how Troeltsch tries to overcome the inadequacies of Kant's solution with his doctrine of interpenetration in real time.

demands, above all, empirical knowledge of the phenomenon, but it demands this only in order, on the basis of this knowledge, to be able to answer the question as to the amount of truth.⁶⁵

In a memorable phrase, Troeltsch repeats this idea:

"psychology becomes the entrance gate to epistemology".⁶⁶

Empirical psychology did not concern itself with the grounds and the goals of knowledge: these were beyond natural science and concerned the *attitude* of the observer towards the object:

It is not 'psychology' which decides for the immediate presuppositions [of science] but a certain intuition and an ethical position of the will towards the question of the meaning and goals of knowledge. Only this can conquer scepticism.⁶⁷

A science which claimed to be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood required the acceptance of a certain set of principles which would guide the practice of that science.⁶⁸ In so far as *Religionsphilosophie* was the delineation of these goals for the "science of religion" (*Religionswissenschaft*), then it too required a set of criteria, of *a priori* presuppositions, whereby truth and falsehood in matters of religion could be distinguished.⁶⁹

65 "Main problems" (C1905/1) p.277.

66 *ibid.* p.281. On this point, see esp. Karl Bornhausen, "Das religiöse Apriori bei Ernst Troeltsch und Rudolf Otto", pp.194ff.

67 Review of Nelson (A1913/12) col.342.

68 Cf. *ibid.*: "That means that the presuppositions of science rest in something which is not itself science". Cf. Review of Oesterreich (A1916/12) col.232.

69 See below, Chapter 6.22 for a discussion of Troeltsch's attitude towards this method in the social sciences and humanities which derives from Windelband and Rickert.

On this view, the philosopher of religion had to establish an *a priori* criterion to assess the validity of religious experience, distinct from the merely pragmatic or empirical.⁷⁰ This application of the critical method to religion became one of the most controversial themes in Troeltsch's *Religionsphilosophie*. Exactly why this is so, and whether Troeltsch's critics were justified, is the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

70 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.280.

3.2 Troeltsch's "Religionsphilosophie". Part Two: The Epistemology of Religion.

3.21 The religious a priori.

The concept of the religious *a priori* was one of the most hotly contested issues in German theology in the early years of this century. There were large numbers of monographs explaining the development of the concept, and comparing the different approaches to the subject.¹ In some ways, the reason for this is clear: the religious *a priori* provided a catch-phrase summary of what was involved in a critical idealistic *Religionsphilosophie*. Thus Rudolf Köhler suggested that

our time is looking for something which will carry the whole of *Religionsphilosophie*...Theories of the religious *a priori* are attempts to construct such a unified concept.²

For some, the religious *a priori* was seen as representing a natural theology which explained religion as a necessary truth of reason.³ For others, who saw religion as based on

1 Günther, op. cit., pp.106-109, lists sixty-two items in his bibliography. Cf. Schlesinger, *Probleme eines religiösen Apriori*.

2 Rudolf Köhler, *Der Begriff Apriori in der modernen Religionsphilosophie*, p.2. Troeltsch regarded this book as "a very good exposition of my attempt to solve the problem" (Review of Köhler and Jelke, A1921/20, col.270). For other accounts of Troeltsch's concept of the religious *a priori*, see, e.g., Reist, *Towards a Theology of Involvement*, pp.168ff., Schrey, "Ernst Troeltsch und sein Werk", pp.40ff., Ritzert, op. cit., pp.56ff., and Apfelbacher, *Frömmigkeit und Wissenschaft*, pp.85ff.

3 Eg. Bodenstein, *Der Neige des Historismus*, p.30: "The theory of the religious *a priori* is nothing other than an attempt to form a substitute for a natural theology".

an irrational value-judgement which denied the possibility of any role for reason, the concept of the religious *a priori* was anathema. The history of the concept of the religious *a priori* reflects the history of twentieth century theology. In her discussion of the development of the concept, Ruth Schlesinger observed that "the explanation of the spiritual-historical destiny of a concept is very closely bound up with the destiny of an epoch".⁴ Consequently, once the kind of idealist philosophy with its liberal Kantian presuppositions which formed the backbone of Troeltsch's system had been banished from theology after the cultural debacle of the First World War, virtually all discussion of the religious *a priori* ceased. The era between the wars saw the radical contradiction between the natural world and that affirmed in the Christian decision of faith. All philosophical creations of humanity were as nothing. Consequently, there was virtually nothing published on the subject of the religious *a priori* between Rudolf Köhler's doctoral dissertation of 1920 and Ruth Schlesinger's of 1959.

Indeed, Köhler was already highly dismissive of Kantian metaphysics. He saw metaphysics as nothing other than a function of a particular *Weltanschauung*, and not as reflecting necessary truths of reason.⁵

4 Ruth Schlesinger, op. cit., p.72.

5 Rudolf Köhler, op. cit. p.69. It is interesting how rapidly H.R. Niebuhr's statement, written in 1924, became untrue: "Although he founded no school, his influence is everywhere evident in German theology and philosophy of religion, and increasing familiarity with his work in England, the U.S. and France promises to be not without effect upon the religious thought of these countries" (Niebuhr, op. cit., p.1).

More recently, Eberhard Lessing has called for a return to the religious *a priori* as a "legitimate theological concept".⁶ After the long exile during the dominance of the dialectical theologies of the mid-century, the time is ripe for a reappraisal of Troeltsch's modification of Kantian idealism as he put it to use in his *Religionsphilosophie*. Indeed a reappraisal of Troeltsch's *Religionsphilosophie*, as summarised in the concept of the religious *a priori*, might even "give promise of liberating modern theology from its former perpetual oscillation between helpless agnosticism and the sheer dogmatism of exclusive supernaturalism".⁷

Assessment of the concept of the religious *a priori* is problematic since it functioned as a polemical term lacking a clear meaning. It was a "very cloudy notion"⁸, or even an "ambiguous catch-phrase".⁹ This unclarity was best expressed by Herrmann:

Whoever wishes to express experience on the one hand, and the Idea or the principle on the other, expresses two conflicting conceptions of religion. Whoever wishes to represent both together achieves a confusing word-play which is today exemplified by the phrase "*a priori* of religion" which Troeltsch proposes.¹⁰

6 Eberhard Lessing, "Die Bedeutung des religiösen Apriori für wissenschaftstheoretische Ueberlegungen innerhalb der Theologie", p.355.

7 D.C. MacIntosh, "Troeltsch's Theory of Religious Knowledge", p.277.

8 Traub, "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori", in Z.Th.K., 24, 1914, pp.181-199, here p.181.

9 Mundle, op. cit., p.428.

10 "Wilhelm Herrmann über Ernst Troeltsch" p.233.

There was little in common between two of its leading exponents, Rudolf Otto and Troeltsch.

Troeltsch was not offering a natural theology: his intentions were far more limited. First and foremost, he was concerned with the rational structure of religious judgements and the way in which this was related to empirical religion. The religious *a priori* explains the logical relationships behind religious judgements, but does not show the rational necessity of religion, nor prove the truth of religious objects or beliefs.¹¹ Troeltsch's guiding motive is thus not "the impulse to know",¹² but merely the desire to clarify and thus purify the phenomenon of religion.

3.22 The concept of the "a priori".

The first task is to look at the nature of the *a priori*, which stands at the centre of Troeltsch's idealist epistemology.¹³ He saw it as the only means for distinguishing between truth and falsehood which did not collapse into total relativism. If experience was to be meaningful there had to be an *a priori* form of judgement to which empirical data were subjected:

11 Cf. *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.60: "We entirely renounce all attempts to prove the truth or necessity of Christianity."

12 Sleight, op.cit., p.66. Sleight over-estimates the capacities of the *a priori*. He saw its function as giving the "purely irrational its fundamental quality of rational necessity" (p.76).

13 Cf. *MS Einführung*, p.41: "Through the gate of the *a priori* we enter that realm which is the homeland of idealism".

By this rationalism alone may the true validity of religion be grounded, and by this alone the uncultivated psychical life may be critically regulated.¹⁴

Kant's primitive philosophical psychology located the seat of these forms of judgement in the understanding, a so-called "faculty" (which in fact had little function other than as a seat for the *a priori* forms of judgement).¹⁵

However, despite the restrictions of his psychology, Kant's point is clear. The *a priori* is concerned with the conditions for the possibility of valid experience and necessarily preceeds experience. Experience is, however, itself necessary to give some content to what is otherwise merely empty form. The *a prioris* are hence "limiting concepts" (Grenzbegriffe) in that they determine the logical form and boundaries of all judgements, but say nothing about the empirical content of these judgements.

It is, however, difficult to state exactly what this notion of a limiting concept guarantees epistemologically: all it shows is that, if there is to be a valid judgement in a certain domain of reality, then it must conform to a certain pattern or form.¹⁶ The *a priori* does not constitute rational knowledge, but is rather, a

14 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.288.

15 Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A69/B94.

16 Cf. MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.51: "All we want to show is whether the religious function of consciousness attains the character of the *a priori*."

valid mode of reflection which issues forth from the nature of consciousness itself.¹⁷

For Kant, the ethical *a priori* stands at the basis of a theory of ethics. Genuine ethical judgements must conform to a certain form. This is made particular clear in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*¹⁸ where Kant specifies the need for the universalisability of ethical judgements. What distinguishes ethical judgements from other forms of judgement concerning human action is this logical form. The *a priori* attains the character of absolute necessity.¹⁹ Kant shows that the canons of utility (Nützlichkeit) so prevalent particularly in the British philosophy of the Enlightenment, could not provide the basis for a genuinely universalisable ethics. Rather than establish an *ethical* system all they gave was a theory of prudential (zweckmässig) action.²⁰ For Troeltsch, as for

17 "Kant" (A1914/15) p.656. This recognition of the limitations of the concept of the *a priori* is already present in Troeltsch's review of Lipsius (A1901/2).

18 ET in *The Moral Law*, (ed.) H.J. Paton.

19 See MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.51. Cf. the section in Kant's *Groundwork* entitled "Heteronomy of the Will as the source of all spurious principles of morality", pp.102ff.

20 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.51. Cf. "Die englischen Moralisten" (A1903/24a), esp. pp.409ff. Here Troeltsch criticises the "calculated self-interest" theories which developed into the full-blown utilitarianism of the nineteenth-century. Any theory of action orientated around the enactment of certain ends which placed these ends within the empirical world (e.g the "greatest happiness principle") failed to carry the absoluteness of the moral law. This view has recently been challenged by R.M. Hare (in *Moral Thinking*) who arrives at the same view of ethics by both *a priori* and utilitarian means.

Kant, the *a priori*s of practical reason had to be purely formal, since they functioned as absolutes which by their nature could never attain complete realisation in history. The religious *a priori* functions in Troeltsch's system as a *goal*, which can never be wholly achieved.

Troeltsch moves on from Kant, however, in seeing the need for a separate religious *a priori* which regulates the logical form of religious judgements.²¹ Religion was a sphere separate from the ethical.²² Just as judgements could be said to be ethical only if they conformed to a certain universalisable form, so judgements could be said to be religious only if they conformed to a certain pattern. Thus on the basis of a modified Kantianism, but in opposition to Kant himself, Troeltsch wishes to establish religion as a self-sufficient area of human spiritual life alongside and independent of ethics.

21 Troeltsch believed Kant had deliberately avoided introducing the notion of a religious *a priori*, as he "saw all the dangers of mysticism lurking in it" (Main Problems (C1905/1) p.287).

22 This question was addressed in "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.371: "Can there be an evaluation of religion, or is the entire process nothing more than a collection of many parallel, different sides?" This was one of the reasons why Troeltsch was so favourably inclined towards James and Schleiermacher. Cf. Mundle, op. cit., p.438.

3.23 The limits of epistemology.

Critical idealism never yields absolute knowledge of things-in-themselves but merely provides borders and coherence to the confused stream of psychological experience.

It criticises all claims to absolute knowledge.²³ Idealist epistemology is not capable of proving the *existence* of the religious object:

If we want a scientific (wissenschaftlich) proof of God, then we are back with theories that Kant destroyed.²⁴

Rather, what Troeltsch aims to show, is that, if life is to be ordered *sub specie aeternitatis*, then certain forms of judgement are necessary. The absolute is not something that can be known in itself, but is something that has to be thought if life is to be pursued under the highest ends. The religious *a priori* helps distinguish

what is nothing more than a vague feeling of supersensual regulations, from real and characteristic religiousness.²⁵

This is, however,

the final achievable foundation in science for establishing the

23 Cf. *Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie* (A1905/7) p.23.

24 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.54. Cf. "Der Deismus" (A1898/20a) p.464f. In discussing Hume's scepticism, Troeltsch suggests he "raised the level of debate" and made a *positive* contribution to *Religionsphilosophie*. No longer could supernaturalism, or a miracle, justify the truth of religion. Cf. MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.55: "For us, miracles are proofs no longer". Cf. p.57: "God is not an object which can be known (erkennen), but an *Idea* which we must think".

25 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.286.

truth content of religion which leads to the means of critical purification and further development of naturally growing psychological religion.²⁶

The religious *a priori* functions like the other *a prioris*: it regulates experience. However, since religious experience involves experience of reality as "*sub specie aeternitatis*",²⁷ the *a priori* can have merely a provisional character, because of the human impossibility of ever grasping this eternal, the absolute, in its fullness. All attempts to reach it must be mere approximations. Consequently the religious *a priori*, unlike Kant's rigorous logical *a prioris* of pure reason which regulate all aspects of scientific judgements, is open-ended:²⁸

A finished system of *a priori* principles [is not given, but rather] is always in growth, and will be obliged unceasingly to correct itself, and to contain open spaces.²⁹

Troeltsch views knowledge, even in the logical sphere, as

26 "Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie" (A1905/7) p.27.

27 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.52.

28 Cf. MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.35: "If, however, we have a 'thing' (Ding) which completely explains consciousness, that means: back to materialism". Cf. Kant's theories of aesthetic judgement, in the *Critique of Judgement*, tr. J.C. Meredith. See esp., para. 17, on the idea of beauty. Beauty (Das Schönen) is a hazy *a priori* idea of reason with an "open" character, yet something which constitutes the basis for aesthetic taste.

29 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.280. Cf. MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.53: "The whole realm of freedom is developing and forming around an ever greater unfolding...there is no ready system of categorical forms. We have only developing forms and approximations...Autonomous reason is not like a pair of parentheses as for Kant, which surrounds everything, but itself only an approximation (Annäherung)."

something always progressing and not hard and fast, forever fixed in the Newtonian mould. It is the continual approximation to the thing-in-itself. Troeltsch thus moves away from Kant's rigid categories:

It is true, the solutions which Kant made which were closely connected with the classical mechanics of the time, with the undeveloped condition of psychology...and with the incompleteness of historical thinking which was only just beginning, have been more than once given up.³⁰

There is likewise an element of provisionality in the religious *a priori*. What the human can say about the absolute reality which the *a priori* regulates can only ever be tentative. It is

only a rational *a priori* of the psychical appearances, but not the replacement of appearances by the truth free from confusion....It is only a reduction which abstracts from empirical reality just as the categories of pure reason do.³¹

In introducing the notion of "openness", Troeltsch was attempting to make Kant's categories

fit life, not to abolish them altogether and put the chaos of reality into their place. If *Religionsphilosophie* is to exist at all - and it is impossible to see how, in view of our distrust of all merely ecclesiastical and enthusiastic affirmations, we are to get on without it - then the abstractions of the transcendental method will have to stay with us. We must simply try to put into them more of the living reality.³²

30 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.278 (amended). This view of Kant's categories accords closely with the view presented by R.G. Collingwood in his *Essay on Metaphysics*. According to Collingwood, Kant's categories had been supplanted by the new physics, their "proper place today [1939] is among the interesting occupants of that 'Anchorage for obsolete vessels' which may be found in the Admiralty Charts of the Isle of Wight" (p.246).

31 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.285. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.15.

32 "Empiricism and Platonism" (A1912/6) p.422.

However, even though the *a priori* is provisional and only ever approximates to the truth, the implications are profound. The religious *a priori* reflects the need for ordering life around an absolute truth, albeit only partially perceived:

We are in the arena of an enormous abstraction. But, that we are able to complete abstractions means we are rescued from the relative.³³

The religious *a priori* provides the form whereby the human being makes itself aware of its finitude before the face of the absolute. It does not claim to be the revelation of the absolute itself, but reflects the human need to order life under absolute ends, to judge *sub specie aeternitatis*. It is this alone which can overcome relativism.

Religionsphilosophie can thus never achieve an absolutely secure and complete knowledge of the truth of religion.³⁴

The *a priori* immanent in our experience is conceived of as provisional, yet at the same time the best we can at present attain.³⁵ Troeltsch reiterates this point in *Christian Thought*:

A truth which in the first instance is a *truth for us*, does not cease because of this to be very truth and life.³⁶

33 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.53.

34 Cf. Günther, op. cit., p.35.

35 Cf. "Logos und Mythos" (A1913/8a) p.823. There is movement towards a yearned-for, yet unobtainable goal. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.139. See below, Chapter 5.22

36 *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.34.

This is as far as the human can ever go:

The proof of (the) subjective necessity (of the *a prioris*) supplies the measure of all of the objective knowledge which they can attain.³⁷

Troeltsch suggests that absolute truth is

not only unknowable by man, but this kind of 'truth' is absolutely impossible because of the vital, changing character of our world...where...there are increasingly new and vital attempts to construe the essential nature of a reality which is ever in process of evolution.³⁸

At this point, philosophy must, as it were, cease with justifications and epistemological security, and move over to faith, a faith in the absolute under which life can be meaningfully ordered, a faith in "the normality and meaningful organisation of our consciousness".³⁹ Troeltsch builds up his theological and philosophical system upon these profound insights into the limits of human knowledge.⁴⁰

37 "Kant" (A1914/15) p.656.

38 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.17f., "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.516.

39 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.156. Cf. MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.58: "The existence of God cannot be proved, but rather the thought (Gedanke) of God is necessarily grounded in the normality of our consciousness". Cf. "Glaube: III" (A1907/22a) col.1443. Cf. E.W. Mayer, "Der gegenwärtige Stand der Religionsphilosophie", pp.41ff.

40 The limitations of knowledge and the futility of asking questions where there can (logically) be no answers demonstrates an affinity between Troeltsch and the later Wittgenstein. Cf. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, sect. 204: "Giving grounds however, justifying the evidence comes to an end". Cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, sect. 108: "The preconceived idea of crystalline unity can only be removed by turning our whole examination round. (One might say: the axis of reference of our examination must be rotated, but about the fixed point of our real need)".

This is, however,

far enough, for in all other areas it is the same. Science can go no further.⁴¹

For Troeltsch, there is no knowledge in any sphere without an axiomatic decision of the will: it is in this act that doubt is overcome.⁴² The final justification for science, as for religion, rests in faith in the meaningfulness of consciousness:

Whoever recognises truth recognises the absoluteness of our consciousness. Without truth we sink into the quagmire (Sand und Sumpf). Here the final decision is practical. This is the decision about the value of our very being.⁴³

The final word of the religious *a priori* rests in the decision to ground the whole of reality in the absolute.⁴⁴ Thus, the modern world with its scientific methods, which had so often been threatening to religion, is shown to *require* religion if it is to be preserved as a unity, or more

41 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.58.

42 There was a certain analogy with ethics. Cf. Mundle, op. cit., p.450: "The conditions, i.e. the *a priori* foundations of [e.g.] ethics are obviously valid whoever recognises the conditioned [in this case, morality - (Sittlichkeit)] and who does not exclude the voice of his ethical consciousness right from the outset". On Troeltsch's concept of decision, see below, Chapter 7.25.

43 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.63. Cf. MS *Einführung*, p.41: a deed is responsible for all knowledge: "Apperception stands against association". Cf. Süsskind, op. cit. p.57. The axiomatic deed was more far reaching in religion than elsewhere, since only religion required a changed lifestyle! (Cf. Mundle, op. cit. p.462).

44 Cf. Schlesinger op. cit. p.63. Cf. Bornhausen, op. cit., p.197. Becker, op. cit., 320, suggests that "the religious *a priori* was nothing other than a cipher for the rational structure of reality".

graphically,

the spear of Odin [the modern spirit] heals the wounds which it had itself inflicted.⁴⁵

Consequently, although Günther's accusation that Troeltsch used religious faith to ground religious faith is correct,⁴⁶ it misses the point. The grounding of life in general through the adoption of a religious view can only ever be in the subjective decision of religious faith. We cannot ever know what it is to perceive reality *sub specie aeternitatis*. Such an unknown character inevitably means an element of risk or of dare.⁴⁷ Religion can only be affirmed by a "deed of the will".⁴⁸

3.24 The religious a priori as the Lebensgrund.

The religious *a priori* thus differs significantly from the *a prioris* of other forms of judgement. It is that under which the whole of reality is unified around an absolute end and is seen as "carrying" the other *a prioris*, in that it gives to them a "firm substantial basis", a *Lebensgrund*.⁴⁹ It thus

45 "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10) p.338. Cf. Drescher, *Glaube und Vernunft*, p.83.

46 Günther, op. cit., p.90.

47 Cf. "Logos und Mythos" (A1913/8a) p.820.

48 "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori" (A1909/31a) p.761

49 "Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft" (A1906/5b) p.494, ET p.116. Cf. Reitsema, op. cit., p.3. Cf. Bornhausen, op. cit., p.194, who suggests Troeltsch's motives are the desire to provide a rational goal of "a unity of spirit against the flowing stream of life".

moves beyond Kant:

In Kant we have vast oceans of the given which we structure. How this material comes to be conceived is insoluble in terms of the theoretical categories (Grundfunktionen).⁵⁰

Rather than providing merely an epistemological basis for religion, the religious a priori grounds the whole of reality. Religion is seen as fundamental to the possibility of meaningful reality. Without a perception of the absolute, everything remains in flux. The final acceptance of religion rests in the sacredness of the consciousness itself, a faith in an unconditional meaning for human life:

When we connect matter and spirit to one another in the theoretical functions, when we unite that which is diffuse, we can only do this because we have experienced this unity in the religious consciousness.⁵¹

Thus

however anti-intellectual the decision is, it is no act of chance (Willkür) or of mere taste, but it introduces the feeling of objective necessity into...all subjectivity.⁵²

The religious a priori is the "tacit immanent presupposition of all value functions".⁵³ It centres around the affirmation of a religious life-world (Lebenswelt), the comprehension of the highest purpose for humanity.⁵⁴

50 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.59.

51 *ibid.* p.60.

52 "Logos und Mythos" (A1913/8a) p.821.

53 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.60. Cf. Walter Köhler, *Ernst Troeltsch*, p.148: the religious a priori is the "simple final fact of the life of the soul".

54 Cf. "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori" (A1909/31a) p.760. Cf. Perkins, *Explicating Christian Faith*, p.107: "Troeltsch maintains that the impulse towards value entails a relationship with God as the source of moral worth".

Consequently it serves more as a grounding of reality through religion. The unified approach to reality becomes essentially a religious viewpoint.⁵⁵ Thus Troeltsch affirms the background to Kantian thought is an energetic theism, and such is also the background to *Religionsphilosophie*.⁵⁶

The religious *a priori* is thus connected ultimately with the purpose of humanity and the possibility of meaningful existence.⁵⁷

The only justification for the adoption of the religious *a priori* was that it guaranteed

a more solid stance towards life (which) avoids the fatal contradiction posed from the stance of radical pessimism and relativism.⁵⁸

Either origin of religion out of the psychological illusion of

55 Cf. Schlesinger, op. cit, p.42. In religion there is a union of subject and object - the recognition of the religious *a priori* is a "thing of faith in the connection of divine and human reason" (p.37). Religion thus becomes that "through which truth is generally possible" (p.43). See below Chapter 8.3.

56 "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori" (A1909/31a) p.764. Cf. Schlesinger, op. cit., p.9: "the religious quality of [Kant's] *a priori* was not given any particular place in the system; rather it concerned the religious foundation of the whole system."

57 Cf "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori" (A1909/31a) p.767.

58 "On the possibility of a liberal Christianity" (C1910/11) p.29. Even Bodenstein recognised that the religious *a priori* was successful at this point: "In spite of everything, the theory of the religious *a priori* is one of the most important achievements in the re-founding of religion and an essential contribution for the overcoming of positivism" (op. cit., p.34).

positivism...or the foundation of religion in an *a priori* of consciousness.⁵⁹

By providing the basis for unity among the competing spheres of life, religion was a means of overcoming an

aestheticising naturalism, a relativism that changes anything into everything and robs every particular of its direct relationship to the absolute, and a pessimism that sublates individual striving and leads to self-transcendence through culture.⁶⁰

In short, the acceptance of the religious *a priori* was nothing short of accepting a power for life in a world of confusion.⁶¹

3.25 The rational and the irrational.

The religious *a priori* points to the inevitable conflict in human knowledge and thought, since in ^{any} finite picture of reality, there is always the remnant of the inconceivable (Unbegreiflichen). Historical religion survives as the effort to realise this inconceivable absolute in the historical world: that is, the attempt to put the inconceivable into concepts.⁶² The effort to understand the

59 Cf. Review of Breysig (A1906/13) p.688

60 "On the possibility of a liberal Christianity" (C1910/11) p.29.

61 Cf. Bornhausen, op. cit., p.205, and Dyson, (in *History in the Philosophy and Theology of Ernst Troeltsch*),^{who} suggest the concept of the religious *a priori* was little more than an existential appeal for the recognition of the primacy of the spirit against all materialism and positivism. Cf. Review of Wlassek (A1917/24) col.468.

62 Cf. Mundle, op. cit., p.470: "through our thought (Denken) we search for the depths of being (Sein) in nature and history; through our will we grasp the elevated heights of the ethical ought (Sollen). Through our imagination (Phantasie) we know ourselves to be carried into a realm where the conflict (Zwiespalt) between *Sein* and *Sollen*, idea and reality,

absolute meaning of reality is always characterised by a conflict founded in the very finitude of the human being:

The two realities, which the critical system must recognise at its very foundation, continue in strife with each other, and this strife, as the strife of divine truth with mere illusion is, for the science of religion, of still more importance.⁶³

Troeltsch thus points out the necessary conflict in the attempt to reach the absolute.⁶⁴ The religious *a priori* is understood as something always in process: what is true must at the same time also be, in part, human error:

The true and rational reality to be attained by thought is always in conjunction with the untrue reality, the psychological, that containing illusion and error.⁶⁵

Troeltsch's motive here is to preserve an anti-monistic view of reality which allows for "personalism".⁶⁶ Hence

is raised up, but this realm is only a dream, an illusion, which cannot last - only through religious faith can we succeed in really solving the conflict." Cf. Schlesinger, op. cit., p.58.

63 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.281. Cf. MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.51.

64 Cf. "Contingency" (A1910/20a) p.89.

65 *ibid.* Cf. Günther op. cit. p.37: "Reality is never completely rational, but is conceived as a battle of the rational against the anti-rational. Against the rational battles the not yet rational and the irrational; the radical meaninglessness and the radical stupidity (Dumme)."

66 "Glaube III. Dogmatisch" (A1910/11), p.27. Cf. "Contingency" (A1910/20a) p.88.

Troeltsch maintains:

Life itself is not shackled by the religious *a priori*, it is merely regulated.⁶⁷

The concept of the personality "plays havoc with every system of thoroughgoing rationalism",⁶⁸ since

in such a case as this, the irrational is recognised by the side of and in the rational.⁶⁹

The new authority of the autonomus individual

meant in fact a powerful, formal change, an increase in the subject and its responsibility, a change of foundation, an intensification of self-consciousness...but it still means adopting a position towards (Stellungnahme) the given...The content given [in the old supernatural authorities] remains for the most part, as before, the point of departure, and the material for thought and for practical formation (Gestaltens)... "Reason" (Vernunft) or thought, is not the creator of the whole of reality...but [it] works upon the given and the factual, upon historical traditions and forces.⁷⁰

Consequently, Troeltsch wrote to Bousset:

I incline towards an anti-rational affirmation of life, which is extremely difficult to unify with the rationalist currents of my thought.⁷¹

67 MS *Religionsphilosophie* p.52. Cf. p.36: "The secret of the ego is not knowledge, but life". See above, Section 3.15.

68 "Contingency" (A1910/20a) p.88.

69 "Main Problems (C1905/1) p.284. "Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie" (A1905/7) p.47.

70 "Autonomie und Rationalismus" (A1907/11) col.207f.

71 Letter to Bousset of 14/12/1909 (G1976/1) p.46. Cf. Lüdemann, "Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule", p.361. The essay "Logos und Mythos" (A1913/8) was written to counter Bousset's claim (in "Kantisch-Friesisch Religionsphilosophie" Th.R. 12, 1909) that he had not carried out "the return to Kant's rational approach with sufficient energy" and that he had "displaced Kant's rationalism with strong historical and psychological elements" (Bousset, p.436). However, Troeltsch contends that a rational religion can never take into account "life" and

Thus in Troeltsch's epistemology there is room for the working of God, as the symbol for the unconditional absolute, on the human spirit. Religious categories like inspiration and revelation can retain a role. Indeed, for Troeltsch,

without the possibility of finding the divine presence in concrete events there is no real religion.⁷²

The religious *a priori* emphasises the dependence and inter-dependence of the personality on the absolute.⁷³

The exact content of the religious *a priori* is difficult to determine, since it is concerned with the absolute which lies beyond the limits of human thought. There can be no firm answers as to how this absolute is to be expressed. This explains why an exact definition was absent in Troeltsch's works.⁷⁴ Either we must content ourselves with the idea (following on from James) of the dark presence of God acting on the individual,⁷⁵ or with the relation of all

creativity. (On this debate, see Paul, op. cit., Chapter Seven). From a Catholic perspective, Emil Spiess (in *Die Religionstheorie Ernst Troeltschs*, esp. p.272) was also critical of Troeltsch's irrationalism and subjectivism. Spiess's massive book contains a good and impartial account of the debate on the religious *a priori* (pp.257ff).

72 "Religionsphilosophie"² (A1904/7a) p.478.

73 See also Ritzert, op. cit., p.56. Ritzert regards this as a "mystical experience" and sees the religious *a priori* as concerned with the connection of the finite person with the absolute substance. See below, Chapter Eight.

74 Cf. Mundle, op. cit. p.446. Cf. Paul, op. cit., p.103: "He never seems to define *a priori* in exactly the same way twice".

75 "Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie", (A1905/7a) p.36.

creatures to the absolute substance.⁷⁶ The religious a priori provided the structure for judging everything in terms of the "eternal worth of the personality"⁷⁷, but as the basis for a religion it lacked "life", and could never be anything other than a vague religious individualism or mysticism.⁷⁸

There are close points of contact with Schleiermacher's notion of the creature's participatory-consciousness in the original ground of all consciousness. Indeed, this seemed to Troeltsch to be

up till today the correct solution, and only to require a working out of Schleiermacher's theory of feeling.⁷⁹

The religious a priori aims to express the fundamental thought of religion as the relation of the human to the godhead, to the absolute, everlasting and eternal, a view of the world "*sub specie aeternitatis*". It thus explained the "gift of grace", the "effect of the supersensuous permeating the natural phenomenal life of the soul".⁸⁰

76 Cf. "Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft" (A1906/5b) p.494, ET p.116; "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori" (A1909/31a) p.764, and "Empiricism and Platonism" (A1912/6) p.418.

77 "Logos und Mythos" (A1913/8a) p.823.

78 See above Section 3.15.

79 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.155.

80 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.285, "Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie" (A1905/7a) p.47.

The actualisation of the *a priori* is the completion of the connection of transcendent reality, the realm of things-in-themselves, to the empirical in terms of "a genuine and not merely postulated, self-completing connection to the divine",⁸¹ felt in "the sense of mystery (which) is the soul of all religion".⁸² Epistemology "cannot be the last word" in *Religionsphilosophie*, but rather an "actualisation was needed in the individual and in real religion".⁸³ Beyond epistemology is metaphysics and religion, where this union of the transcendent with the empirical, the absolute with the relative, takes place. It was Kant who clearly pointed to the character of the human being, as something which creates its reality in thought, but which alone can never get beyond this to the knowledge of things-in-themselves.⁸⁴ To move to this knowledge is a matter of speculation and of faith.

81 "Religionsphilosophie"² (A1904/7a) p.478.

82 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.132.

83 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p155f. The religious a priori is actualised in specific experiences. Cf. Günther, op. cit., p.43, sees these as "conversion, prayer and contemplation, and enthusiasm (Schwärmerei), vision and ecstasy in the excitation of pious feeling".

84 Cf. Niebuhr, op. cit., p.269: "In our logical labour we approach the Divine Life and the Divine Ideas, but we only approach and at every step beyond our limits we fall into contradiction and antinomies".

3.26 A psychological a priori: Rudolf Otto's alternative.

A sophisticated criticism of Troeltsch's position was made by Rudolf Otto. He undertook a similar task to Troeltsch himself, aiming to establish a substantial unity grounding life but one which did not have to resort to metaphysics. However, according to Troeltsch, this turned out to be nothing more than a psychological rationalism lacking critical regulation, failing to grasp the necessary finitude of the human perception of the absolute.

According to Otto's theory, Troeltsch placed

the emphasis on knowledge (the Erkenntnismoment) too strongly in the foreground, and at the same time overlooked the individuality of religion, that is, as an experience of the numinous.⁸⁵

Otto emphasises experience, and he bases the *a priori* in the psychological apprehension of religion. Religion is epistemologically founded upon the feeling of the certainty of the unity and necessity of things. This *a priori* moves beyond Kant's, who saw it as a limiting concept, and becomes instead something of real worth, that is, something involving an "immediate dark feeling".⁸⁶

Otto maintained the essential unity of the world as it was mediated to humans by instinctive (gefühlsmässig) insight.⁸⁷

85 Lessing, op. cit., p.355. On Otto, see esp., Ansgar Paus, *Religiöser Erkenntnisgrund: Herkunft und Wesen der Aprioritheorie Rudolf Ottos*, esp. pp.61-75.

86 Cf. Bornhausen, op. cit., p.98.

87 Cf. *ibid.* p.99.

The synthetic unity which Kant placed in the sphere of the transcendental ego was seen by Otto as taking place in real time, and was not merely an empty form, but was guaranteed by a feeling of truth. In this manner the speculative ideas of absolute being, of the soul and of freedom were "divined" as real. The religious *a priori* was "the same *a priori*, with which we guarantee the reality of a tree, of a headache, of certainty and of God".⁸⁸ Hence in Otto's philosophy there were no special presuppositions for *Religionsphilosophie*, and no need for the primacy of practical reason. The perception of the religious object was of the same type as the perception of any other object.

Otto held with J.F. Fries that Kant's error had been the fallacious inference from the apriority of knowledge to the ideality of the known, the object of that knowledge.⁸⁹

For Fries the noumenal was just as real and was something guaranteed through the faculty of *Ahn[d]ung*, that is of presentiment, or reason's self-reliance, a disinterested claim to the experience of beauty which assures the human that the world of appearances and the world of things-in-themselves are not two worlds, but one world. Otto made his theory of religious perception clear in his discussion of Fries' book, *Wissen, Glaube und Ahndung*:⁹⁰

88 *ibid.* p.201.

89 Otto, *Kantisch-Fries'sche Religionsphilosophie*, tr. E.B. Dicker, p.19.

90 J.F. Fries, *Wissen, Glaube und Ahndung*, Jena, 1805.

Every religious man will concede, even if my terminology is not quite to his taste, the truth of this statement: the feeling on which his faith is really based is the instinctive sensation of the eternal in the infinite.⁹¹

Later, Otto re-affirmed this point:

The fact that we really *know* something in our sense-perceptions, i.e. that we conceive an object which really exists and conceive it according to its being, is solely based on Reason's natural self-confidence that it is capable of truth and knowledge, a confidence that no scepticism can really shake.⁹²

Whoever was firmly convinced by the feeling of truth, could have access to the "pure science of nature", even before being able to justify the findings.⁹³

Otto indeed found a latent Platonism in Kant, the philosopher who, above all, restored the meaning of "Idea" in its fullness. The Idea was

something which absolutely transcends all experience, which moreover, cannot be applied to experience but is rather revealed in the immediate knowledge of Reason itself.⁹⁴

Hence, as in a glass darkly, the human could cognise the universal essence of things-in-themselves through its own (special) perceptive faculties:

91 *Kantisch-Fries'sche Religionsphilosophie*, ET, p.32.

92 *ibid.*, p.53.

93 *ibid.*, p.59.

94 *ibid.*, p.66.

He who sees a landscape through a mist does not cognise an utter nothing; he is not dreaming...he cognises the landscape itself, and his knowledge is valid, but valid with limitations.⁹⁵

These pure ideas were, as it were, "schematised" in the "profoundest and most emotionally effective types of poetry, mythology and eschatology".⁹⁶

The book *Das Heilige* (E.T., *The Idea of the Holy*) tries to analyse the exact nature of the immediate feeling which cognises the religious object. Otto emphasises the wholly other, "numinous" character of religious experience. Over and again he talks of symbols and gestures which relate the meaning of religion more clearly than words could ever do.⁹⁷

Such a feeling has analogues in the world of art. For example, "the tower of the cathedral of Ulm is emphatically not *magical*, it is numinous".⁹⁸ He goes on:

Not even music, which else can give manifold expression to all the feelings of the mind, has any positive way to express "the Holy". Even the most consummate Mass-music can only give utterance to the holiest...by sinking into stillness.⁹⁹

95 *ibid.*, p.67.

96 *ibid.* p.82.

97 Cf. Otto, *Das Heilige*, tr. J.W. Harvey, p.53.

98 *ibid.* p.83.

99 *ibid.* p.85.

The numinous is thus something inexpressible and can only be grasped as

an immediate, underivable judgment of pure recognition, and it follows a premise that defies exposition and springs directly from an irreducible feeling of the truth.¹⁰⁰

Whether Otto is talking of merely the recognition of "The Holy" as an *a priori* category (as in *Das Heilige*), or of a more general feeling of the security of all *a priori* categories (as in *Kantisch-Fries'sche Religionsphilosophie*), his theory identifies, albeit mysteriously, the numinous, the thing-in-itself, with the natural character of objects, and not as lying beyond human capacities of perception. Reality is conceived of as a unity in which the doublesidedness of thought and existence, which in Troeltsch are interactive, become united.

3.27 The need for metaphysics: Troeltsch's critique of Otto.

Troeltsch reviewed *Das Heilige* at length,¹⁰¹ seeing Otto's concerns as similar to his own. For them both, *Religionsphilosophie* emerged from a more general philosophical theory.¹⁰² Troeltsch saw Otto's mistake in

100 *ibid.* p.187.

101 "Zur Religionsphilosophie" (A1918/21). Cf. Apfelbacher, *op. cit.*, p.64, for an assessment of the importance of this essay for Troeltsch interpretation.

102 Cf. "Zur Religionsphilosophie" (A1918/21) p.66.

his adoption of an inadequate philosophical system, which affirmed the belief that "strong norms" could be obtained from experience alone. According to Troeltsch, Otto's theory did not derive from Kant, but rather "leads back to Hume":

The pure psychological and anthropological has little or nothing to do with the Kantian doctrine of critical apriority, that is, an inner necessity and validity.¹⁰³

This was an understandable temptation because it meant the "labyrinth of metaphysics" could be avoided.

Otto gave scarcely any information about the contradictory nature of the religious object, as a blend of the rational and irrational, but rather looked at the realisation of the noumenal in terms of a "harmonious unfolding".¹⁰⁴ Hence Troeltsch charged Otto of rationalism:

It is easy to recognise - even though the content may have changed a great deal - the formal elevation of the *Religionsphilosophie* and theology of rationalism.¹⁰⁵

Otto's philosophy is the

atheoretical rationalism of anti-metaphysical yet still rational (vernunftmässigen) *Religionsphilosophie*.¹⁰⁶

By asserting this harmony and unity, Otto avoided the true character of *Religionsphilosophie* which was characterised by

103 *ibid.* p.70

104 *ibid.* p.73.

105 *ibid.* p.74.

106 *ibid.* p.70

conflict and compromise in its unfolding of the dualism of human life.

Troeltsch's point in introducing the idea of the religious *a priori* is to show the limits of epistemology. He makes no attempt to introduce a special faculty of divination, which is nothing other than a special religious means of knowing. For Troeltsch, no amount of religious experience can guarantee the truth of what is experienced. No amount of intellectual searching will ever be able to prove the thing-in-itself.¹⁰⁷

There is, however, a point of contact between Troeltsch and Otto.¹⁰⁸ In Otto, according to Troeltsch, Fries' theory of the religious predisposition is modified under the old mystical theory of "spirit" (Geist), and of "Divine Spark" (Gottesfunken):

In this way, Otto confirms my thesis that modern *Religionsphilosophie* and theology stand much closer in their scientific thought to spirituality than to objective theology, to the Word and Authority of Luther or the natural religion of the Enlightenment.¹⁰⁹

Troeltsch objects to Otto's conclusions in so far as they rest upon Fries' presuppositions but he regards Otto's superstructure (Ueberbau) as impressive, but as something requiring a more acceptable philosophical basis.¹¹⁰ For

107 Cf. "Logos und Mythos" (A1913/8a) p.823.

108 Cf. Niebuhr (op. cit., p.174) who also sees a similarity with Windelband, even though he allowed no separate sphere for the Holy.

109 "Zur Religionsphilosophie" (A1918/21) p.75.

110 Bornhausen draws out the connection between Troeltsch and Otto. Both were concerned with an underlying unity, yet Otto's theory could never succeed since it derived *a prioris* from the very experience they were to organise. "It could appear that Otto had created the unity of

Troeltsch, the feeling of dependence, and the experience of the noumenal, are not primary, but can only be understood in terms of critical philosophy.¹¹¹

3.28 The charge of rationalism.

Most of Troeltsch's critics lacked Otto's sophistication, yet for them as well, the provisional character of Troeltsch's notion of religious truth could obviously never satisfy their continual demands for complete certainty and secure knowledge of the absolute.¹¹² The dispute revolved around the status which could be accorded to the truths proclaimed by faith. In what sense could they be said to be known?¹¹³

the *a priori* that Troeltsch had passed over. Much more has Otto destroyed religion through purely psychological foundations" (op. cit. p.201).

111 Cf. Bornhausen, op. cit. p.201. Cf. Garrett Paul, op. cit. p.114, who criticises Troeltsch's *a priori* for its purely formal content: "There is a fundamental inconsistency, if not a contradiction, in Troeltsch's concept of the religious *a priori* and its function in a philosophy of religion". For Troeltsch, however, the religious *a priori* had to be formal, yet it also had to be in a necessary connection with the material: the rational had to be schematised. Paul's criticism derives from Nygren's insistence on a material *a priori* which stands in direct relationship to Otto. Cf. Nygren, *Die Gültigkeit der religiösen Erfahrung*, pp.31-32: "When [Troeltsch] allows himself to be guided by epistemological concerns, he holds fast to the formal character of the *a priori* in connection with Kant. When, on the other hand, he wishes to use it as a criterion of value, it must be conceived of as material (inhaltlich). Between these two possibilities Troeltsch has not been able to decide".

112 Cf. K. Oesterreich, *Die religiöse Erfahrung als philosophisches Problem*: "the religious man always understands exactly the same truth in religion which he ascribes to knowledge elsewhere" (p.34).

113 Cf. Traub, op. cit. p.183. Similar criticisms of Troeltsch from the

Those critics who relied on a special religious epistemology which guaranteed knowledge assumed that Troeltsch's epistemology arrived at secure rational knowledge and thus destroyed the need for religious faith.¹¹⁴

Troeltsch was highly critical of these charges of rationalism. For instance, he wrote the essay "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori",¹¹⁵ to defend the irrational content of his theory of religion in response to Paul Spiess's charge that he had rationalised religion.¹¹⁶ For Troeltsch,

point of view of a self-authenticating faith have been made more recently by Bodenstein (e.g. p.61) and Reist. Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.33 for Troeltsch's critique of Ihmels' *Heilsgewissheit*. This is discussed in Paul, op. cit., pp.191ff.

114 Eg. Dunkmann, *Religionsphilosophie*, p.13, and Ritzert, op. cit., p.69. There was no room in Troeltsch's theory for a "living religion" or a religiously founded idea of God. Cf. Bodenstein, op. cit., p.31: Troeltsch "anchored religion, or, what is the same, the idea of God, in reason, and thereby created a basis upon which to place the thought world of Christian faith". This meant a "scientific proof for the truth of the idea of God, but not for the reality of God". Wobbermin also accuses Troeltsch of a rationalism: "The decision of the religious value-judgement in the question of faith cannot be translated into rational universality or be replaced by such" (*Aufgabe und Bedeutung der Religionspsychologie*, p.7f). Cf. Pannenberg, "Toward a theology of the history of religions", p.100 n.47: "If religious experience were grounded in an a priori capacity of the human spirit, then it [i.e. religious experience] would be the creature of this capacity".

115 (A1909/31a). Cf. Paul Spiess, "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori", p.21.

116 Spiess had turned to Herrmann to achieve the criterion which made religion scientifically valid. Psychology, or "inner experience" was charged with the task of providing such a criterion, a task, according to Troeltsch, it could never fulfil. Cf. Review of Schaefer (A1918/2) col.11: "inner experience" was the "Pandora's box of modern theology".

however, the question was not *either* the "a priori law of reason, or the living God of religion",¹¹⁷ but rather a *combination* of the two.¹¹⁸

Troeltsch's opponents virtually all failed to understand the role he had established for the *a priori* in his *Religionsphilosophie*, and resorted to an either/or, thus failing to grasp the importance of a synthesis between rational and irrational in Troeltsch's thought.¹¹⁹ This is clear from the debate between Süskind, a pupil of Troeltsch, and Traub. Traub criticises Süskind's exposition of faith (*Pistis*) as something with no possible truth-content. According to Traub, Süskind's (and Troeltsch's) error was "to deny the religious means of foundation which we are looking for, and replacing this with a rational proof."¹²⁰ Where the religious conviction was denied, no theology was

Cf. Review of Metzger (A1913/24) col.502: "Subjective feelings of satisfaction have nothing to do with the proof of absolute validity".

117 Jelke, op. cit., p.48. Troeltsch is particularly scathing of Jelke's exposition of his views. See his review (A1921/20), col.270.

118 Cf. Süskind, op. cit., p.53.

119 This was present from the very beginnings of Troeltsch's output. In "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2), p.378, he criticises the neo-Hegelians who sought to rationalise religion and so rob it of its definitiveness and "living fullness".

120 Traub, op. cit. p.185. A similar criticism was made by Jelke (op.cit. p.54): Certainty was possible in religion by a "special means of knowing...In short the experience of certainty is a subjective certainty which nevertheless has the character of objective necessity, and this alone can achieve objective necessity." Cf. Ritzert, op. cit. p.66, who was also convinced of the certainty of religious intuitions.

possible.¹²¹

According to Traub, Süskind had made the error of separating faith and knowledge. Knowledge was solely a matter for the intellect.¹²² Süskind was thus open to the charge that the measure of knowledge was the measure of faith.¹²³ If the religious *a priori* represented a *proof* or a knowledge of God by showing the rational necessity of religion, as Traub maintained, then this would destroy the "essence of piety".¹²⁴ Traub's conclusions could have been echoed by many others:

We deny an intellectual, rational *a priori* based on compelling grounds. It contradicts the essence of religion which is always irrational.¹²⁵

For Traub, a religion founded on the *a priori* was something in direct contradiction to one founded upon religious experience. Since, on Troeltsch's view, certainty could not be guaranteed by experience, Traub leapt to the conclusion that Troeltsch viewed it as purely fleeting and capable of no truth-meaning (*Wahrheitsbedeutung*) in itself.

121 Traub, op. cit., p.186. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) sect. 3.8, p.45: "The epistemological value of faith is denied by rationalism."

122 Traub, op. cit., p.187. Thus he asks (p.185): "What happens to theology if scientific analysis of religion yields a negative result?"

123 Cf. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, sect.3.

124 Traub, op. cit., p.196.

125 *ibid.* p.196.

What Traub seems to assume is that, if religion has a "rational" content, that is, if it is structured according to certain forms of judgement, then the "irrational" practice and experience of religion must be relegated to second place.

However, Traub misrepresents Troeltsch's purposes in the religious a priori. Experience plays a vital role in Troeltsch's *Religionsphilosophie*.¹²⁶ Indeed the concept of the religious a priori leads directly to the philosophy of history.

3.29 The move to a philosophy of history: the religious a priori as the goal of history.

Troeltsch was firmly convinced that the religious a priori had to be related to experience and to the concrete historical structures of religion. The religious conviction

must always stand in connection with the great historical powers of religious history and community, and through this connection attain the necessary depths and strengths and necessary organisatory social effects.¹²⁷

Troeltsch urges over and over again that,

the a priori alone, even when it is the "religious a priori", can give no religious knowledge but only empty concepts. For religious knowledge the religious a priori must have the material furnished through religious sensibility or intuition.¹²⁸

126 See above, Sections 3.15 and 2.25, and below, Chapters 4 and 5.

127 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.131. Cf. Review of Cohen (A1915/12) col.385. Cf. Troeltsch's criticism of Eucken (A1902/7) col.386: "The concept of the universal religion itself is only primarily abstracted from the basis of the religious reality present in primitive religion." Cf. Review of Holtzmann (A1904/1) p.88.

128 "Religionsphilosophie"² (A1904/7a) p.475f. Cf. D.C. MacIntosh, op. cit. p.279.

The religious *a priori* was concerned with the "rationalisation" and "purification" of real religion, but not with its replacement. Thus Troeltsch did not set up a "religion within the limits of reason alone",¹²⁹ but rather,

the religious *a priori* should only serve in order to establish the essential in the empirical appearance, but without stripping off the appearance altogether, and from this point of the essential, to correct the intricacies and the narrowness, the errors and false combinations of the psychical situation.¹³⁰

We can never grasp the timeless in an abstract manner, for life is nowhere abstract. There is no idea of a religion which could be conceived without the historical, but there again, there is nothing historical which is purely historical. Bound up with a divine unified life is the exaltation of the suprahistorical with the historical...The pursuit of the pure idea, this rationalistic Ideal, is nonsense.¹³¹

The final realisation of the religious *a priori* could never be accomplished by humans imprisoned as they were in their own finitude. All their efforts at progress had to include an element of error, a false perception of the absolute. It thus functions as a teleological concept, as the highest end around which human action is oriented. The final question confronting Troeltsch is thus, How is religion

129 Contra D.C. MacIntosh, op. cit., p.281 who suggested Troeltsch was concerned with "actual empirical religion, historical - more or less mystical religion - reduced by criticism to a thoroughly rational form." For Troeltsch there could be no such "thoroughly rational" form of religion.

130 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.286. See below Chapter 7.23.

131 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.93.

to develop if it is to move ever closer to the realisation of the *a priori*?¹³²

The present was merely a stage of development *towards* the religious *a priori*, even though it might seem the highest possible. A *Religionsphilosophie* thus moves to a philosophy of the history of religions in searching for the criterion for the assessment of historical religions.¹³³ This led to the question of how the religious *a priori*, as the "assertion of a valid final goal" for all religion, was to be realised in concrete historical religions.¹³⁴ The religious *a priori* thus functions as a

criterion of validity which can do justice to the varying degrees of validity of various forms of religion.¹³⁵

The concept of the religious *a priori* is thus vitally related to the question of the absoluteness of Christianity, to a *Geschichtsphilosophie der Religion*, which is the subject of the next two Chapters.

132 This move from the religious *a priori* as the final *Urphänomen* of religion to a philosophy of *Religionsgeschichte* was first made explicitly in the essay "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.339f.

133 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.143.

134 "Logos und Mythos" (A1913/8a) p.831. Cf. Sleight, *op. cit.*, p.79: "the religious *a priori* is only brought gradually to light by individual appropriations of, and approximations to, the ultimate impulse and goal of history in commerce with religious experience in historical evolution".

135 "Wesen der Religion und Religionswissenschaft" (A1906/5b) p.495, ET p.116.

Chapter Four: Troeltsch's "Religionsphilosophie". Part Three:

The philosophy of the history of religions (I).

4.1 Introduction: >Die Philosophie der Religionsgeschichte<.¹

The following two Chapters discuss the third element which Troeltsch outlines in his programmatic sketch for a *Religionsphilosophie*.² In the essay "Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft", Troeltsch delineates this as the *Geschichtsphilosophie der Religion*.³ A similar formulation is given in the essay, "Religionsphilosophie":

We need a philosophy of the history of religions (Philosophie der Religionsgeschichte) which presupposes a real history of religions, but is not exhausted by it.⁴

1 On this subject, see esp., Garrett E. Paul, op. cit., Ch.4; H.R. Niebuhr, op. cit., passim; Bodenstein, op. cit., esp. pp.17ff.; Ogletree, *Christian Faith and History*, Ch.2; Becker, op. cit., esp. pp.120ff.; Apfelbacher, op. cit., Ch. 5.C; Wyman, *The Concept of Glaubenslehre*, pp.36ff.

2 See above, Chapter 3.11.

3 "Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft" (A1906/5b) p.495, ET p.117. Cf. MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.16. This term lacks a direct English equivalent. The translation offered by Michael Pye is "the philosophical history of religion" which is too Hegelian for Troeltsch's purposes. Better would be something like "philosophy of history in the realm of religion", as this sections aims to make clear.

4 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.143. The relationship between a *Philosophie der Religionsgeschichte* and a *Geschichtsphilosophie der Religion* will be discussed below, Chapter 5.22.

This element of Troeltsch's *Religionsphilosophie* was present from the very outset of his career, the first use of the term, "Philosophie der Religionsgeschichte", being in the essay, "Die christliche Weltanschauung und ihre Gegenströmungen",⁵ and it continues to form the leading theme of Troeltsch's works up to *Die Absolutheit des Christentums und die Religionsgeschichte*.⁶ However, he never lost interest in the evaluation and appraisal of religious history: his later works are built upon the basis of conclusions reached in the earlier works. This is most clear in his monumental *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* which sees the very analysis of history itself as a religious task.⁷

5 (A1894/1a) p.301.

6 (A1901/23), ET: *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religion*. Hereafter cited as *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d). References are to the English translation of the third edition (almost identical to the second). There are many alterations between the first and second editions, particularly in reference to the significance of the person of Jesus. It is because of apparent Ritschlian remnants in Troeltsch's Christology, even in the second edition, that Sarah Coakley (in *Christ Without Absolutes*) regards *The Absoluteness* as something of an aberration in his "mature Christology" (See esp. Chapter Two). Yasukata (in *Ernst Troeltsch. Systematic Theologian of Radical Historicity*) also points out the distinctions between the different editions of Troeltsch's works.

7 See below, Chapter 6.24. Bodenstein saw Troeltsch's philosophy of *Religionsgeschichte* as a mere step on his development to the adoption of a religion of humanity, which was part of the "universal tragedy of German theology in that era" (op. cit. p.17). Yasukata (op. cit. p.1), however, points to an overriding continuity between the various stages of Troeltsch's career.

Troeltsch sets about the philosophical appraisal and evaluation of the concrete phenomenon of religion over its historical development. As was shown in the previous chapter, religion could never be assessed independent of the concrete phenomenon. There was no rational religion open to scientific investigation *apart from* its appearance in the actual forms of religious history:

The truth-content of religion must be assessed in its historical movement and peculiarity.⁸

Even those who refused to countenance a philosophical appraisal of the phenomenon of religion in fact tended to identify particular manifestations of religion with absolute religion. Consequently Troeltsch maintained that

behind all theological systems is a philosophy of history, or rather a philosophy of *Religionsgeschichte*, which makes either concealed or manifest use of the modern concept of development.⁹

Troeltsch thus addressed the question, how are higher and lower religions to be distinguished from one another?

One speaks of 'higher' and 'lower' stages. But how do we arrive at and measure this value difference (Wertunterschied)?¹⁰

The concept of development (Entwicklung) played a leading role in this aspect of his *Religionsphilosophie*¹¹ and

8 "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1895/2) p.370.

9 "Die christliche Weltanschauung und ihre Gegenströmungen" (A1894/1a) p.301.

10 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.143.

11 Cf. Review of Günther (A1916/22) col.448.

continued to be an abiding concern of Troeltsch's throughout his career.¹² His aim was to arrive at the law of historical development for the phenomenon of religion whereby the "level of ascent from the lower to the higher can be known".¹³ Rather than remaining satisfied with the traditional theological answers to this question, Troeltsch attempted to establish criteria for the assessment of the truth content of religion consistent with a thoroughgoing critical historical method. It was this that he saw as essentially the new problem confronting theology: *It was*

Only in recent times that it has been necessary to secure the abiding and true in human life against the apparently unbroken stream of happening using a philosophy of history.¹⁴

Indeed the modern era which had seen the collapse of the all-embracing world-views of the Middle Ages, and which required a re-establishment of a dominant value-system if an equivalent unity was to be achieved, became "the era of the philosophy of history".¹⁵

A philosophy of the history of religions thus

aims to establish the levels of development within history using the historical method, and presupposes a fundamental analysis of the religious consciousness under the viewpoint of the

12 Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) Chapter Three.

13 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.16.

14 "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.300.

15 *ibid.*

normative.¹⁶

Concrete historical religion is placed in contact with the normative, with that which ought to be, with the *goal* of development. In this manner

the investigation moves here into the fundamental questions of the philosophy of history, which has to decide about the nature and meaning of the concept of development...The specific problem arising here for the science of religion is then the question about the goal of religious development.¹⁷

This leads naturally to the question addressed in the fourth and fifth chapters of *The Absoluteness*:

Does the historical way of thinking include the positive acknowledgement of Christianity as the highest realm of religious life and thought that has validity for us?¹⁸

This aspect of his *Religionsphilosophie* led Troeltsch to two systematic problems, answers to which formed the major theme of the early period of his career. The first was the attempt to draw out the systematic implications of the historical method in relation to the traditional claims of theology, and might be summarised as the attack on dogmatic theology, and the second was the task of drawing out the consequences of this method for systematic theology.¹⁹ The

16 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.143.

17 "Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft" (A1906/5b) p.49, ET p.117.

18 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.107. Cf. Review of Th. Kaftan (A1912/8) col.727.

19 See below, Chapter 7.11, where it is argued that Troeltsch moved beyond the other members of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* in drawing out the consequences of the historical method for a systematic theology.

following two Chapters discuss the first of these problems. Chapter Four assesses the general background to the problem of the relationship between religion and the rest of reality, between theology and science, in the context of the prevailing Ritschlianism of the theological faculties. It is argued that there are greater continuities between Troeltsch and Ritschl than has usually been supposed. Troeltsch's real object of attack was the Ritschlians with their attempts at a philosophical and theological isolation of Christianity from its historical nexus. Much of Troeltsch's early work in particular took the form of polemical attacks on the Ritschlians.

Chapter Five looks more closely at the historical method as developed by Troeltsch in relation to the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. It is argued that Troeltsch develops the most systematic account of the historical method in theology which leads him beyond a *Philosophie der Religionsgeschichte* to *Geschichtsphilosophie der Religion* and ultimately to *Geschichtsphilosophie* in general. Again, this move takes place under the onslaught of the dominant Ritschlianism of the time. Their attacks led Troeltsch to formulate the historical method in an ever more consistent fashion. This theme of the "formal logic of history" runs right through Troeltsch's career, even after he had left the specific discussions of *Religionsgeschichte* for the discussion of history in general. The systematisation of what it is to understand the past meaningfully, which is the subject of *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, is, in effect, an extension of Troeltsch's earliest concerns.²⁰

²⁰ See below, Chapter 6.11.

For Troeltsch, however, the exposition of the historical method is only the *beginning* of a philosophy of *Religionsgeschichte*, which always leads beyond the merely formal to the problem of establishing a synthesis or a balance between the material and the formal. For Troeltsch, values can have no relevance until they gain contact with historical reality. Formal values must always be given a material content. To understand the present as the arena for meaningful human action, to instil it with normative values, requires moving beyond the formal confines of the historical method which sees everything as relative. Troeltsch's task leads him to the problem of seeing what *is* (the relative) in terms of that which *ought to be* (the absolute). The philosophy of *Religionsgeschichte* leads naturally to a *Geschichtsphilosophie*, but a *Geschichtsphilosophie* construed as ethics, as something with prescriptive rather than merely descriptive implications. The need for religion to be amenable to both scientific and historical criticism is the first stage on the development of Troeltsch's new ethical synthesis. If there can be no contact, then religion is bound to lose its power and vitality.

The philosophy of *Religionsgeschichte* thus occupies a crucial role in Troeltsch's work, since he uses his analysis of the historical method as the basis for his constructive theology, which he sees as the attempt to arrive at a new all-embracing synthesis (a "universal context") which takes into account the realities of the modern world. This is clearly stated in the Foreword to *Die Soziallehren*:

All this research, however, was only intended to serve the purpose of solving the systematic problem, in order to think through and formulate the world of Christian thought and life in frank relation

to the modern world.²¹

Troeltsch summarises the importance of the *Philosophie der Religionsgeschichte* in a programmatic essay written as a review of Günther, one of his contemporary critics.²² Here he states that the real purpose of the philosophy of *Religionsgeschichte* was to provide the context in which any constructive theological effort was to be undertaken. Troeltsch suggests that traditionally there had been three solutions to the problems posed by history to religious truth: first, it had been guaranteed by revelation, second, through reason, and third, it was not recognised at all. With his epistemology and *Geschichtsphilosophie* of religion, Troeltsch had attacked the idea of both a rational and a dogmatically revealed religion. Scepticism, as the third solution presented nothing other than "spiritual suicide." Consequently a fourth option was required if religious truth were to survive:

There is then nothing left but to work from the concretely given, to ask how an increased and ever-expanding knowledge of the religious world allows us to assert the fundamental trends (Grundzüge) of our religious world, and to ask how far these fundamental trends are theoretically and practically related to the modern world. This is not the question of an absolute logical truth, but rather the question as to the possibility of maintaining the root (Grundstock) of western religion, and the possibility of a further development out of this root, to tackle the problems of the current situation.²³

21 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2), p.vii, ET p.19.

22 (A1916/22).

23 Review of Günther (A1916/22) col.450.

On the basis of his philosophical and historical analysis of reality, Troeltsch sets about attempting this "further development" of religion in frank interaction with the forces of the modern world. It is this interaction alone that will overcome the impasse of the Enlightenment.

4.2 The attack on isolationist theology.

4.21 The rejection of Ritschl?¹

The ideas which led Troeltsch to develop a *Philosophie der Religionsgeschichte* took their shape in the context of the dominant Ritschlian theology. The application of historical causality to the hitherto impervious phenomenon of religion marked a rejection of the prevalent method of liberal theology. What will be argued in this chapter is that the real object of Troeltsch's attack was the Ritschlians, rather than Ritschl himself, since, for Troeltsch, Ritschl's theology was essentially the last bastion of the attempt to revitalise the Lutheran conception of an over-riding unified interpenetration of Christianity with the world. It was only with his successors that there was any real attempt to isolate theology from the rest of reality in the value-judgement of faith. Ritschl, albeit in a hidden form, had retained something akin to the Hegelian universal.²

1 On the relationship between Troeltsch and Ritschl, see Bodenstein, op. cit., Chapter 3; Coakley, op. cit., Chapter Two; Yasukata, op. cit., Chapter One.

2 Cf. Herrmann Timm, *Theorie und Praxis in der Theologie Albrecht Ritschls und Wilhelm Herrmanns. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Kulturprotestantismus*, p.24, p.58. Timm views Ritschl's mature theology as derivative of his earlier work which was written under the influence of Baur. Although he was vehement in his attacks on metaphysics, Ritschl retained a conception of the universal, and did not collapse into the neo-Kantian positivism of Herrmann. Indeed Troeltsch shared a common theme with Ritschl precisely in his attack on the prevailing materialism of popular philosophy (p.99). Ritschl retained a belief in the ultimate possibility of reconciliation between the world and the Kingdom of God: worldly purposes could fulfil a divine vocation.

Although Troeltsch was in part reacting against him, Ritschl was still the dominant figure in German theology and provided the background and context for Troeltsch's work. Indeed, it was his "powerful personality" which drew Troeltsch and Bousset to Göttingen³ and led them deeply into the study of the New Testament and of the Reformation.⁴ Troeltsch's early writings naturally reflect something of the same concerns as Ritschl's, since they were written in the context of the theological disputes between the orthodox Lutherans and those under the influence of Ritschl.⁵

It was only with Herrmann that Lutheran social-ethics became identified with the personality which was indifferent to all worldly purposes (p.115.). This point was also clearly recognised by Wendland, (*Albrecht Ritschl und seine Schüler im Verhältnis zur Theologie, zur Philosophie und zur Frömmigkeit unserer Zeit*, p.29): "The Ritschlian theology took part in the dissolution of the unified culture into divergent individual strands (Einzelbestrebungen)".

3 Cf. "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.52n. The influence of Ritschl in Göttingen has recently been reassessed by Jörg Baur in "Albrecht Ritschl: Herrschaft und Versöhnung", in *Theologie in Göttingen*, (ed.) Bernd Moeller, pp.256-270. Cf. Gerd Lüdemann, "Die Religionsgeschichtliche Schule", in the same volume, esp. p.330.

4 Cf. Otto Ritschl, *Albrecht Ritschls Leben*, vol. ii, p.260: "It was not Ritschl's labours in Biblical theology by which he exercised an influence on a wider circle. Rather he won over his pupils to his view of Christianity by the influence of his systematic theology". Troeltsch and Bousset were led to their studies of the Reformation and of the Bible precisely because of Ritschl's inadequacies as a biblical and Reformation scholar. David Lotz, however, (in *Ritschl and Luther*) has recently reasserted the importance of Ritschl as Reformation scholar.

5 Cf. the debate between Frank of Erlangen, Luthardt of Leipzig and Ritschl which led to the latter's clearest statement of his philosophical system, *Theologie und Metaphysik*. Cf. Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. II, p.3, and the note by Hefner, in Albrecht Ritschl, *Three Essays*, p.149.

Troeltsch remarks that, at one point, he even shared the *Anspruchstheologie* of the Ritschlians where religion is verified by the claims to revelation and not by what lies behind the revelation.⁶ However, although he may have shared this aspect of Ritschl's theology at the beginning of his career, it is evident that much else was rejected. Certainly, by the time he wrote *The Absoluteness* he had "eliminated the alleged analogies and parallels".⁷ Although Troeltsch was critical of the orthodox Lutherans,⁸ his real opponents were the Ritschlians.

Troeltsch's antagonism towards Ritschl himself stemmed from Ritschl's attempt at a synthesis, or a balance between the world and the Kingdom of God (which owed more to Luther than to any form of Kantianism).⁹ This is particularly clear in *Die Soziallehren* where Troeltsch argues against Ritschl's portrayal of Luther as directly applicable to the modern world.¹⁰ For Troeltsch, Luther was part of the Middle Ages and any coherent synthesis between the world and

6 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23) ET p.159, p.172 n.5. For a close analysis of this, see Coakley, op. cit., Chapter Two, esp. p.67f.

7 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.172 n.5.

8 For Troeltsch's response to orthodox Lutheranism, see his reviews of Theodor Kaftan, in *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.171 n.1, and A1912/8. Although he is naturally scathing, he at least admires Kaftan for his consistency.

9 This was not the prevailing view of Ritschl at the time. Cf. James Orr, *Ritschlianism*, p.36: "We may say...that Ritschl was a Kantian in principle long before he was one in practice".

10 This was already clear from the outset of his career. Cf. *Vernunft und Offenbarung* (A1891/2) p.212; *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.440, ET p.470.

Christianity would have to rest upon another basis.¹¹

Ritschl's error was not so much that of identifying Luther as the herald of the modern era, as that of suggesting that the medieval synthesis, even expressed in its most modern form, was possible under contemporary conditions. For Ritschl, the Reformation implied a continuity with the Christian doctrine of community with its *integrative* view of society and religion.¹² For Troeltsch, however desirable such an integration might be, the conditions which provided the background for Ritschl's solution no longer existed. A synthesis on Luther's (or Ritschl's) terms was no longer possible:

The idea of a society inspired by a uniform world view

¹¹ Ritschl and Troeltsch agreed in other aspects of their Luther interpretation. Importantly both recognised that Luther's ethic did not rest on the modern concept of autonomy, but on the notion of community. Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.433 n.198, ET p.822 n.198: "Luther is still a monk". Cf. Ritschl (*Festrede for the 400th. Birthday of Luther*, in David Lotz, *Ritschl and Luther*, pp.187-202, p.190): "The freedom which Luther has caused to shine forth brightly, namely Christian freedom, does not at all involve a religious independence from communal norms and considerations". Far from asserting a liberal conception of freedom which stemmed from Kant's emphasis on the autonomy of the person, Ritschl's ethic implied a reconciliation between the world and God in obedience to a vocation. A reconciliation along these lines did not seem possible to Troeltsch, since the modern world was founded upon the doctrine of the autonomy of the person. See above, Chapter 1.3. (Cf. Dilthey, in L.W. Spitz (ed.), *The Reformation: Material or Spiritual*, p.12).

¹² Ritschl inveighed powerfully against pietism and the *unio mystica* of Lutheran Orthodoxy: the chief reason for these attacks was that in stressing the primacy of individual feeling they cut off religion from its historical roots in the revelation in Christ and the continuation of this in the Christian *Community*. For Ritschl, without revelation there could be no relation to Christ. Cf. *Theology and Metaphysics* p.196.

(*einheitliche Weltanschauung*) is undoubtedly medieval, but it is still a vital problem which has not yet been solved.¹³

Troeltsch saw that something along the lines of the medieval synthesis was required in the modern world, but this could not be accomplished by reverting to the thought-forms and social organisation of the middle ages. Rather, such a synthesis would have to confront the modern world on its own terms.¹⁴

4.22. Ritschl, Luther and Kant.

Kant's influence crossed the narrow boundaries of academic philosophy into many other disciplines.¹⁵ A common

13 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.470 n.214, ET p.492 n.214. Herrmann Timm (op. cit. p.151) emphasises the integrative nature of Ritschl's theology as Christian *Weltanschauungslehre* where there is a dynamic relationship between the world and God. There is no dualism of method between *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften*, but rather Ritschl attempted a reconciliation of Nature and Spirit. The Kingdom of God thus becomes the dominant theme in Ritschl's theology. The suggestion that Ritschl was a neo-Kantian is seriously in error.

14 Troeltsch recognises that the best thinkers of the modern era had also recognised the need for a synthesis: "There cannot be a real social coherence at all without the unity of the world-view, and it is good for us to remember that in opposition to the modern world with its anarchy which has a disintegrating influence on society, two so fundamentally different thinkers as the Romantic, Novalis and the sober empiricist, Auguste Comte deliberately look back to the Middle Ages as the classic epoch of social unity based on the unity of ideas. At present we have the similar example of the Social Democrats" (*Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.473 n.215, ET p.835 n.215). See above, Chapter 1.3.

15 Cf. Windelband, *Präludien*, p.iv: "The Kantian Critique was so generally taught as a point of departure for all philosophical thinking that it influenced many scholars who were not professional philosophers. Kant's position affected almost every aspect of German learning at some level of theoretical justification." It is interesting to note that the membership of the *Kant-Gesellschaft*, founded in 1904, had reached 400 by

presumption is that Ritschl too was something of a neo-Kantian and that he initiated the theological use of Kant, which Barth had later so criticised. According to Barth, Ritschl had ethicised the Gospel, removing from the Kingdom of God all specifically religious content.¹⁶

The view of Ritschl as initiating the resurgence of Kantianism in theology has been seriously questioned. It was not so much Kant, as Luther, who provided the basis of Ritschl's conception of freedom with its emphasis on *vocation* rather than on the autonomy of the individual.¹⁷ What differentiates Ritschl from Kant is his stress upon the inter-relation (as two foci of an ellipse) between activity in the Kingdom of God and redemption through Jesus. What Ritschl regarded as the excesses of the Enlightenment are put before the bar of Reformation religion.¹⁸ All Ritschl's

1912, and included such diverse figures as Werner von Siemens and Ernst Cassirer.

16 Karl Barth, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, p.391.

17 Ritschl devotes a long section in *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* to a discussion of Kant (Bd. I, pp.429-458, ET pp.387-415). He is particularly critical of Kant's move from the critical principles of morality to the dogmatic principles of empirical ethics (*Sittenlehre*). This move can only be effected through an (objective) justification (p.452f). For Ritschl there is an interpenetration of the religious and the ethical.

18 Troeltsch does not consider Ritschl to be artificially modernising Luther. This criticism was reserved for Herrmann and Hermelink: "Things could not be twisted in a more mad (toller) and twisted fashion" (*Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.441 n.202, ET p.471 n.202).

fundamental categories are thus both moral and religious.¹⁹

Ritschl was concerned to show that if there was to be a unification of nature and spirit, this would have to be found in Christianity. Metaphysics, even though it conceived of the absolute spirit, tended to identify this spirit with the world and thus there was no longer any need for redemption. "Metaphysics", according to Ritschl, in so far as it was the watchword of the "scholastic fiction" of his opponents, destroyed the grounds of the distinction between nature and spirit by looking for an absolute unity outside of Christian revelation. Nothing could be known of God except from revelation. God was known, not as he was in himself, but only in relationship:²⁰

We can conceive of that which stimulates our sensibilities in no other way except as the relationship, movement and activity of the thing itself...we can justifiably posit a thing as real only as it stands before us in the realm of appearance.²¹

A thing "exists" only in its relationships and it is only in them that we can know the thing and only by them that we can name it.²²

19 The importance of Luther for Ritschl has recently been closely analysed by David Lotz who shows that the idea that Ritschl was involved in the "Back to Kant" movement is a Barthian misrepresentation (esp. pp.144ff.). This point is also emphasised by J.A. Richmond (in *Ritschl: a Reappraisal*). Richmond regards Ritschl not as adopting philosophical systems, but like Luther, as using them for his own purposes (p.26).

20 *Theologie und Metaphysik*, esp. ET p.182. References are to the English translation by Philip Hefner in Albrecht Ritschl, *Three Essays*, pp.150-217.

21 *ibid.* p.180. Cf. p.34, ET. p.182: "Every claim to teach something concerning God as he is in himself apart from some real revelation on his part, felt and perceived on ours, is baseless".

22 *ibid.* p.184.

It is clear that Ritschl's motives for adopting this kind of relational epistemology (even though it bears a certain similarity with Lotze's) were forced upon him by theological considerations.²³

If one of Ritschl's chief concerns was to attack natural theology which claimed knowledge of God as he was in himself, he also aimed to point to the dualism of the human condition. The human being was of nature, but this was not what constituted its essential being. It

differentiates itself...in value from the phenomena within its environment and from the workings of nature that press in upon it.²⁴

The real threat to Christianity came from the prevalent popular philosophy of materialism, against which Ritschl directed his efforts. The concept of spirit, whereby the human being was differentiated from the natural world, was the vital concept which allowed for the Christian view of redemption and the possibility of the vocational ethic of the Kingdom of God. In their attacks on materialism, both Ritschl and Troeltsch share the same objective.²⁵ Ritschl's

23 The bulk of the essay on theology and metaphysics deals with countering theological opponents rather than in drawing out carefully considered philosophical opinions. The passages aimed at philosophical analysis are extremely unclear. *Theologie und Metaphysik* constituted a momentary aside in the production of the monumental history of pietism, which provides a much clearer attack on a theology not founded^{solely} upon the revelation of Christ.

24 *Theologie und Metaphysik* ET p.157.

25 This background to the development of Ritschl's theology is discussed by Herrmann Timm, op. cit., p.99, and Julius Wendland, op. cit., pp.17ff.

dualism of nature and spirit was not inevitable, but could be overcome in the act of redemption and life in the Kingdom. Nature could be spiritualised. Troeltsch similarly never adopted a plurality of method in which the social sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) were irreconcilably divorced from the natural sciences, nor did he succumb to the positivistic Marburg Kantianism which reduced theology to a non-scientific value-judgement.²⁶ In this, there was much common purpose in Ritschl and Troeltsch which has often been overlooked.

Troeltsch certainly saw Ritschl's system as inadequate, but to suggest that he initiated a profoundly new conception of theology is to fail to see the continuity of purpose between master and pupil. They both desired a unification between the world of spirit and nature: it is this which differentiates Troeltsch from his contemporaries, who by and large adopted an epistemology which separated off spirit from nature, and where nature became indifferent towards all spiritual purposes. It was but a short step from here to the theory of secularisation which so occupied Troeltsch's second generation of critics.²⁷ For Ritschl and for Troeltsch

26 See below, Chapter 6.22. P. Wrzecionko (in *Die philosophischen Wurzeln der Theologie Albrecht Ritschls. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des Verhältnisses von Theologie und Philosophie im 19. Jahrhundert*) emphasises the importance of the value-judgement Kantianism in Ritschl's work. Ritschl, however, does not seem to have denied the scientific character of religious faith since he founded everything upon an irrational faith-judgement. For Ritschl, *all* knowledge stood in relation; there was not a difference in kind between scientific and religious knowledge. (Cf. Timm, op. cit., p.23).

27 Cf. Gogarten, *Ich glaube an den dreieinigen Gott*, Chapter Two.

there was no desire to escape from the natural world: they both aimed to come to terms with such a world. Ritschl's synthesis may have failed to meet the demands of the modern world, but at least it moved in the right direction. Troeltsch's most severe criticism is reserved for those who failed even to perceive the problem of the relationship between spirit and nature.²⁸

4.23. Troeltsch and Ritschl.

Troeltsch often points to the shortcomings of Ritschl and of his failure to grasp the importance of the modern world, *Something* which was apparent from the outset of his career.²⁹ In a short autobiographical sketch written in 1920 as a tribute to his friend Wilhelm Bousset,³⁰ Troeltsch remarked that they had both experienced a "profound change" at Erlangen in the Winter Semester of 1884.³¹ The theological debate of the

28 For a comparison between Ritschl's epistemology and that of the later Ritschlians, see Wendland, op. cit., Pt.II.

29 Cf. Bodenstein, *Der Neige*, p.13: "Behind the whole of (Troeltsch's) undertaking was the tacit altercation (Auseinandersetzung) with the theology of Albrecht Ritschl". Cf. Yasukata, op. cit. p.2: "it would hardly be an overstatement to say that the entire course of Troeltsch's theological development was strongly determined by his Oedipean struggle to overcome the flaws which he expressed in his great teacher's doctrines".

30 On the friendship with Bousset see, Renz, "Troeltschs Theologiestudium" (in T.S. I, pp.48-59), pp.57-59. A selection of letters from Troeltsch to Bousset was published in 1976 (G1976/2). Cf. Coakley, op. cit., p.59. See above, Chapter 3.25.

31 "Die 'kleine Göttinger Fakultät' von 1890" (A1920/8) col. 281. Cf. Bousset letters, (G1976/2) p.20. On the move to Erlangen, which owed a great deal to the activity of the *Uttenreuter Burschenschaft* and the

time appeared sterile to them, failing to address what the two young colleagues saw as the real "social and political problems of the time" as well as the "current natural-scientific view of the world (Weltanschauung)".³² From the very outset of his career, Troeltsch realised that theology could not be divorced from the modern world in the attempt to return to a medieval synthesis, but, to retain its intellectual credibility, it would have to confront the modern world on its own terms.

From the very beginnings of his career he emphasised the intention of reconciling nature and spirit, even if he had no great hopes that he would be successful:

There is no such thing as a consistent conception of the world (Weltauffassung). The combination of the two elements of the mechanical (Mechanik) and the spiritual (Bewusstsein) into an all-embracing construction (lückenlosen Weltbau) will never be achieved: there will always be a massive unfathomable gulf between the two components. The end of research will always be this: 'my understanding tells me this, my feelings (Gemüt) tell me this'...The only systems which are consistent are those which deny one of the elements.³³

Although consistently pessimistic about the success of this venture, Troeltsch's attempt to bring philosophy and

influence of Julius Kaftan in Berlin, see Renz, "Eine unbekannte Preisarbeit über Lotze" (in T.S. I, pp.33-47), p.35n.

32 "Die 'kleine Göttinger Fakultät' von 1890" (A1920/8) col. 281.

33 Letter to Bousset, 12/8/85, (G1976/2) p.22.

theology into a new synthesis, an "all-embracing construction" displays an overall continuity of purpose with Ritschl, even though Ritschl's system itself was at least to some degree rejected as early as 1885. Most commentators have seen a significant breach with Ritschl, yet it is probably more accurate to suggest that Troeltsch maintained a similar conception of theology even though he was highly critical of specific points of Ritschl's system. It was against the Ritschlians, with their utilisation of a neo-Kantian positivistic philosophy, rather than against Ritschl himself, that Troeltsch directed his theological polemics. It is thus important to differentiate between Ritschl and his "School".³⁴

34 Almost all commentators have set an arbitrary point for Troeltsch's rejection of Ritschl's theology. H.R. Mackintosh, for instance, (in *Types of modern Theology*, p.181) suggests that the break with Ritschl occurred sometime around 1900. Gustav Ecke, (*Albrecht Ritschl und seine Schule*, p.126) maintains that Troeltsch broke with Ritschl at an early date. H.R. Niebuhr (op. cit., p.24) dates the rejection from at least as early as *Vernunft und Offenbarung* (i.e. 1891), and Becker (op. cit., p.101) puts it at the "very beginning". Drescher, however, in "Ernst Troeltsch's Intellectual Development", considers Troeltsch still "to be operating on the basis of a Ritschlian theology" (p.6, cf. p.7) in "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1), and he sees 1895-6 as "decisive for the rejection of Ritschl" (*Glaube und Vernunft*, p.47). Most recently Sarah Coakley (in *Christ without Absolutes*) has shown that Troeltsch gradually rejected certain Ritschlian tenets whilst maintaining others: any attempt at periodisation of Troeltsch suggests "more conscious and consistent changes of direction than in fact occurred" (p.45 n.2). From a close analysis of the two editions of *The Absoluteness* she convincingly shows that Troeltsch retained a close link with a Ritschlian Christology even as late as 1912 (p.46). However at the same time it was true that "Troeltsch's conscious departure from certain Ritschlian tenets began even with his first publication, *Vernunft und Offenbarung*" (p.46f.). Coakley suggests that each element of Troeltsch's theology (i.e., historical periodisations, the espousal of the *religionsgeschichtliche* approach, the acceptance of the historical method, the issue of supernaturalism, and the rejection of the theology of claim) meant a

Troeltsch's break with Ritschl's *system* is clearly apparent in the theses he defended as part of his doctoral examination in 1891.³⁵ These are however characterised by a concern to relate theology to the rest of reality and thus contain *in nuce* many of the criticisms he was to level at the Ritschlians. Apart from the first thesis (which will be discussed in more detail below), Thesis 15 and 17 are of particular interest. Thesis 15 asserts the need for metaphysics in any theology, which as has been noted above, is a direct attack on Ritschl's anti-metaphysical polemic as presented in *Theologie und Metaphysik*, even though others, most importantly Herrmann, had made more consistent use of Ritschl's distinction:

Every positive *Glaubenslehre* includes a *religionsphilosophische Metaphysik*, even where the differences between religion and metaphysics are very clearly distinguished.³⁶

More subtle in its attack on Ritschl is Thesis 17,³⁷

rejection of a specific Ritschlian tenet at a different date (p.78).

35 These have recently been republished in T.S. I, p.299f. (A1891/1a). In a close analysis of their content, F.W. Graf (in "Der >Systematiker< der >kleinen Göttinger Fakultät<. Ernst Troeltschs Promotionsthesen und ihr Göttinger Kontext") suggests that Troeltsch's theses present a radical breach with the dominant Ritschlian theology of the time (T.S. I, pp. 286ff.). There were admittedly vestiges of Ritschl's system present in Troeltsch's theology in the last decade of the century, (Cf. "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.324n) but the *fundamental breach* had occurred virtually at the start of Troeltsch's theological education.

36 Thesis 15 (A1891/1a) p.300.

37 Thesis 17 (A1891/1a) p.300. Cf. *Vernunft und Offenbarung* (A1891/2) p.7.

where Troeltsch called for the introduction of a new textbook for religious instruction in the *Gymnasium*. Ritschl himself had provided one of those currently in use.³⁸ There may be a simple reason for this thesis: the text-book had proved too sophisticated for the average *Gymnasiast* and had in fact become an influential university text.

Ritschl's influence upon the young Troeltsch is difficult to measure.³⁹ At times Troeltsch looked at Ritschl in a positive light: his service was to pull Christianity out of the monism into which Hegel had brought it:

He had an inwardly religious and ethical aversion to everything that smacked of pantheism and monism.⁴⁰

A living feeling for the sovereignty of of all original religion over against science, philosophy and art lay at the basis [of Ritschl's system].⁴¹

However, although Troeltsch certainly regarded Ritschl as a

38 Albrecht Ritschl, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*, Bonn, 1875. (ET by Alice Swing, in Albert Swing, *The Theology of Albrecht Ritschl* and more recently, revised by Philip Hefner, in Albrecht Ritschl, *Three Essays*, pp.221-291). Ritschl's rather grandiose intentions for this little book are contained in the title which is the same as that of the German edition of Calvin's *Institutes*. Swing's title "Instruction in the Christian Religion" fails to capture this.

39 Cf. "Geschichte und Metaphysik", (A1898/2) p.53f.

40 "Die theologische und religiöse Lage der Gegenwart" (A1903/16a) p.13. Cf. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, ET, vol. I, p.24: "The Christian view of the world and of life is opposed both to that produced by materialism and to those views which are presented in systems of monistic idealism".

41 "Geschichte und Metaphysik", (A1898/2) p.53f. Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.923, ET. p.789 where Troeltsch speaks of Ritschl's "usual acuteness (Spürsinn)".

"teacher",⁴² he was in no sense a "disciple".⁴³ According to Troeltsch, the most significant failing in Ritschl's system was his severe restriction of the appropriation of the historical method in theology. Unless the historical method could find a place in theology then there could never be an opportunity for a genuine synthesis in the modern world which moved beyond the syntheses of the Middle Ages. Ritschl did not arrive at his definition of Christianity by critical historical analysis, but by dogmatic revelation.⁴⁴

For Ritschl, the independence of Christianity was merely asserted to show its peculiarity and distinctiveness from other religions, as that religion where nature and spirit achieved their closest union. "But", Troeltsch maintained, "I want to place it in connection and comparison with all aspects of reality and other religions".⁴⁵ Ritschl saw history as functioning merely to confirm the dogmatically fixed concept of Christianity, whereas Troeltsch asserted that the concept of Christianity could not be established before historical research, but only after thoroughgoing historical comparison and analysis.

42 "Meine Bücher" (A1921/29b). Cf. "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.v.

43 Cf. Graf, "Der >Systematiker<", p.288: "Where Troeltsch spoke of his teachers, he maintained at the same time his own individuality (Selbständigkeit)".

44 See above, Section 4.22.

45 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.53f.

In the first of the theses he presented as part of his doctoral examination, Troeltsch had already made this point clear:

Theology is an historical (religionsgeschichtliche) discipline, not as an ingredient in the construction of a universal *Religionsgeschichte*, but as the determination of the content of the Christian religion through comparison with the few great religions of which we have exact knowledge.⁴⁶

Troeltsch's early essays set about justifying the claim for a comparative historical study of religion *within* the discipline of theology.

Troeltsch's critique of Ritschl was aimed first and foremost at his failure to adopt the historical method at the crucial points in the study of religion. The dogmatic statements which Ritschl saw as part of history could never survive thoroughgoing historical analysis. Again, Ritschl differed significantly from his successors: he was not concerned with a proto-existentialist isolation of significant events from their historical nexus. Rather it was in concrete history that the prototype of the full reconciliation of nature and spirit had revealed itself: the personality of Jesus who fulfilled his vocation to the utmost, became the criterion for judging history.⁴⁷ By degrees Troeltsch came to realise that very little could be known of this personality. Troeltsch thus questioned the

46 Thesis 1 (A1894/1a) p.299.

47 Cf. Ritschl, *Unterricht*, para. 44. Cf. *Justification and Reconciliation*, ET, Vol.II, p.386f, p.476f.

very basis of Ritschl's theology by showing that historical analysis could never achieve what Ritschl required of it.

According to Troeltsch, only if they could be placed in context could religion and theology set about coming to terms with the modern world.⁴⁸ The theologian could not isolate one aspect of reality from all others, but had to grasp history in its fulness. Troeltsch thus moved beyond Ritschl into the broader problems of religion and the contemporary world:

While the dogmatician [i.e. Ritschl] made clear the incomprehensibility of European intellectual history (Geistesgeschichte) without knowledge of the long period of the all-pervasive dominion of theology, I always maintained that my most important question (Lebensfrage) was the justification of the religious attitude to life against the all-devouring influence of modern naturalism.⁴⁹

Troeltsch summarised his relationship with Ritschl most clearly in the foreword to the *Social Teaching*:

Trained in the school of Ritschl, I learned very early that two elements were united in the impressive teaching of this energetic and great scholar: a distinct conception of the dogmatic tradition

48 Cf. *Vernunft und Offenbarung* (A1891/2). Troeltsch attempted to assess the teachings of Melanchthon and Gerhard in their historical setting without Lutheran preconceptions. It was only in this manner that there could be a genuine "co-existence (Zusammenbestehung) of worldly education with religious truth" (p.3). The study of the history of dogma led Troeltsch to realise that European culture could only be comprehended through an understanding of "the theological constituents which had for so long been dominant" ("Meine Bücher" (A1921/29b) p.5). Theology was part of culture and open to historical analysis like everything else.

49 "Meine Bücher" (A1921/29b) p.5. Cf. "Theologie und Religionswissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts" (A1902/13)p.116ff. It is in the context of "naturalism" that the concept of "Historismus" is developed. It is significant that Troeltsch agrees with Ritschl that it was modern materialism and naturalism that posed the real threat to religion.

by means of which modern needs and problems were met, and just as decided a conception of the modern intellectual and religious situation, by means of which it seemed possible to accept and continue the teaching of tradition, understood in the Ritschlian sense. The question arose, therefore, quite naturally, first, whether this conception was true to the actual historical meaning of the dogmatic tradition and second, whether the present situation was being interpreted as it actually is. Then it became clear that from both sides a certain process of assimilation had been completed which did not correspond with actual facts and which did not permit the real contrast to appear in its full actuality. This naturally presented me with a double task: to make clear to myself both the ecclesiastical dogmatic tradition of Protestantism in its own historical sense, and the intellectual and practical situation of the present day in its true fundamental tendencies (Grundbestrebungen).⁵⁰

Thus, according to Troeltsch, for a systematic theology to be acceptable in the modern context there would have to be a new synthesis between tradition and the modern world, which Ritschl's attempt had failed to satisfy. This is brought out in Troeltsch's doctoral dissertation, *Vernunft und Offenbarung*, where he outlines the task for dogmatics as the attempt to unite philosophy (as the prevailing scientific view of the world) with theology (as the religious interpretation of the world). How they can be understood together is the

true meaning of dogmatics, which is of extraordinary importance for the life of religion.⁵¹

A rejection of philosophy is a rejection of the modern world and a denial of the possibility of a synthesis. To

50 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.vii, ET p.19 (amended).

51 *Vernunft und Offenbarung* (A1891/2) p.2f. Cf. p.13.

understand the great systems of the past is to look at how the two were united: the new task is a synthesis for the present.⁵² This synthesis of the tradition with the present was what it was to write "authentic history".⁵³

This could never be the case with Ritschl's theology. Although he had admittedly

allowed attention to the modern picture of the world - i.e. its causal nexus of events (Kausalzusammenhang) and the immeasurability of the world, which made anthropomorphism impossible...it had become ever more obvious that forced and unhistorical interpretations were being offered here and that in fact his procedure was silently to conform traditional Christian ideas with those of modern science or modern ethics.⁵⁴

The isolation of the Bible from the "fabulously rich and interesting world of history"⁵⁵ was nothing more than unjustified "assertion (Gewaltsprüche)".⁵⁶

52 *ibid.* p.3. Cf. "Meine Bücher" (A1921/29b), p.4 where Troeltsch points out that the problems of metaphysics and history were consequently at their most profound in theology.

53 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) p.87, cf. p.91, p.103. Cf. "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a), p.349: "It is one and the same truth which is reached from different angles and in different relations to the other elements of the spiritual life". Cf. *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (A1922/22) p.12: "History demanded an answer to the question of its unity, goal and purpose". Cf. Ecke, *op. cit.*, p.124 "[Troeltsch's] ideal is the retrieval of the unity (Einheitlichkeit) of the spiritual life". Cf. Review of Kaftan, (A1912/8) p.727f.

54 "Rückblick auf ein halbes Jahrhundert der theologischen Wissenschaft" (A1909/18a) p.217f., ET p.73. Cf. "Die kleine Göttinger Fakultät" (A1920/8) col.282.

55 "Meine Bücher" (A1921/29b) p.5.

56 "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.219f., ET p. 74. Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.373.

Beyond this, however, Ritschl's greatest failure was that "the burning questions of the modern life or death struggle of religion received no answers or merely pretend answers".⁵⁷ Troeltsch saw the task of theology as the attempt to find a solution to these "burning questions" of the day. For Troeltsch, the real continuation of Ritschl's work was thus

in the always more true understanding of the real historical development of religion and Christianity, which leads to a *Religionsphilosophie* which clarifies the presuppositions, and yields a clear presentation of the Christian faith.⁵⁸

Consequently, theology was, in Troeltsch's view, one of the most "interesting, most exciting and most revolutionary of disciplines",⁵⁹ since it alone attempted to draw out the meaning of history for the present.

57 "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.219, ET p.74.

58 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.67.

59 "Meine Bücher" (A1921/29b) p.4.

4.3 Troeltsch and Ritschl's successors.

Many of Troeltsch's Ritschlian contemporaries adapted Ritschl's method significantly. Ritschl's anti-metaphysical method, which began as an attack on orthodox Lutheran natural theology, and as a defence of the supreme importance of revelation, soon became a means whereby the historical method could be evaded. Ritschl had desired a "balance" between faith, history and ethics whereby each found a place in a coherent unified system, yet those who followed him destroyed his synthesis into a dichotomy of religion and the world.¹ Ritschl's attack on metaphysics was merely aimed at those who found the possibility for seeing God apart from his revelation in Christ.² It was not aimed at establishing a

1 Cf. Ritschl, *Unterricht*, para. 46, 47: "Practical proof of the sonship with God in spiritual dominion over the world and labour for the Kingdom of God fill out the Christian Life which is a new creation of God." Cf. Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. II, p.30. Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23) p.80. Peter Fischer-Appelt (in *Metaphysik im Horizont der Theologie Wilhelm Herrmanns*) sees Herrmann's system as embodied in the "ambivalent position towards the world". The human *Lebensproblem* was characterised by a fundamental dichotomy which could only be overcome in the individual. In this he sees Herrmann as a precursor of the theology of demythologisation.

2 The differences between Ritschl and Herrmann in their attacks on metaphysics are clearly brought out from a comparison between Ritschl's *Theologie und Metaphysik* (1881), and Herrmann's *Die Metaphysik in der Theologie* (1876, reprinted in Wilhelm Herrmann, *Schriften zur Grundlegung der Theologie*, (ed. Peter Fischer-Appelt) Teil I, pp.1-80.). Part One of Herrmann's essay asserts the absolute impossibility of any reconciliation between the knowledge acquired in faith and that acquired through science. See above, Section 4.2 n.26. Michael Beintker (*Die Gottesfrage in der Theologie Wilhelm Herrmanns*, p.12), and Herrmann Timm, (op. cit., pp.91-102), both contend that Ritschl's interest in metaphysics was first aroused by Herrmann's essay. Cf. Otto Ritschl, op. cit., Bd. II, p.272; Robert Mackintosh, London, 1915, p.252; Peter Fischer-Appelt, op. cit., pp.65ff.

distinctively religious mode of knowledge which differed completely from all other modes of knowledge. Rather, Ritschl's method fulfilled a religious and theological purpose, even though it had philosophical implications.³

Although Troeltsch was aware of the inadequacies of Ritschl's solution from the outset of his theological studies, he was also aware of the even more profound problems of the solutions of the "Ritschlians".⁴

3 Julius Wendland, (op. cit., p.21f.), points out that it was Herrmann who first believed that a different concept of reality was implied in religion. It was Herrmann and Kaftan who attempted to link Ritschl's attacks on metaphysics with empiricism and neo-Kantianism. With them everything was pushed away from the idea of a unification of the worlds of nature and spirit to the idea of the individual alone. Troeltsch observed that in his justification for an agnostic epistemology, Ritschl was "satisfied at this point with a few *aperçus* and a firm declaration of will" ("Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.217, ET p.73).

4 A "Ritschlian School" is as difficult to characterise as a *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. Perhaps the clearest examples of the divergent strains of Ritschlianism are the journals *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* and *Die Christliche Welt* in whose pages many of the most important conflicts were fought. Ecke (in his massive *Die theologische Schule Albrecht Ritschls und die evangelische Kirche der Gegenwart*, Berlin, 1897, Vol I, pp.66ff., esp. p.76), emphasises the disparate nature of the phenomenon: "The individuality of the Ritschlian School does not consist in the agreement of its members in the content of the convictions of faith but in a shared pursuit of certain methodological axioms". Similarly, James Orr (in *The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith*, London, 1898, pp.11-28, and *Ritschlianism*, London, 1903, esp. pp.53-73), points to the divergence of opinion. Ritschl's followers shared "certain fundamental aims and tendencies, but already their theological standpoints and modes of apprehending Christian truth show wide divergence...The chief point of Ritschl's influence lay, as can easily be perceived, in his large and impressive personality" (*Ritschlianism*, p.4). Cf. Julius Kaftan "Die Selbständigkeit des Christentums", p.378: "The Ritschlian School as a unity expressive of the same theology exists only in the mind of its opponents...However at essential points we are in agreement". The distinctiveness of the Ritschlians from Ritschl himself is emphasised by Kattenbusch (in *Die deutsche evangelische Theologie seit Schleiermacher*, (4th. ed.), p.63):

Troeltsch regarded the value-judgement theology of his critics as his greatest threat. The removal of faith from the domain of *Wissenschaft*⁵ robbed theology of its capacity to effect change in the world guided by scientific laws.⁶ Under this conception of faith there could be no possibility of synthesis between theology and the world. Between Troeltsch and the Ritschlians there was thus a wholeheartedly different conception of theology which is clearly exemplified in their different interpretations of Kant.⁷

"in the year 1891, the point was reached where Albrecht Ritschl's actuality began to ^{wirklich} ^{entfalten} Consequently, "Ritschl's theological principle is infinitely richer than his system". (p.78). Cf. Wendland, *Albrecht Ritschl und seine Schüler*. For other accounts of the Ritschlian school, see Harnack's review article on Ecke, "Ritschl und seine Schule", reprinted in *Reden und Aufsätze*, Vol. II, pp.348-368; A. Titius, "Albrecht Ritschl und die Gegenwart"; Claude Welch, op. cit., vol.II., p.2n3; James Richmond, op cit., pp.28ff; Rupp, *Culture Protestantism*, pp.15-20; Robert Mackintosh, op. cit., Chapter Nine; Coakley, op. cit., p.45 n.3. On Troeltsch's view of the Ritschlian School, see *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23) pp.80-83, and "Rückblick", (A1909/18a), esp. Sect. 4.

5 Following normal practice, the word "Wissenschaft" is usually translated as "science". The German word has the broader meaning of something like "scholarship" or "learning". See below, Chapter 6.13.

6 This was clearly perceived by Wendland, (op. cit., p.25): "in maintaining the independence of religion over and against all philosophy it becomes isolated and thus cannot take part in the fruitful interaction with the rest of culture". Thus despite the intentions of the Ritschlian school, religion becomes something less scientifically justifiable. Cf. Timm, op. cit., p.99: "More important than everything else appeared to the younger generation to be the scientific justification of Christianity over against the all-pervasive materialism of popular philosophy with its blasphemous critique of religion." Such justification, however, was arrived at by *evading* science rather than by adopting its methods.

7 For Wilhelm Herrmann's interpretation of Kant, see "Kants Bedeutung für das Christentum", in Fischer-Appelt (ed.), op. cit., Pt.I,

The primacy of the value-judgement, a theme developed from Kant himself, was the leading philosophical justification for many of Troeltsch's theological opponents.⁸ In his biography of Barth, Eberhard Busch paints a vivid picture of the predominance of a particular form of neo-Kantianism deriving from Cohen, in the theological faculty at Marburg, as represented by Herrmann. Barth confessed that what he learnt during his time as a new student in Berne was "that all God's ways begin with Kant and if possible must end there", an experience which his time in Marburg did little to dispel.⁹ Troeltsch considered this emphasis on the value-judgement to be a gross misrepresentation of Kant's intentions.¹⁰ There was no attempt to *unify* the whole of reality into a single coherent view where each aspect was

pp.104-122, and "Die Auffassung der Religion in Cohens und Natorps Ethik" in *ibid.*, Pt. II, pp.206-232.

8 James Orr (*Ritschlianism*, pp.58ff.) lists three main characteristics which were shared by the Ritschlians: (i) the primacy of practical over theoretical reason; (ii) the denial of the power of theoretical reason to attain to any knowledge of God, and (iii) the consequent drawing of a strong distinction between religious and theoretic knowledge. For an assessment of the differences between the Ritschlians, and particularly between Julius Kaftan and Herrmann, see pp.60ff. For a description of the "value-judgement" as used by the Ritschlians, see Robert Mackintosh, (*op. cit.*, Appendix D, p.277), and Herrmann, "Die Auffassung der Religion", p.207.

9 Cited in Eberhard Busch *Karl Barth*, tr. John Bowden, p.34. Cf. M.S. Fisher, *op. cit.*, for a lengthy discussion of Barth's philosophical development, especially in relation to Herrmann and Cohen.

10 Wendland (*op. cit.* p.24) suggests that even the most empirical disciplines contain presuppositions which are derived from beyond the empirically given. See above, Chapter 3.15.

amenable to a particular mode of scientific investigation, but rather, everything not amenable to exact mathematical scientific investigation was reduced to mere "faith".¹¹ There was no method whereby Christianity, accepted as true merely in the value-judgement of faith, could make contact with the rest of reality.

For Troeltsch, there could be no basis for isolating Christianity from the rest of reality. The theologian and the philosopher were concerned with the meaning and unity of *all* thought.¹² Troeltsch made this particularly clear in speaking of Herrmann:

On the one hand he allows full validity to the enormous world in its mechanical causal nexus of events, and leaves it alone, and then allows the religious person simply a religious and ethical autonomy which is based in the experience of God's holiness and love in the picture of Jesus.¹³

Since religion was distinct from the world of cause and

11 "Die wissenschaftliche Lage und ihre Anforderungen an die Theologie" (A1900/7) p.45.

12 Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1896/1) p.83.

13 "Rückblick auf ein halbes Jahrhundert der theologischen Wissenschaft" (A1909/18b) p.219, ET p.74. Cf. "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.715. See also A. Leukowitz, "Die Religionsphilosophie des Neukantianismus", pp.10-33, and Max Reischle, "Kant und die Theologie der Gegenwart", pp.357-388. Leukowitz discusses the influence of Cohen and Natorp on Herrmann and attacks Troeltsch's critique of their "Einheit der Methode" (p.21). Reischle's essay was published to mark the Kant centenary and is the clearest statement of the appropriation of Kantianism by the Ritschlians and marks a stark contrast to Troeltsch's 1904 essay, "Das Historische" (A1904/4a). Cf. H.R. Mackintosh, "The Philosophical Presuppositions of Ritschlianism" in *Some Aspects of Christian Belief*.

effect, the Ritschlian notion of the Kingdom of God was transferred to the spiritual, the *Jenseits*, and consequently Ritschl's "balance" between nature and spirit collapsed. Ritschl's system, which had been aimed at attacking positivism, was itself transformed in the hands of the Ritschlians into a subtle form of positivism.¹⁴

4.31 Troeltsch, Kant and Herrmann: Science and religion.

Troeltsch is particularly critical of the total separation his critics had made between religion and science (Wissenschaft).¹⁵ This was a leading theme in Herrmann's epistemology, which saw Kant himself as chiefly responsible for this separation.¹⁶ In criticising Troeltsch, Herrmann suggests that he denied "what Christianity and Protestantism has most to thank Kant for, namely, the differentiation of religion and science".¹⁷ Herrmann contended that

14 Cf. James Orr, *Ritschlianism*, p.25: "The Ritschlian system is perhaps best described as one of religious positivism".

15 Herrmann gives a clear exposition of his views on faith and science in "Der Glaube an Gott und die Wissenschaft unserer Zeit" in Fischer-Appelt, op. cit., Bd.II., pp.242-263.

16 This is clearly shown in an essay Herrmann wrote chiefly in response to Troeltsch's epistemology as portrayed in *Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie* (A1905/7), "Die Lage und Aufgabe der evangelischen Dogmatik", (in Z.Th.K. (1907), Pt.I, pp.1-33, Pt.II, pp.172-201, reprinted in Fischer-Appelt (ed.) op. cit., Bd.II, pp.1-87. Refs. are to the Z.Th.K.). Cf. esp. p.180. The case for Herrmann's criticism of Troeltsch's "Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu" (originally in T.L.Z., 1912, col.245-9, reprinted in Z.Th.K. 1960, pp.231-237, references are to the Z.Th.K.) also derives from the impossibility of scientific knowledge of the religious, which in this case he suggests stems from Schleiermacher (p.235).

the Kantian understanding of science can never result in religious experience as scientific. A science of supernatural reality, which the pious claim to experience, just does not exist.¹⁸

For Herrmann, religion involved an inner obedience to the ethical which rested on an "inner experience".¹⁹ True religious knowledge does not come through the understanding, but from the relationship with Christ guaranteed through inner experience, through the *Eindruck*. Nothing *metaphysical* could be said of Christ.²⁰ Faith and reason are pulled so far apart, that no point of contact remains between them. The sphere of religion is thus removed from all theoretical understanding, and is concerned merely with the practical (i.e. the knowledge accorded in the value-judgement of faith).

Religion, Herrmann contended, could never depend on scientific knowledge, since science itself could never reveal anything about universal validity (*Allgemeingültigkeit*).²¹

17 Herrmann, "Die Lage und Aufgabe", p.183. Cf. "Kants Bedeutung", pp.106ff., esp. p.122.

18 Herrmann, "Die Lage und Aufgabe", p.186.

19 *ibid.* p.191.

20 On this, see Fischer-Appelt, *op. cit.*, *passim*, and Beintker, *op. cit.*, pp.18ff.

21 Cf. Herrmann, "Der Glaube an Gott", p.249: "Science has to do with facts as they are inter-related, but not as they affect our individual lives. The reality to which this perfect knowledge of science is directed, we call provable (*nachweisbar*); the reality which is only present in individuals we call experientable (*erlebbar*)". On the notion of *Erlebnis*, particularly in relation to *Lebensphilosophie*, see Fischer-Appelt, *op. cit.*, pp.158ff. Cf. Beintker, pp.35ff.

Science was concerned with the relative,²² religion with the absolute, and the one could say nothing about the other:

Religious conceptuality (Gedanken) can never agree with knowledge about the provable real which denies the universally valid from the outset. [Religious conceptuality] stems from an individual experience.²³

Herrmann is consequently highly critical of Troeltsch's objectives in *The Absoluteness*. To attempt to secure with science what can only be guaranteed by religious experience is a "dangerous course".²⁴

Herrmann is thus critical of Troeltsch's theory of a religious *a priori*:

An *a priori* based on provable knowledge just cannot be found.²⁵
The universally valid cannot be found in religion by means of science, which is always concerned with the individual and the relative. Consequently, if religion is to be universally valid, then some other (specifically religious) mode of knowledge is necessary:

[Religion] implies a knowledge of a completely different kind, for

22 Cf. Herrmann, review of *Die Absolutheit* in T.L.Z., 1902, Nr.11, cols.330-334, here, col. 332.

23 Herrmann, "Die Lage und Aufgabe", p.197f. Cf. Review of *Die Absolutheit*, col.333: Science is not concerned with "absolute certainties, but with probabilities". Cf. Herrmann, *Die Gewissheit des Glaubens und die Freiheit der Theologie*, p.7: "They fear that faith will become without foundation when science can no longer provide a basis. In truth, faith thereby becomes free and clarifies the point that what is to overcome the world cannot derive from the world."

24 Herrmann, review of *Die Absolutheit*¹, col.331. Cf. Herrmann's article "Religion" in R.E.³, pp.589-597, esp. p.591.

25 Herrmann, "Die Lage und Aufgabe", p.180. See above, Chapter 3.20.

which the theory of the *a priori* has absolutely no basis.²⁶

Such religious knowledge depended ^{upon} the revelation of the absolute ethical will being made real in the individual's experience.²⁷ Herrmann felt that science could never overcome the fundamental dichotomy (Zwiespalt) of nature and spirit in which the human being found itself. This was the role of religion.²⁸

Troeltsch, however, contended that one aspect of reality could never be totally separated from another: there had to be a *Wechselwirkung*.²⁹ To assume that science was limited to the positivistic method of cause and effect was an unnecessary (and, Troeltsch contended, un-Kantian) restriction. A broader conception of the capacities of science allowed religion access to scientific, rational investigation:

I contest the universal applicability of the causal view, in the sense of a closed system of necessary causes and effects, as far as historical phenomena and the entire compass of human events are concerned.³⁰

26 Herrmann, *ibid.* p.180. Cf. Herrmann, Review of "Die Bedeutung" (A1911/5) p.235.

27 Herrmann, "Die Lage und Aufgabe", p.199.

28 Cf. Herrmann, "Der Glaube an Gott" p.259: "Faith must achieve such a position towards science that science does not threaten it. With this object in mind, however, faith should not attempt to influence the scientific conception of the world". Cf. Herrmann, "Die Religion und das Allgemeingültige. Zur Verständigung mit Sulze", p.229.

29 Herrmann's recognition of this attempt to combine faith and science led him to see Troeltsch as the "most conservative and reactionary of us all" ("Der Glaube an Gott", p.258).

30 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.31.

For Troeltsch, Christianity could not be isolated from the rest of reality. It was part of historical and natural life like any other religion:

We cannot separate and prove Christianity differently *toto genere* from the non-Christian religions. Thus we are led to answer the questions as to the place and truth of Christianity on the basis of the whole phenomenon (*Gesamterscheinung*) of religion. This is nothing other than a *Religionsphilosophie*.³¹

Troeltsch did not see Kant as restricting "science" to the sphere of the exact sciences, basing all other aspects of reality on value-judgements.³² Rather, science was a "striving for order between all objects".³³ Kant's theory is seen by Troeltsch as a "theory of reason in all aspects of its *a priori* functions; it is a Platonism without Plato's metaphysics".³⁴ Kant's goal was thus the *unification* of all aspects of reality. Consequently, human activity, as reflected in the unpredictable course of human history, was as much a part of "science" as anything else:

31 "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1896/1) p.83n. Cf. "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.396, ET p.133.

32 Cf. MS *Einführung*, p.10: "Science cannot crave for a complete explanation unless it wants to be a new Pope with the same kind of infallibility". Cf. Troeltsch's review of Cohen (A1918/6) col. 62: "Since absolute canonical presuppositions are valid in Marburg rationalism, there is no room left for religion."

33 "Die wissenschaftliche Lage" (A1900/7) p.45f.

34 "Kant" (A1914/15) p.656.

Therefore Kant placed the study of religion in the sphere of universal history, and brought the highest ascertainable values of moral philosophy, aesthetics and *Religionsphilosophie* into the closest relationship with the results and problems of his natural philosophy.³⁵

Kant was motivated by the desire to overcome the contradiction between the empirical causality of the exact sciences, and intelligible freedom which made itself apparent in meaningful action. Thus Troeltsch saw Kant's view of science as far from restricted to the logical.

This critique of the value-judgement Kantianism of his opponents led Troeltsch to see the need to study Christianity, not as a divorced phenomenon grounded in faith, but as something which stood in relation to the rest of reality.³⁶ The theological faculty was consequently not to be cut off from contact with the other faculties. This is made particularly clear in an article prompted by state interference in the theology faculty at Strassburg, the so-called Spahn affair,³⁷ where Troeltsch states the principles that must guide the modern theological faculty. Rather than the clerical principle there had to be an

35 "Die wissenschaftliche Lage" (A1900/7) p.46. Cf. Herrmann's review of Pfleiderer's *Die Ritschlsche Theologie* in T.L.Z., 1892, col.383.

36 Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/1) p.107. This is diametrically opposed to the role suggested by Herrmann: "Science can only achieve one thing in the study of theology: it can show that in that sphere of knowledge which is established through faith, there is not even the slightest trace to be found" (Herrmann, *Die Gewissheit*, p.60) .

37 On the Spahn affair, see esp. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins*, p.142f.

"autonomous principle of culture".³⁸ In the war for "correct presuppositions",³⁹ the theologian had to search for "pure, powerful religious axioms" acceptable in the modern world with its value-free science, otherwise theology would lose all scientific justification and consequently its right to exist in the modern university.⁴⁰ Troeltsch, like Ritschl, was thus searching^{for} a reconciliation between the world of spirit and the world of nature: the principles which guided one had to guide the other, otherwise all quests for universality would collapse into dualism.

4.32 The ethical implications of Herrmann's system.

Troeltsch's most fundamental criticism of Herrmann rests upon the ethical implications of the epistemological isolation of Christianity.⁴¹ The epistemology which isolates religion

38 "Voraussetzungslose Wissenschaft" (A1901/21a) p.185. Cf. Troeltsch's rectorial address to the University of Heidelberg, "Die Trennung von Staat und Kirche, der staatliche Religionsunterricht und die theologischen Fakultäten" (A1907/2), for a comprehensive account of the relations between the state and the control of the theological faculty (esp. pp.40ff). Troeltsch sees the problem as resting in the deeper problem of the state's attempts to control truth (p.7).

39 "Voraussetzungslose Wissenschaft" (A1901/21a) p.190.

40 *ibid.* p.189. Cf. "Die Trennung" (A1907/2) p.23. Cf. Wendland, (*op. cit.*, p.29): "Theology retreats to its own special area and achieves a great deal here. Yet the connection with the whole edifice of science is unrecognised. Theology develops its own method with scant regard to the rest of science, and yet demands recognition for itself."

41 Herrmann Timm (*op. cit.*) carefully points to the distinctions between Ritschl and Herrmann, who became the leading figure in the theological appropriation of Marburg neo-Kantianism. "The moment he denied the potential cosmic universal-historical rationality of faith, dividing the world into experiential (*erlebbaren*) and explainable (*erklärbaren*)

from science also isolates religion from the world.⁴² In the essay, "Grundprobleme der Ethik", Troeltsch offers an extended exposition of Herrmann's ethics.⁴³ Troeltsch concedes gratitude to Herrmann for providing him with the context in which to develop his own ethics.⁴⁴

As has been shown in Chapter Two, Troeltsch criticises Kant's ethics and philosophy of history because of the difficulty in realising the formal *a priori* in practice.⁴⁵

reality" (p.115), the result was an inevitable devaluation of the positive importance of the world. For Herrmann, true faith was "in escape from the world (Weltflucht)" (p.24). Whatever Troeltsch's acceptance of a similar form to Herrmann's experiential Christology, even as late as 1911 (Cf. Coakley, op. cit., p.46), this world-denial constituted the gravest irreconcilable difference between the two.

42 Cf. Herrmann, (*Die Gewissheit*, p.58), where he explicitly connects the two sides of his theory: "The end-goal of theology is the building up of the Christian community; and if Christianity serves and furthers the natural powers of society, so also Christian theology will not retard the development of scientific knowledge of the world". Theology and religion have their own spheres in which they are "all-dominant". What they cannot do is to step into the other spheres.

43 This essay (A1902/4a) first appeared as a response to Herrmann's *Ethik*. A short portion of A1902/4a (GS.II, pp.629-639) was translated by Walter Bense in *The Unitarian Universalist Christian*, vol.29, 1974, pp.38-45.

44 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.672. See below, Chapter Nine, for a discussion of Troeltsch's conception of ethics.

45 Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.623. According to Troeltsch, this is nothing other than the problem confronting Schleiermacher. On this point, see esp., Pannenberg, "Die Begründung der Ethik bei Ernst Troeltsch". Troeltsch repeated his criticism of Kant at length in his posthumous *Christian Thought* (E1923/7 p.47). Kant had "pushed this comparison too far and approximated the ethical too closely to the logical. In reality we must see to it that, after this comparison has rendered all the services of which it is capable for the cognition of the autonomy which also belongs to the ethical, our attention is turned to the ethical phenomenon in its peculiarity".

Herrmann, who identifies the revelation of Jesus with the formal ethical will, is open to the same criticisms.⁴⁶ Where Herrmann's problem rests is that the "content" of the *a priori* remains indeterminate.⁴⁷ Christianity had always been occupied with the problem of immanent cultural values, that is, with the attempt to relate the formal principles of ethics to the cultural context in which the form was to be realised. The culture was not given and immutable, rather there was a dynamic interaction between the formal and historical. According to Troeltsch, this was something completely ignored by Herrmann, who, in denying anything but a purely formal content to ethics, rendered the sphere of culture as something ethically indifferent.⁴⁸ For Troeltsch, the personality was not mere individuality, but was, at the same time, essentially social.⁴⁹

46 Troeltsch makes the following formulation of Herrmann's system (ibid. p.590): "Christianity is the realisation of ethical autonomy through trust in Jesus".

47 Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.576ff.

48 Cf. ibid. p.592ff.

49 ibid. p.580. That Troeltsch was vitally concerned with the realisation of values in history seems to have been overlooked by Herrmann who suggests that, in denying the importance of the historicity of Jesus except as some kind of social-psychologically necessary bond, Troeltsch was guilty of being a "mystic" thus robbing religion of its power (Herrmann, Review of "Die Bedeutung", p.234). As has been shown above (Chapter 3.29), Troeltsch did not consider that it was possible for the "Idea" of religion to survive without historical embodiment. What Herrmann is criticising is merely Troeltsch's rejection of the uniqueness of the embodiment of the Christian Idea in the personality of Christ as made present to the believer through a special means of knowing: Troeltsch had a different but nevertheless very real sense of the historicity of revelation. See below, Chapter 8.4.

The lack of a possible contact between Herrmann's idea of Christianity and the historical world is made clear in *Die Soziallehren*, where Troeltsch sees Herrmann as following closely in Luther's footsteps:⁵⁰

Just as Luther regarded the class guild, absolutist and agrarian form of life (Lebensverfassung) as a condition which was permanently demanded by Nature, as conditions which determined the outward form of life compatible with Christianity, so here [i.e. in Herrmann's *Ethik*] an unlimited mobile shaping of these things, including the modern militaristic, capitalistic, and scientific and aesthetic civilisation, is regarded as the 'form' of the natural life which is to be inspired by faith...Everywhere any possibility of an inner opposition between the natural forms of the ethic of civilisation (Kulturethik) and the spirit of love (whose radical and otherworldly (jenseitig) aims ought to fill them) has been entirely forgotten, and Luther's conflicts around this problem are simply regarded as 'Catholic relics'...In Catholicism Nature and Grace are different in degree, in Protestantism they finally divide as form and content.⁵¹

This criticism of the inherent conservatism of such Lutheranism is re-iterated in "Grundprobleme der Ethik". Under this conception of ethics, if the Christian cannot change society using the legal means at his disposal, then the response has to be to withdraw from society, as was the response of the early Christians, and to live in obedience to worldly callings.⁵²

50 Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.603: "All in all it is Lutheran Ethics translated into the spirit of Kant".

51 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.502 n.227, ET p.848, n.227 (amended); Cf. p.506 n.230, ET p.849, n.230.

52 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.599.

Troeltsch's second problem with Herrmann's ethics rests in his connection of the formal Kantian ethic with the ethic of Jesus. Troeltsch agreed with Herrmann that autonomy was very important in Jesus' ethic of the love command, but that the infinite value of the soul was not primary, but rather derived from the ethic of the love of God.⁵³ Thus for Troeltsch, Jesus' ethic was not primarily humanitarian but God-centred.⁵⁴ There was no room for any motive besides love of God; this was the objective good which stood in tension with the world. This was the goal, to which everything stood in a relation of "vital becoming", in an active surrender to the highest end.

For Troeltsch, modern Protestantism had to recognise a tension between God and the sanctification of the world for God. The goals of the world were always in conflict with the highest good, however ethicised they might appear. Yet, at the same time, it had to accept that the creation of a relative correspondence was the necessary task from which nobody could escape. The quintessence of Jesus' ethic was thus not in the *form* of the moral law but in its *content*, a content which could not be taken for granted but which was something established in the constant effort to move towards the realisation of the Kingdom of God.⁵⁵

53 Cf. *ibid.* p.630ff.

54 Cf. *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.55.

55 Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.638f.

For Troeltsch, culture could never be ethically indifferent: it was that sphere in which formal ethical demands were to be realised as far as was possible. God grants

to the work of the human, the task of building up a community of persons which sanctifies secular goals and makes them subservient to his overall purpose.⁵⁶

Nature and "history", as the spheres in which human beings lived out the ethical demands of Jesus, did not stand in a necessary opposition to God, but rather were to be seen as domains which could grow to reflect God's purposes.

Herrmann's view was quite different from this. Since the ethical was purely formal, it could find no place for any active realisation in the world. The world of nature and of human society was a necessary condition determining human life. One was Christian to the extent that one "held back" from this society or natural world.⁵⁷ The need to live in society in order to satisfy natural desires was something governed by obedience to one's worldly calling. One lives as a fellow worker and as a citizen in the society which provides the natural conditions in which the personal religious life is to be lived. There is no need to change such circumstances, since the religious life is indifferent to them. It concerns a sphere which lies beyond this world. The religious life merely requires a diligent acquiescence to

⁵⁶ "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.637, ET p.44.

⁵⁷ "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.599.

worldly stations and callings. For Herrmann, the Kingdom of God remains wholly other-worldly and transcendent. Similarly, for Troeltsch, there must always be a transcendental aspect to the Kingdom of God, it must always be in part an unrealised "heavenly object of longing".⁵⁸ Yet, at the same time, it had to be immanent, where God could make contact with the human being in the real historical world. Herrmann's concept of the Kingdom of God had thus succeeded in transforming Ritschl's "balance": a synthesis was no longer possible, since the world, as a form of nature becomes wholly indifferent to a religion which has been separated from nature.

For Herrmann the only contact between the absolute and nature takes place in the individual who mysteriously experiences the personality of Jesus.⁵⁹ He becomes the bearer of ethical values and he alone instils them with a religious power.⁶⁰ This power enabled the human to overcome

58 *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.68.

59 For a discussion of Herrmann's theology in the context of the development of later Christology, see W. Grieve, *Der Grund des Glaubens*. For an appreciation of Herrmann's view of Jesus as ethically powerful personality, see sect. 4.2, pp.81ff. Cf. Beintker, op. cit., pp.42ff., 63ff.

60 For Herrmann, what guarantees religion against the threats of science is the mysterious "experienced reality" (erlebten Wirklichkeit): whatever the conclusions of science this experience remains possible (Herrmann, review of "Die Bedeutung" p.237). This reality was made present to each individual in his or her relationship with God. There could be no communication of this experience: "[The individual] cannot relate this experience to others, and yet it could never be replaced by any higher claim to universality" (Herrmann, "Die Religion und das Allgemeingültige", p.232); Cf. "Die Religion in Cohens und Natorps Ethik", p.232: "We can give no other answer to the question of how we can presume (erdreiten) an object to be real which we cannot prove to

the sense of guilt, and ensured the certainty of the forgiveness of sins.⁶¹

others, than by saying 'through religion', which will never deliver itself up; we have the courage to do this because God lets us see this in the world that we experience (erleben)...The power, which brings humanity to life, creates no uniformity (Einerlei) but an imponderable fulness of individual vitality (Lebendigkeit)". Timm's thesis of Herrmann's surreptitious identification of the universal with the individual personality seems confirmed (op. cit., p.152). By replacing the Kingdom of God with the concept of the personality, Herrmann removed the necessity for community in the world. M.S. Fisher, (op. cit.), is also highly critical of this self-authenticating revelation, and draws out the ethical implications of Herrmann's epistemology: "If an alleged revelation is self-authenticating and supplies its own criteria not only of meaning and truth, but of goodness as well, who among its supporters is able to condemn it as immoral?" (p.385). Fisher concludes that such a belief "is dangerous and rash for theism" (p.382). Cf. Fischer-Appelt, op. cit., p.201ff.

61 Cf. Herrmann, review of *Die Absolutheit*, col.333f. where he emphasises the primacy of experience. Whoever experiences the revelation of God in Jesus, will always experience release from the "bondage to the feeling of guilt", and "ethical power in the present". Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.613. Cf. Herrmann, *Die Gewissheit*, p.54, for a clear statement of his theory of redemption: "When I have completely grasped that in Christ I am dealing with God himself, then I am redeemed". Sarah Coakley (op. cit., esp. Chapter Two, pp.59-79) presents an interesting account of the development of Troeltsch's Christology and from a close analysis of the two editions of *The Absoluteness*, shows how at first Troeltsch shared a similar view to Herrmann of the revelation of Jesus' personality in the individual. Although Troeltsch changed several references to this in the second edition, much is still present which appears to ride uneasily with the Christology of "Die Bedeutung" (A1911/5). (Cf. e.g. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d), ET p.119: "Is not the principal need of the religious man, rather, the real and innermost certainty of having encountered God and heard his voice?". Cf. *ibid.*, pp.123,126). Certainly *The Absoluteness*, even in the second edition, affirms a mysterious experience of the personality of Jesus which guarantees "naïve absoluteness" (p.159). This aspect of *The Absoluteness* even meets with Herrmann's approval (Cf. his review of *Die Absolutheit*, col.334). However the differences between Troeltsch and Herrmann were also most profound. That Troeltsch continued to hold fast to his belief in the possibility of historical knowledge of Jesus' personality seems to rest in his rather slow appropriation of the

Such a view of the uniqueness of revelation in Christ has ethical implications which Troeltsch finds unacceptable:

Here Herrmann is quite the hard dogmatician and apologist, who maintains the value of Christianity at the expense of denying the value of everything unChristian.⁶²

In locating all redemption as necessarily derived from the power of the personally-appropriated Christ, Herrmann is placing the core of faith not in the God whom Christ revealed, but in the revealer himself. According to Troeltsch, redemption was not *completed* in the person of Christ, but was effected only in so far as he presented to us the mood of hope and confidence in the future. According to Troeltsch, redemption must have this future aspect, otherwise those media which express the activity of a completed redemption, that is, the Bible and the Church, would become absolutised, and it would become impossible to rework the tradition in order to bring about the future completion of redemption, since all would have been completed in the past. This would have worked to destroy Troeltsch's very conception of the tasks of theology.⁶³

eschatological ideas of Weiss and Schweitzer (Cf. Coakley, p.78). These advances in historical knowledge could not have affected Herrmann's Christology: the experience of Jesus' personality was impervious to developments in historical knowledge (Cf. e.g. Herrmann, "Der Glaube an Gott", p.251, p.263). Philosophically Troeltsch and Herrmann were diametrically opposed, even if there were similarities in their personalist Christology. For Troeltsch, naïve absoluteness was certainly not the *only* form of absoluteness, to the exclusion of all metaphysics and philosophy. On the concept of the personality, see esp. W. Sanday, *Ancient and Modern Christologies*, Chapter 6.

62 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.647.

63 On this point, see below, Chapters 5.22 and 8.6.

Troeltsch is deeply critical of Herrmann's isolation of Christianity from science, since his conception of theology was as a synthesis between all aspects of reality. He could not remain satisfied with a self-authenticating mysterious revelation, since this would have been an evasion of the theologian's responsibility. It was impossible for a Christianity to adapt itself to the modern era if it cut itself off from the world at the outset. Herrmann's theology consequently failed to answer that question which Troeltsch saw at the heart of theology:

Can Christianity adapt itself to (sich anpassen) the enormous miracle of the modern era, that is, the destruction of the supernatural, and unfold its powers in the new situation?⁶⁴

Religion was to confront the world, and it was only in this confrontation with the world that there could be any possibility of progress towards the goal of development, the Kingdom of God. Consequently, it is apparent that despite his hostility towards Ritschl, Troeltsch had much in common with his intentions to achieve a balance between faith, history and ethics. The Kingdom of God remained for Troeltsch, as for Ritschl, a synthesis between the transcendent and the immanent. Despite his talk of the supreme value of the personality, Troeltsch, unlike Herrmann, never cut this personality off from its social roots. However, Troeltsch moved on from Ritschl whose solution he thought no longer tenable given the massive advances in the study of history.⁶⁵ The next Chapter will assess these

64 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.39.

65 This is particularly apparent in "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) Sect. 4. Troeltsch also in several places points to his indebtedness to Schleiermacher, who also displayed this quest for synthesis. See below,

developments and draw out their implications for the construction of a new synthesis.

Chapter 7.17.

Chapter Five: Troeltsch's "Religionsphilosophie". Part Three:

The philosophy of the history of religions (II)

5.1 Introduction: The historical method.

The previous Chapter showed how Troeltsch argued against the isolation of theology and religion from scientific knowledge in favour of a balance between religion and science. This Chapter outlines Troeltsch's method for the analysis of historical phenomena in more detail. Troeltsch contended that religious phenomena were of the same kind as other historical phenomena and were consequently open to historical investigation using the principles applicable to any other historical subject matter.

Having shown in the last Chapter, that Christianity cannot be isolated from philosophical analysis, this Chapter aims to show that religion cannot be isolated from historical analysis, and more importantly from the philosophy of history. Indeed, it will become clear that from his discussion of the *Geschichtsphilosophie der Religion*, Troeltsch moves on to a discussion of *Geschichtsphilosophie* in general,¹ since, in refusing to isolate religion from the rest of life, he places it in the universal context of historical life.

The first half of this Chapter discusses Troeltsch's formulation of the historical method in terms of the

¹ See below, Chapter Six.

theological context in which he was active. Troeltsch's characterisation of the historical method itself was nothing but a reflection and a systematisation of a method which had been adopted by a group of scholars, who, although influenced by Ritschl, looked beyond him to the broader principles which dominated academic study of history beyond the theology faculty. The second half of this Chapter discusses how Troeltsch developed his arguments in the context of much Ritschlian criticism of the historical method.

5.11 The >religionsgeschichtliche Schule<.²

Troeltsch's recognition of the vital importance of the historical method in theology developed in fruitful interaction with a group of biblical scholars, many of whom,

² The term "Religionsgeschichte" is usually translated as "history of religion(s)". The translators of Troeltsch's article, "The dogmatics of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*" (A1913/2), (the longer German version was published in the same year in GS II as "Die Dogmatik der >religionsgeschichtlichen Schule<" (A1913/2a)) which was first published in the *American Journal of Theology*, recognised the inadequacy of this translation, and thought it better to "retain the German word rather than to employ an unsatisfactory circumlocution" (p.1n). They suggested, however, that the "nearest approach to the German term is the current expression 'comparative religion'". Cf. H.R. Mackintosh, "Does the historical study of religions yield a dogmatic theology?". Mackintosh assesses the *religionsgeschichtliche* method from a hostile English-speaking perspective, which stems first and foremost from his admiration of Ritschl's method. Mackintosh leaves the German term untranslated, but points to the overwhelming importance of the historical method: "The new method of study, familiar to Germans as the *religionsgeschichtliche Methode*, is in theology the question of the hour" (p.505). Since Troeltsch's day, the term "history of religions" has entered English as a direct equivalent of the German "Religionsgeschichte".

like Troeltsch, had gathered in Göttingen in the early 1890's. This group came to be known as the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*.³

Troeltsch first pointed to the distinctiveness of this group in a letter to Bousset written in 1895 in response to the latter's influential work, *Der Antichrist*:

I can detect in the work of the young Göttingen School a common current, if I might be allowed to say, an unrestrained *religionsgeschichtliche* method which...investigates Christianity purely historically and philosophically.⁴

Exactly who constituted the "school" is a problematic issue.⁵ What is clear, however, is that Troeltsch stood in close contact with a group of scholars who adopted a historical comparative method for the study of Christianity. Although the group was referred to as a "School", it was in fact so loosely united that it might be better to speak

3 The most recent discussion of the *religionsgeschichtlichen Schule* is by Gerd Lüdemann, in "Die Religionsgeschichtliche Schule" in *Theologie in Göttingen*, (ed) Bernd Moeller, pp.325-361, and *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule in Göttingen*, which contains much previously unpublished documentation.

4 Letter to Bousset of 23/7/95, (G1974/1) p.27. Amongst those whom Troeltsch includes in this group are Gunkel, Wrede and surprisingly, Otto Ritschl. For Troeltsch's clearest accounts of his relationship to the "school", see "Rückblick auf ein halbes Jahrhundert der theologischen Wissenschaft", (A1909/18a) pp.209-221, ET: "Half a century of theology: a review", Sect. 4, pp. 66-81; "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2), "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a), "Die kleine Göttinger Fakultät von 1890" (A1920/8) and "Theologie und Religionswissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts" (A1902/13) pp.116-121.

5 Cf. Lüdemann, "Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule", pp.325ff.

merely of a "shared method".⁶ Troeltsch defined the movement as sharing the

recognition of the universally accepted scientific conclusion that human religion exists only in manifold specific religious cults which develop in relations of mutual contact and influence, and that in this religious development it is impossible to make the older dogmatic distinction between a natural and a supernatural revelation.⁷

He went on:

The only proper application of the term ["Religionsgeschichte"] would be to designate those scholars who have given up the last remnant of the idea of truth supernaturally revealed in the Bible and who work with the universally valid instruments of psychology and history. But even these form no 'school' and have no common dogmatics. We may simply mention here such diverse spirits as Robertson Smith, Wellhausen, Lagarde, Gunkel, Weizsäcker, Wrede, Usener, Harnack, Holtzmann, and Bousset.⁸

6 Cf. "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.1, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.500, and p.4 (p.502): "We cannot speak of a *religionsgeschichtliche* school but only of a *religionsgeschichtliche* method which is more or less radically employed". Cf., however, "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.5, where Troeltsch speaks of a *Schule*. Cf. Lüdemann, op. cit., p.336. For a discussion of this method, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Toward a theology of the history of religions", ET in *Basic Questions in Theology*, II, pp.65-118.

7 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.1f., "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.500. Cf. Letter to Bousset (G1974/1) p.27, and *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) p.65, where the names of Wellhausen, Jülicher and Harnack are mentioned as important for the development of the *religionsgeschichtliche* method.

8 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.4f., "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.503f. Georg Ittel (in "Die Hauptgedanken der >religionsgeschichtlichen Schule<", Sect. IV.), lists three common themes which the various members of the group shared, and uses these to justify speaking of a "school": firstly, Christianity developed as an amalgam of many religious movements and not merely as a continuation of the Old Testament. Secondly, they shared the belief that theology should be transformed into a purely historical discipline, and thirdly, they emphasised the need for the comparison of Christianity with other religions. Cf. Lüdemann, op. cit., Pt.II, pp.339ff.

The "school" was clearly a "school without a teacher,"⁹ and as Troeltsch's list indicates, it was difficult to identify the members since many stood on the fringes, or were influenced by the method without adopting it wholeheartedly.¹⁰ It is also difficult to work out the origins of the "school".¹¹ The clearest unifying factor was perhaps the influence of Ritschl, which was, however, fundamentally negative.¹² How, after all, could "we admire a theology based upon a hole in causality?"¹³ By rejecting Ritschl's "dogmatic agnosticism", a

firmly delimited normative truth, presented as available in the bible or in the church, and both accredited and recognisable on the basis of divine authority is dispensed with.¹⁴

9 Herrmann Gunkel, "Gedächtnisrede auf W. Bousset" cited in Ittel, op. cit., p.66.

10 Cf. "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.4: "These methods are actually used in scientific theology of every sort". ("Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.503. Cf. Rade, "Religionsgeschichte", col.2185.

11 Cf. W. Klatt, "Ein Brief von Herrmann Gunkel über Albert Eichhorn an Hugo Gressmann", in Z.Th.K., 1969, p.1-6, esp. p.1; H.R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, p.183: "The movement may be said to have opened with Gunkel's book on the operations of the Holy Spirit published in 1888"; Robert Mackintosh, *Albrecht Ritschl and his School*, p.245: "One cannot date or define with precision the rise of the History-of-religion school."

12 Cf. Lüdemann, op. cit., p.325, p.332. Ittel ("Die Hauptgedanken" p.67) suggests that the "school" was a "many-sided friendship of a close circle of young intellectuals who had gathered around the chair of Ritschl in Göttingen". Lüdemann (esp. p.360) emphasises the influence of Eichhorn.

13 "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie" (A1900/9a), p.752.

14 "Was heisst >Wesen des Christentums<?" (A1903/18a) p.394, ET p.131.

5.12 The development of the historical method in theology.

The impact of the historical method on theology can be traced from the Enlightenment right through the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Troeltsch discusses the development of the historical method in several essays.¹⁶ D.F. Strauss is given the pivotal role in bringing an end to the Schleiermacherian and Hegelian synthesis of dogmatics and history.¹⁷ The

clarity and strength of his method, the sundering of research from all presuppositions is what is decisive in Strauss and what initiated a new epoch.¹⁸

The radical surrender of theological history to the general principles of the historical method has gradually penetrated further as a result of the decisive influence of Strauss, even

15 On the history of the historical method in the study of the Bible, see R.E. Clements, "The Study of The Old Testament", and J.C. O'Neill, "The Study of the New Testament", both in Smart (et. al.) ed., op. cit., vol.III, and most recently, Robert Morgan (with John Barton), *Biblical Interpretation*, Chapters I-III.

16 See esp., "Rückblick auf ein halbes Jahrhundert der theologischen Wissenschaft" (A1909/18a), ET "Half a century of theology: a review", Section Four; "Theologie und Religionswissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts" (A1902/13); "Die theologische und religiöse Lage der Gegenwart" (A1903/16a), pp.8ff, and *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.78f.

17 Also not to be underestimated was the influence of Renan: "For many he was the ultimate and most perfect of the gravediggers of theology" ("Die theologische und religiöse Lage der Gegenwart" (A1903/16a) p.11).

18 "Theologie und Religionswissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts" (A1902/13) p.112. Cf. Review of Weinel, (A1903/23), col.2990: "It was Strauss who broke the mould (Erst hat Strauss die Bahn gebrochen)". Cf. Pannenberg, op. cit., p.72.

though people do not usually like to appeal to him and he himself made it difficult for theology to testify to the gratitude it owes him.¹⁹

[Strauss], though not a profoundly religious man, was a solid and perceptive scholar. He has shown clearly and irrefutably - in opposition to Hegel - that no absolutely perfect principle of religion can be realised at any single point...He next went on to show just as incontrovertibly - in opposition to Schleiermacher - that it is impossible to postulate an absolute and historically unconditioned cause for individual and conditioned historical effects...History is no place for 'absolute religions' or 'absolute personalities'. Such terms are self-contradictory.²⁰

After Strauss, with the Tübingen School, Christianity had been related to the great movements of the orient, and under Biedermann and Pfleiderer, a new synthesis between history and dogmatics had been attempted.²¹

However, it was Paul de Lagarde to whom Troeltsch looked for the clearest statement of the historical method.²² From

19 "Rückblick auf ein halbes Jahrhundert der theologischen Wissenschaft" (A1909/18a) p.203, ET "Half a century of theology: a review", p.61 (amended).

20 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.78. For Troeltsch's assessment of Strauss and the *Auseinandersetzung* with the Zürich theological faculty, see his review of Schulthess (A1916/26) col.521. However, Schleiermacher had recognised that systematic theology, if constructed on the basis of the historical study of religion did not "seem to exclude the possibility that a person could be a master of dogmatic theology without...himself believing in what he expounded, just as a man may have the knowledge of the interconnection of propositions in philosophical systems which he does not himself accept" (*The Christian Faith*, p.88). Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.14f.

21 Cf. "Theologie und Religionswissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts" (A1902/13) pp.115f. Cf. "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.126. For Troeltsch's view of Biedermann, see Review of Fleisch (A1903/12) cols. 1213-1214.

22 Martin Rade (op. cit., col. 2189) suggests that Lagarde was the "real father" of *Religionsgeschichte*, as does Kattenbusch (in *Die deutsche Theologie seit Schleiermacher*, p.66): "Paul de Lagarde was the founder

the study of philology, Lagarde had formed an ideal of theology as the "comparative universal science of religion" capable of assessing the development and comparative value (Stufenunterschiede) of religions.²³ He

divorced the evolutionary development of religion from all dogmatic and metaphysical application and called for impartial, dedicated study of the history of religion that would make use of every available means of conscientious research.²⁴

Lagarde's achievement was in showing that religion

had to be an object of science, yet that such a science would not yield a philosophically exhausted religion robbed of all hope and power of prayer, but rather would yield renewed life for the essential forces of Christianity.²⁵

Troeltsch's admiration for Lagarde is emphasised in the second volume of his collected works, to whose memory it is dedicated.²⁶ In the preface, he suggests that just as

[of the historical study of religion]". Cf. Lotz, op. cit., pp.163ff.; Graf, "Der >Systematiker<", p.240, p.250; Stern, "Paul de Lagarde and a Germanic Religion" in *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, p.42n.; Schütte, "Theologie als Religionsgeschichte. Das Reformprogramm Paul de Lagardes", p.111-120; and most recently, Robert Hanhart, "Paul Anton de Lagarde und seine Kritik an der Theologie", in *Theologie in Göttingen*, pp.271-305, esp. pp.300ff.

23 "Theologie und Religionswissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts" (A1902/13) p.120.

24 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) p.78.

25 "Theologie und Religionswissenschaft des 19. Jahrhunderts" (A1902/13) p.20. See esp. Hanhart, op. cit., for Lagarde's conception of theology as science.

26 *Zur religiösen Lage* (G.S.II) (A1913/13). Cf. Fritz Stern, op. cit., p.35n.

Ritschl had inspired the work which led to the writing of G.S.I, so Lagarde, despite all his shortcomings (especially his anti-Semitism), had provided the impetus for the collection of essays presented in G.S.II.²⁷

In the 1903 essay, "Die theologische und religiöse Lage der Gegenwart", Troeltsch regarded Lagarde as "one of the most stimulating and important theologians, if at the same time one of the strangest".²⁸ His

Deutsche Schriften, cast in such powerful prose, have in spite of everything, finally made the impact that his great and important ideas deserve...[And this not merely amongst theologians] but especially among laymen; he placed the gravity and the greatness of all these questions before their heart and conscience.²⁹

There is possibly a second more tactical reason for Troeltsch's emphasis on his indebtedness to Lagarde, which concerned the place of Luther in the modern world. Ritschl, as has been shown, regarded Luther as of supreme relevance for the contemporary balance between faith and ethics. This is particularly emphasised in the *Festrede* Ritschl gave in 1883 before the University of Göttingen on the occasion of the four hundredth anniversary of Luther's birth.³⁰ Lagarde

27 *Zur religiösen Lage* (A1913/13) p.viif. Lagarde's influence spread far and wide and permeated many aspects of German culture. This is well documented by Fritz Stern, op. cit., pp.3-96, esp. pp.40ff. However, he emphasises the over-riding importance of Lagarde's religious thought: "it was as a religious thinker, as a freelance theologian and critic on the fringes of orthodoxy, that Lagarde had the most lasting influence on German thought."

28 "Die theologische und religiöse Lage" (A1903/16a) p.19.

29 *ibid.* p.19f.

30 This has been published in English as an appendix to Lotz, *Ritschl and Luther*, pp.187-202. On the conflict between Lagarde and Ritschl, see esp. Lotz, pp.163ff., and Hanhart, op. cit., p.290f.

regarded Luther as a sectarian and consequently objected to honouring the great Reformer's birth. Ritschl's speech was a step by step repudiation of Lagarde's view of Luther.³¹ In honouring Lagarde, Troeltsch was perhaps emphasising the impotence of a modern day protestantism which attempted to revitalise the tradition of Luther and Lutheranism. As becomes clear in his reformulation of theology upon a *religionsgeschichtlichen* basis, Troeltsch saw the need to create a synthesis capable of fulfilment in the modern world, and not a return to antique formulations: religion had to be instilled with life.³²

Lagarde's idea of a science of religion (Religionswissenschaft),³³ was paralleled in the new faculties of *Religionswissenschaft* which grew up at the end of the nineteenth century in Holland (1876) and Switzerland

31 Cf. Lotz, op. cit., p.166; Otto Ritschl, *Albrecht Ritschls Leben*, Bd.II, p.420; Fritz Stern, op. cit., p.16f.

32 For Lagarde's view of the total impotence of Protestantism, at least after 1648, see Stern, op. cit., pp.43ff. Although Troeltsch does not adopt Lagarde's racial views on the need for a German Christianity, he continues to assert the need for a vital and irrational life-force to invigorate all rational philosophical and theological constructions. What prevents Troeltsch's system from a collapse into pure conservative vitalism, however, is his insistence on the importance of rational structure. On this point, see Klemens von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism: Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century*, esp. pp.43-70. See below, Chapter 6.122.

33 On the concept of *Religionswissenschaft*, see Welch, op. cit., vol.II, pp.123-135, and "Wesen der Religion und Religionswissenschaft" (A1906/5b) for Troeltsch's clearest statement of the relationship between *Religionswissenschaft* and religion and theology.

(1879).³⁴ Troeltsch moves beyond a strictly "scientific" study of religion, since he was concerned with the adoption of the historical comparative method into the discipline of theology, with the practical implications of the historical method.³⁵

5.13 The "religionsgeschichtliche" method.

Building upon the work of the nineteenth century pioneers, the new generation of biblical scholars successfully applied the historical method particularly in the field of biblical studies.³⁶ For Troeltsch, it was this very success that was a vindication of the historical method:

If the lever of the historical method has raised the level of our understanding of Christian history, then by so doing it has also demonstrated that the fulcrum of a universally historical mode of

34 Cf. Martin Rade, "Religionsgeschichte", col.2185. On the growth of "comparative religion" as a discipline, see the article "Friedrich Max Müller and the Comparative Study of Religion" by J.M. Kitagawa and John S. Strang, in Smart, et. al., (ed), *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, Vol. III., pp.179-213. Troeltsch's conception of the historical method has been compared to the "socio-historical method" that was prevalent in America at the same time, particularly in the "Chicago School" of Shirley Jackson Case and Shailer Matthews. Brian Gerrish, (in "Protestantism and Progress: an Anglo-Saxon view of Troeltsch", esp. pp.35-42) argues that there was no obvious direct influence from Troeltsch.

35 Cf. "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.197, ET p.56: "Scientific theology...is resolutely unconcerned about the practical and dogmatic implications of its results". Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.370 (On Max Müller): "He left the question open as to *norms* in religion." Cf. Review of Hébert (A1907/12), col. 1306, where Troeltsch points to the need for rational criteria in the comparative study of religion.

36 Cf. Rade, op. cit., cols. 2187-2189.

thinking is true.³⁷

The leading exponents were Hermann Gunkel in the Old Testament, and William Wrede and Wilhelm Bousset in the New Testament, each of whom attempted, in different ways, to put the thought forms of the bible into their historical context.³⁸

Their findings could be shocking, appearing to shatter the foundations of religion.³⁹ Thus Gunkel:

37 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.85.

38 Cf. Gunkel *Reden und Aufsätze*, p.v: "Historical exegesis is...contextual explanation (Erklärung aus dem Zusammenhang)"; Wrede, *Vorträge und Studien*, p.74: "To explain is to place something in the context of its historical development". On this point, see Bodenstein (op. cit.), p.37: "They freed Christianity, especially the process of its origin, from its religious isolation and plunged it into the greater context of ancient culture"; Cf. Ittel, (op. cit.), p.66: "the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* proceeded from the historical study of its own religion, but this necessitated using a method of analogy which naturally led to drawing out the position of Christianity within the general sphere of *Religionsgeschichte*". Cf. Graf, "Der >Systematiker<...", p.240f. For contemporaneous British assessments of the School, see Robert Mackintosh, op. cit., p.246: "The History-of-Religion school stands for explaining Christianity, as far as possible, by contemporary conditions". Cf. H.R. Mackintosh, "Does the historical study...?", p.505: "In Kipling's words: 'What can they know of England who only England know'...How can we reach truth at all except as we define various types of religion by contrast to one another, thus fixing and authenticating by reference to history the beliefs and practices that are relatively highest." As will become clear, the relationship of Johannes Weiss and Harnack to the "School" was ambivalent. Even though Weiss had rediscovered apocalyptic (R. Mackintosh, op. cit., p.242) he remained at crucial points a Ritschlian dogmatician. (On this point, see Graf, *ibid.*, pp.258-265, and Lüdemann, op. cit., p.334). See below, Chapter 7.1.

39 Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) p.127.

We Christians have come to the acceptance that everything good and valuable in religion could only derive from Israel, but with absolutely no justification.⁴⁰

Troeltsch summarised their achievement:

[Biblical research] has been gradually compelled to illuminate the beginnings of Israelite religion through analogies with the religions of other Semitic peoples: to connect the deep original transformation of the religion of Yahweh to the general situation of the Near-East with its catastrophes and its general cultural and religious horizon...and to illuminate the growth of the Christian Church by the interaction between earliest Christianity and its location within the Roman Empire.⁴¹

Indeed, by "virtue of these relations", Christianity

showed that it was a thoroughly concrete, limited and conditioned movement.⁴²

Troeltsch summarised the effect of historical researches on cherished truths in the closing pages of *The Absoluteness*:

Till such comparison takes place, the temporary position that any given religion maintains with regard to its knowledge of the higher life seems ultimate and unique.⁴³

40 Gunkel, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des neuen Testaments*, p.1. Bultmann summed up the achievement of the "school" (preface to Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, p.xii): "they pushed the ideas of the New Testament back into the past, and over against the middle-class conception of Christianity, brought the strangeness of the New Testament startlingly to light". The importance of the work of the school becomes apparent in the destruction of the liberal picture of Jesus. Hence Naumann could say of Jesus: "Had he a cultural ideal at all?...It is hard to think of ourselves, as Kierkegaard demands, as his contemporaries" (cited in Ward, *Theology, Sociology and Politics*, p.99).

41 "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie" (A1900/9a) p.733.

42 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) p.71.

43 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) p.158. Cf. Troeltsch's review of Dorner (A1917/4) where he recognises that historical criticism can "never find

The conclusions reached by the various members of the *religionsgeschichtlichen Schule* often differed significantly;⁴⁴ yet, despite this, they were united against the sort of role for *Religionsgeschichte* in the theological faculty outlined by Harnack in his essay, "Die Aufgabe der theologischen Fakultäten und die allgemeine Religionsgeschichte".⁴⁵ On this view, theology did not

harmony, but only tension, contradiction and riddles" (col.87).

44 Cf. Ittel, op. cit., esp. sect. III, for a discussion of the various conclusions arrived at by the different members of the "school".

45 in Adolf von Harnack, *Reden und Aufsätze*, II, pp.159-187. For Troeltsch's reply to this essay, see *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.26f. and p.169 n.6, where Harnack is seen as a representative of "evolutionary apologetic"; the "Gospel" stood for "religion itself". (Cf. Welch, op. cit., Vol.II, p.125f.). Harnack's criterion for the assessment of religion derived from a "Gospel" isolated from its surroundings and guaranteed in the last resort by experience. It was dependent upon non-historical conditions, and the *religionsgeschichtliche* principles outlined at the beginning of his *Dogmengeschichte*⁴, Tübingen, 1909, (Bd. I, p.12), (ET, *History of Dogma*, p.9), that "theology is dependent on innumerable factors, above all the spirit of the time", are severely restricted. Harnack criticised his predecessors for establishing an arbitrary essence of Christianity instead of investigating the actual conditions in which the dogmas arose: "Instead of investigating the actual conditions in which believing and intelligent men have been placed, an essence of Christianity has been constructed, out of which (as out of a Pandora's box) all doctrines have been formed, have been extracted and have been legitimised as Christian" (p.15, ET p.13). However, he then promptly set up a criterion based upon the "plain and simple" truths embodied in the personality of Jesus. (Cf. p.69, ET p.59; p.81, ET p.71). Harnack aims to establish a simple criterion for establishing what is definitively Christian, namely the Gospel. On the problem of the "Essence of Christianity", see below, Chapter 7.22.

require *Religionsgeschichte*, for the simple reason that in knowing the one religion, the Christian was presented with the paradigm for all religions. Whoever knows the one religion knows all religions:⁴⁶

We desire that the theological faculties should remain for the study of the Christian religion, because, in its pure state, Christianity is not a religion, *alongside* the others, but is *the* religion...Some forms of Christian piety, especially the highest, just do not have parallels.⁴⁷

Troeltsch's own critique of the Harnackian method had already taken shape in the eighth thesis which he presented as part of his doctoral examination, which is directed against the sort of special Church history which is separated from general history. According to Troeltsch, this has no place in the modern theological faculty:

The so-called church-history and the history of the Christian religion are to be firmly differentiated; it is only the latter that has a bearing upon theological science (Wissenschaft).⁴⁸

46 Harnack, "Die Aufgabe", p.168.

47 Harnack, "Die Aufgabe", p.172. For the relationship between Harnack and the members of the *religionsgeschichtlichen* school, see Rade, op. cit., col.2185. Cf. "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.205 n.7, ET p.63 n.4 (amended): "[The Ritschlian historians] with such a weighty researcher as Harnack as their head, treat those points of history given prominence by the religious value-judgement very differently from the rest of history. Thus they make those high points (Hauptpunkte) into objective religious authorities and designate their effect as perceived by religious experience as the foundation (Stiftung) of redemption amongst unredeemed humanity". However, Troeltsch recognised in the same essay (p.209, ET p.66), that "with Harnack biblicism is ready to flow into pure history of religions".

48 Eighth Thesis (A1891/1a) p.299.

This emphasis becomes crucial in Troeltsch's method in *Die Soziallehren* which formed the bulk of his own researches into the history of religions. Here, the history of doctrine was treated as a history of Christian-clerical culture which marked a "complete parallel to Harnack's *History of Dogma*".⁴⁹

It was against the absolutising of Christianity or its isolation from the rest of reality that the members of the "School" directed their efforts. For Troeltsch, this was significantly different from the use to which the *religionsgeschichtliche* method had been put by the Ritschlians. Troeltsch affirmed that

Religionsgeschichte is no mere apologetic tool to show the peculiarity of Christianity but rather treats all the great founders and leaders the same.⁵⁰

This contrasts with the outline of the role of *Religionsgeschichte* given by A.W. Hunzinger in a short polemical pamphlet of 1909. Hunzinger admits that the *religionsgeschichtliche Methode* is of service to theology, but merely because it shows that Christianity is without analogy and thus special:

The *religionsgeschichtliche Methode* serves theology by pointing to the real basis of faith, so that everything ethnic, secondary and merely human is removed in order to concentrate on the core (Kern) and the essence of the basis of salvation (Heilsgrundlagen).⁵¹

49 "Meine Bücher" (A1921/29b) p.11. Cf. esp., "Was heisst >Wesen des Christentums<?" (A1903/18a).

50 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.8.

51 A.W. Hunzinger, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Methode*, p.35.

Troeltsch's delineation of the historical method, which will be discussed in detail in the next section, is aimed against those who sought a dogmatic isolation of Christianity from the universally applicable canons of the historical method. This provides a parallel to Troeltsch's attack on the philosophical isolationism of Marburg neo-Kantianism discussed in the previous Chapter. The *Geschichtsphilosophie der Religion*, and the epistemology and psychology of religion as discussed in the previous chapters, are two sides of the same coin: both aimed at providing the philosophical basis for a synthesis between the world and religion. Troeltsch's contention was that, if theology were to remain relevant, then it would have to maintain a contact with the modern world, whatever its threats and constrictions. Any isolation of Christianity, regardless of its theological or philosophical justification, rendered religion and theology superfluous.⁵²

52 Cf. Nietzsche in *Human, All too Human*: "Who worries about theology apart from the theologians"?

5.2 The historical and dogmatic methods.

Troeltsch attempted to formulate the method which had been adopted by the *religionsgeschichtliche* school, emphasising the intimate connection between religion and history, against what he saw as the artificial isolation of absolutes made by his opponents.¹ His clearest statements of the historical method were developed in response to Ritschlian critics. The most important of these is the essay, "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie",² which was published in reply to Niebergall's essay, "Ueber die Asolutheit des Christentums".³ In this essay, Troeltsch gives a concise summary of the principles which guide the historical method, and places them alongside the dogmatic presuppositions which guided the theological work of his opponents.⁴

1 Cf. "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.333.

2 A1900/9a.

3 *Theologische Arbeiten aus dem rheinischen wissenschaftlichen Predigerverein*, N.F.4, 1900, pp.46-86. Troeltsch and Niebergall, a pupil of Julius Kaftan's, had long been adversaries. During his brief time as *Extraordinarius* in Bonn (1892-94), Troeltsch had developed the ideas for what was later to be published as "Die christliche Weltanschauung und ihre wissenschaftlichen Gegenströmungen" (A1894/1) as a course of summer refresher lectures for Rhineland preachers, in whose journal Niebergall's essay was first published. (Cf. Graf, "Profile: Spuren in Bonn", T.S.I, pp.103-31). Niebergall later moved to Heidelberg as Privatdozent in the Winter-Semester of 1903-4. (Cf. Heidelberger Vorlesungsverzeichnis, 1903-4).

4 Cf. esp., "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie" (A1900/9a) pp.731-733. Cf. "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a). Primitive Christianity became a source, not a proof, for Christianity. Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.32.

The three principles Troeltsch delineated in the essay "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode" are possibly his most well-known contribution to theology.⁵ He summarised them in *The Absoluteness*:

The Christian religion is in every moment of its history a purely historical phenomenon, subject to all the limitations to which any individual historical phenomenon is exposed, just like the other great religions.⁶

The three principles were firstly, all religious tradition had to be open to criticism: it had to be explicable in terms of the laws of possibility and probability.⁷ Secondly, what had happened in times past had to be analogous to normal everyday experience. "Jewish and Christian history are analogous to all other history".⁸ This was the principle of

5 Eg. Van Harvey (in *The Historian and the Believer*, pp.14-19) begins his account of history and faith with a summary of this essay as marking a definitive statement of the historical method. Gerhard Sauter's collection *Theologie als Wissenschaft* contains a reprint of this essay. Other works which discuss Troeltsch's principles are Runzo, *Reason, Relativism and God*, pp.24-28; Mackintosh, "Does the historical study of religions yield a systematic theology?", p.508ff; John Bowden, *Jesus: The unanswered questions*, pp.153-160; James Luther Adams, in the introduction to the English edition of *The Absoluteness*, p.9f.; Bodenstein, op. cit., p.38; Apfelbacher, op. cit., pp.209ff.; Abraham, *Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism*, pp.92ff.; Pannenberg, "Redemptive Event and History"; Lüdemann, op. cit., pp.358ff.; and most recently, Sarah Coakley, op. cit., p.24ff.

6 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.85.

7 Cf. "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.336, "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.6. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) sect. 2.4, p.22. Cf. Coakley, op. cit., p.25f.

8 "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode" (A1900/9a) p.732.

the fundamental similarity of all historical occurrences. Thirdly, the phenomenon of religion, although independent of all other phenomena, could only be assessed in so far as it was correlated with the rest of historical and spiritual life.⁹ Without this method there could be no genuine progress in theology comparable with the progress which had been made in other historical disciplines.

To the orthodox and to the Ritschlians, however, this method seemed to be the very "devil incarnate".¹⁰ Yet for Troeltsch, it was the only one which could be consistent with the modern scientific view of the world:

Once it is applied in biblical scholarship (Wissenschaft) and Church History, [the historical method] is a leaven which transforms everything and which finally destroys all previous theological methods.¹¹

All "our reasearches into the essences and goals of the human

9 "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie" (A1900/9a) pp.731-733. Cf. "Rückblick" (A1909/18a), p.214, ET p.71 (amended): "This entanglement (Verschlingung) of Christianity in the universal (allgemein) context of the history of religions with all its analogies and real connections, and in currents of ordinary (allgemein) practical and intellectual life, places it completely in the stream of the historical process (geschichtlichen Werdens)". Cf. Coakley, op. cit., pp.26ff.

10 In a discussion of the nature of Troeltsch's relativism, Sarah Coakley emphasises its limited nature. Troeltsch's object is to attack Niebergall's (and Kaftan's) supernaturalism: "When Troeltsch says that historical method 'relativises all truths', he simply wishes to discount this particular way of artificially (or 'dogmatically') guaranteeing the 'supra-historical' core of Christian origins" (Coakley, op. cit., p.26). See below, Chapter 6.15.

11 "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie" (A1900/9a) p.730.

spirit rested upon this method."¹²

The Ritschlians had failed to draw out the full consequences from the historical method. According to Troeltsch, Julius Kaftan, for instance, had refused to pursue the logic of his own thought:

To see all that is non-Christian as the product of sin is merely a product of theology and reflexion, especially of the need to localise salvation firmly in the church. To naïve religion this idea is quite alien...*Religionsgeschichte* is no mere apologetic tool to show the peculiarity of Christianity, but rather treats all the great founders and leaders the same.¹³

Kaftan saw other religions merely as formal analogues yet, Troeltsch contended,

in reality these other religions have no idea that they are postulates...Reality does not show the analogy of postulate and fulfilment, but only related religious attitudes to life.¹⁴

Troeltsch's criticism of the dogmatic method is put most clearly in Chapter Two of *The Absoluteness of Christianity*. According to Troeltsch, the dogmatic method was nothing but a complete perversion of history, since it attempted to isolate

12 "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie" (A1900/9a) p.736. Cf. "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.338: "The science of history has forced us to look at the driving forces and unifying forces as never before." Cf. Wendland, "Wesen des Christentums" in R.G.G.¹, (Vol.V., cols.1967-73), col.1968: "We need no other method than that used in the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften)...The hard facts of history are the objective moment which stands behind our subjectivity. What the essence of Christianity is, only history will yield". See below, Chapter 7.2.

13 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.8. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Toward a theology of the History of Religions", p.67 n.4, for a restatement of Troeltsch's critique.

14 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.17f. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.11: "The desire to see every form of non-Christian piety as a postulate is an impossibility."

certain individual facts of history from any possibility of analogy.¹⁵ The dogmatic method implied a special "Christian epistemology",¹⁶ since Christianity was "dogmatically isolated from its connections with its environment".¹⁷ Although it was perfectly consistent,¹⁸ the dogmatic method could not presume to be a scientific method, since it presumed to perceive absolute truth from an absolute standpoint in a historical fact:

Today one calls every possible kind of thing historical (geschichtlich) and factual (Tatsache) which is not and should not be; rather it is the reverse because it is a miracle affirmed through faith.¹⁹

15 "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie" (A1900/9a) p.740.

16 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.81.

17 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.32.

18 Cf. "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie" (A1900/9a) p.745. Cf. "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.10.

19 "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie" (A1900/9a) p.741. Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.83. Cf. Review of Steinbeck (A1901/11) col.712: "Their [i.e. the Ritschlians'] intention was to remove the historical critical method and analogy with universal human happening and erect a theological history which is not history but dogma. It is gruesome theological scholastic". Cf. "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori" (A1909/31a) p.766: "The individuality of Christian theology is in the contents of its object, not in special theological methods of research and proof". Cf. Review of Reischle (A1904/8) col.616: "We are back in the 18th. Century again with the problem of miracles, and we will have to start all over again". For Troeltsch's view of miracle, see his review of Lipsius (A1905/2) col.209.

Troeltsch summarises this point in *The Absoluteness*, where he emphasises over and over again that "to wish to possess the absolute in an absolute way at a particular point in history is a delusion".²⁰ In speaking of the systems of "exclusive supernaturalism", he says, the

demand for 'absoluteness' is satisfied when Christianity has been traced to an immediate divine causality...Absoluteness here consists of miracle. It is the absoluteness of a Christian Sunday causality in antithesis to the relativity and mediacy of a non-Christian weekday causality.²¹

Troeltsch sees his own method as preferable to that of the Ritschlians, since rather than building upon the isolated judgement of a small community, it builds upon the whole of the tradition. The historian's own standpoint is recognised as relative to his or her own position and there is no attempt to absolutise it; under this recognition, as much of the tradition as possible is assessed in order to construct a new criterion to distinguish truth. Truth is not guaranteed by the isolation of a particular historical fact,²² but from the attempt to obtain a universal standpoint, that is, by the philosophy of *Religionsgeschichte*.²³ In this manner, the

20 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.122.

21 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.52f. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.36.

22 Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.64: "The modern idea of history, as it has taken shape in connexion with the object of its inquiries, knows no concept of a universal principle".

23 Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.65. Troeltsch concedes that in his earlier works, he may not have been careful enough to distinguish between the levels of empirical historical investigation [which cannot involve universals] and the philosophy of history [where universals are applied to history]. Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.28.

study of history, at least in so far as it was to be appropriated by the theologian, naturally led to the study of the metaphysics of history. Consequently metaphysics could not be separated from theology, as the Ritschlians had attempted:

I believe that it is a vain effort to attempt to exclude metaphysics from religion, which in its essence is the primitive form of metaphysics.²⁴

In his debates with the Ritschlians, this move to the universal, and consequently to the philosophy and metaphysics of history, became ever more apparent.²⁵

24 Review of Marshall (A1903/11), col.1017. See below, Chapter 7.12.

25 According to Walter Köhler's account of the astonishing "walkout" at Eisenach in 1896 (op. cit., p.1), it would seem that Troeltsch's relationships with the Ritschlians, particularly his erstwhile friend, Julius Kaftan, were rather acrimonious. (On Troeltsch's relationship with Kaftan, see Horst Renz, "Eine unbekannte Preisarbeit über Lotze", (in T.S. I), p.55). This meeting of the friends of the *Christliche Welt* on 5th October 1896 was the occasion of Troeltsch's remark that "Everything is tottering". In response to Kaftan's lecture on the doctrine of the *logos*, Troeltsch jumped up to respond, starting "Es wackelt alles". When Kattenbusch reproached him, Troeltsch stormed from the room, slamming the door behind him. This event had a profound influence on Troeltsch. He wrote to Bousset (27/1/1897), that "I am in any case finished with Kaftan personally and want to have nothing more to do with him" (in Renz, op. cit., T.S. I, p.55 n.25). After the Eisenach Congress Troeltsch felt himself increasingly isolated, and saw his essay, "Religion und Kirche" of 1896 to be "a decisive breach with Kaftan, and probably also with Herrmann" (Letter to Bousset (G1976/1) p.31-2). Cf. Yasukata, op. cit., pp.8ff; Coakley, op. cit., p.60 n.34; Pauck, *Harnack and Troeltsch*, p.65f. It is thus an oversimplification to suggest, as did Karl Barth in a discussion of his years in Marburg as editorial assistant to Martin Rade, that the semi-popular journal, *Die Christliche Welt* presented a single theological position, even though it may have been the single most representative culture-protestant journal of the time (Timm, op. cit., p.19). Cf. J. Rathje, *Die Welt des freien Protestantismus*, p.463. J.R.C. Wright (in *Above Parties*) sees *Die Christliche Welt* as being primarily concerned with the need to justify liberal theology against conservative orthodoxy. However, although the

5.21 The historical method and its Ritschlian critics.

Troeltsch was naturally subjected to a great deal of criticism from the Ritschlians, most actively from Julius Kaftan, Max Reischle, and Friedrich Traub.²⁶ For Troeltsch's opponents, his reliance on a subjective response to history meant that revelation depended on human response and not on objective fact. This philosophy of history could never satisfy those such as Julius Kaftan, who saw modern

contributors shared in the attack on orthodoxy, the journal represented all shades of liberal opinions which were often set against one another.

²⁶ See esp., J. Kaftan, "Die Selbständigkeit des Christentums", (Z.Th.K. VI, 1896 pp.379-394), written in response to Troeltsch's "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/1 & 2), to which Troeltsch responded with "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2), which in turn provoked "Erwiderung", (Z.Th.K. VIII, 1898 pp.70-96). (On Kaftan, see Robert Mackintosh, op. cit., p.235-9; Rupp, *Culture Protestantism*, p.17f; Coakley, op. cit., p.17f.). Max Reischle's "Historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie" (Th.R. 1901, pp.261-75, 305-24) was a response to Troeltsch's essay "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode" (A1900/9). Cf. his *Theologie und Religionsgeschichte. Fünf Vorlesungen gehalten auf den Ferienkurs in Hannover im Okt. 1903*, a response to *Die Absolutheit*. Cf. Fr. Traub, "Die religionsgeschichtliche Methode und die systematische Theologie: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Tröltschs theologischen Reformprogramm" (Z.Th.K. XI, 1901, 301-40). For Troeltsch's discussion of these critics, see esp., *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.30, p.165 n., p.168 n.4, p.169 n.2. For a brief discussion of the debates, Cf. Rupp, op. cit., pp.20-23; Bodenstein, op. cit., p.69ff.; E.W. Mayer, "Wesen der Religion" in R.G.G.¹, Vol.V., col.1963; Coakley, op. cit., Chapter two.

science as marked by an all-pervasive empiricism, a "gradual emancipation from philosophy and perhaps, more importantly, from metaphysics".²⁷ Kaftan responded to Troeltsch by affirming that the absoluteness of Christianity was not guaranteed through a philosophy of history, but rather, "the roots of religion rest in inner personal life",²⁸ mediated through the Christian community.²⁹

Philosophies, Kaftan contended, came and went, but Christianity remained the same, and was guaranteed by an inner conviction.³⁰ For Kaftan, the criterion for the assessment of historical phenomena was not arrived at using a metaphysical or philosophical method, but rather was derived from a revelation which was presented directly to the individual.³¹ According to Kaftan, Troeltsch's method could in reality guarantee nothing, since it was of necessity

27 Julius Kaftan "Die Selbständigkeit des Christentums" in Z.Th.K., 1896, pp.373-94. Cf. "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.31.

28 Kaftan, op. cit., p.378f.

29 Kaftan, op. cit., p.380.

30 Kaftan, op. cit., p.382.

31 Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.169 n.2: "I can only reply that such a 'Christian epistemology' without the 'Christian causality' that belongs to it strikes me as an artificial, incomplete sort of thing. If abandoned, it permits the development of a plain and natural view of the great rival types of religion, a balanced attitude towards them, and the establishment of this attitude on the theory of a common if differently realised goal."

subjective: it was like "children who speak loudly in a dark room, in order to drive away their fear".³² Kaftan contended that Troeltsch failed to recognise the quite special way of conceiving religious phenomena required by faith in the absoluteness of the revelation of Jesus Christ:

Whoever maintains the independence of Christianity also confesses the absolute truth of the Christian faith.³³

Troeltsch responded to Kaftan in the essay "Geschichte und Metaphysik".³⁴ Unlike Kaftan, Troeltsch could not allow for a special way of perceiving historical events as absolute: indeed the very possibility that supernatural events could be perceived in history was a "dangerous experiment".³⁵ The recognition of absolutes in history required a criterion

32 Kaftan, op. cit., p.388.

33 Kaftan, op. cit., p.387. H.R. Mackintosh, ("Does the historical study...?", p.510) accepted these tenets of the Ritschlians: "the Christian Gospel, in no sense lives and moves and has its being in the pure vacuum of historical science. Rooted in history once for all, it yet stands in another richer context". Cf. p. 519: "With all their brilliant service to the cause of biblical exegesis, they are useless for the purposes of Christian theology. For there is no evading the principle laid down by the instinctive feeling of the Church: unless a theologian takes the specifically Christian attitude to Jesus...he is not a Christian theologian any more."

34 A1898/2. According to Troeltsch, this essay, which was not included in G.S. II, was "strongly Hegelian". Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.168 n4. Although there is much talk of principles and absolutes, the absolute is not *identified* with any particular historical person or principle: its content, even in this more Hegelian phase, was left open to the future.

35 "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1895/2) p.373.

derived from an assessment of history itself: "The criterion grows in and with history itself".³⁶ "Understanding of history has to be drawn from history".³⁷

Thus the criterion for judging *Religionsgeschichte* was not something given before the process of abstraction from history in the sense of being an *a priori* necessity, but rather was developed in the process of abstraction itself:

The dangers [of the historical method] can only be overcome through a metaphysics of history which raises up the kernel of the simple, abiding and true in historical development on the basis of a belief in the rationality of human history.³⁸

The recognition of the simple, abiding and true which was required to give history significance and meaning rested upon faith, and not in a revelation of the absolute at some point in the past:

Ideals derive from and are effective in history but they are made effective in it only through *faith*, and in the last analysis can only be grounded in faith...History and the formation of ideals are not separate, but are directed to one another.³⁹

Kaftan found a latent Hegelianism in Troeltsch's system as expounded in "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion":⁴⁰ the

36 "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1896/1) p.78. Cf. (A1895/2) p.376.

37 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.88f.

38 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.68. Cf. p.65; "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.181f.

39 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.32f. Cf. p.45.

40 Cf. Coakley, (op. cit. p.55) who sees a kind of oscillation between Hegelianism and the value-judgement Ritschlianism in this essay: "the language of claim may have largely fallen away but the theme lurks".

Prinzip appeared to have been separated from the historical Christ-event. The logic of Troeltsch's metaphysical position appeared to lead to this position. He seemed to have failed to allow for God's decisive revelation to enter history. Kaftan maintained an *Entweder-Oder*,⁴¹ whereas Troeltsch aimed to mediate between the metaphysical idea and the concrete manifestation in Jesus Christ:

To aim the pistol of the either/or at a person is typical of the dogmatic method, while a contextual consideration of both/and is characteristic of the historical.⁴²

For Troeltsch, the *Prinzip* was not an abstract idea stemming from a metaphysics of the absolute but could only be apprehended as a living power in the course of history itself.⁴³ His separation of the Person and the *Prinzip* was chiefly aimed against a biblicism that restricted Christianity entirely to the New Testament.⁴⁴ The Hegelian

41 Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.31, p.35.

42 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.35. Cf. p.90: "The problem faced by the modern approach to history is not that of making an either/or choice between relativism and absolutism, but that of how to combine the two." Cf. Ogletree, *Christian Faith and History*, p.40.

43 Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.104, p.170 n.5, where Troeltsch is careful to make a clearer distinction between his system and that of Hegel's than he had done in "Die Selbständigkeit". Cf. Coakley, op. cit., p.61, p.63, where she argues that Troeltsch never denied the need for the person of Christ, (against Pannenberg, in "Redemptive Event and History" in *Basic Questions in Theology*, Volume One, pp.15-80, esp. pp.40-50). For Troeltsch's conception of the *Prinzip* of Christianity, see below, Chapter 7.24.

44 Cf. "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.61, p.63. Troeltsch consistently affirms that he was no Hegelian. His theories stemmed not from a metaphysics of the absolute, but of history. Cf. "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) pp.41,45,56, "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.361, "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.262, *The Absoluteness*, Chapter 2, esp. p.77. Contra Paul, op. cit., p.149: "Troeltsch's desire

tone of the essay "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (where he talks of Christianity as the "convergence point") is moderated in *The Absoluteness*, but the basic point is the same in both:

The modern understanding of history knows no evolutionary development in which an actual law-regulated universal principle produces values that are universally authentic. It knows, finally, no absolute realisation of such a universal principle within the context of history where as a matter of fact, only phenomena that are uniquely defined and thus possess individual character are brought forth at any given point.⁴⁵

The contrast between the two types of absoluteness implied by the historical and the dogmatic methods is the chief thrust of *The Absoluteness*. For Troeltsch, despite the fact that the historical method leads to an inevitable relativisation of religious phenomena as they become objects of universal history,⁴⁶ it is still possible for the human

to answer the Hegelian questions about the meaning of history, complete with a simultaneous rejection of the Hegelian speculative approach and an insistence on the modern empirical method, plagued his philosophy of history throughout his entire career". Contra G. von Schlippe, (*Die Absolutheit des Christentums bei Ernst Troeltsch auf dem Hintergrund der Denkfelder des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Neustadt, 1966, p.51f.), who maintains three stages of absoluteness on the basis of Troeltsch's original Hegelianism and the gradual adoption of a cultural theology.

45 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.67. Troeltsch regards Dorner's Christ-Principle "as simply an abomination for my historical realism" (Review of August Dorner (A1917/4) col.87). Coakley regards any Hegelianism as very temporary (op. cit. p.58): "This new-found adulation of Hegel was not to last more than a couple of years without rather drastic modification".

46 Cf. "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.353.

being to recognise movement towards the realisation of absolute goals.⁴⁷

The theologian does not need to resort to the exclusive supernaturalism of the orthodox or the Ritschlians, or the Hegelian metaphysics of the absolute, since

simple normative value is something distinct from exclusively supernatural revelation and likewise from absolute fulfilment of the principle of religion.⁴⁸

The choice facing the theologian was not that of the either/or of naive prejudice or anarchistic scepticism, but rather

the only course that remains is the kind of scientific enquiry in which humans strive as best they can to comprehend the empirical, historical reality and to acquire norms from history by conscientious comparison and reflection.⁴⁹

5.22 The move to philosophy of history: The absoluteness of Christianity and the reconciliation of nature and spirit.

The dogmatic method, far from being a last bastion of absoluteness, was nothing more than relativism and irrationalism taken to its extreme: for the dogmatic theologian there could be no access to truth from the relative perspective of the human being, except through an

47 Cf. *ibid.*

48 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.57.

49 *ibid.* ET p.105.

irrational decision to accept certain facts as supernaturally guaranteeing truth. For Troeltsch, however, it was impossible to locate the absolute as wholly revealed in any concrete event, personality or institution:

Humans must learn that in the arena of the religious life there is no absolute miracle which represents the truth supernaturally at one particular point or in one particular institution, but rather every person and every era must conquer the faith for itself with its own calculations (Rechnung) and with its own dangers, relying (aller Anlehnung) on the powers of history alone.⁵⁰

Despite this, he wished to affirm that such relativism, although an unavoidable aspect of the human condition, did not necessarily deprive Christianity of its basis, since the very propositions at the heart of the Christian religion were a systematisation of this condition and provided hope for human freedom and individuality in the renewed possibility for an ethicisation and a spiritualisation of the world. This was, in short, a union of spirit and nature, which lay at the heart of the idealist synthesis.⁵¹

The concern with the realm of spirit, with the absolute, with the universal, distinguished the theologian from the historian or social scientist:

What is of chief importance in this connection is the victory of the highest values and the incorporation of all reality into their frame of reference. Determinative at every point, therefore, is ethically oriented religious faith that includes the idea of an end, and this is something no scientific imagination can give. The assurance thus provided by faith need fear none of the effects of historical relativism.⁵²

50 "Katholizismus und Reformismus" (A1908/1), col.26.

51 For an account of Troeltsch's notion of relativism, see below, Chapter 6.15.

52 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.94.

Troeltsch made this point as early as in the essay "Die christliche Weltanschauung und ihre Gegenströmungen"⁵³ of 1894. Meaning can only be given to history by a faith which recognises a dominant truth (beherrschende Wahrheit) in history. History, as relative, can never show this ground or goal in its fulness.⁵⁴ The affirmation of an absolute goal can only ever be the role of religion.⁵⁵ It is only religion that concerns itself with absolutes, with the purpose, the goal of history:

In religion alone there is the single possible contact with the purpose of development.⁵⁶

What religion assured was the possibility of higher spiritual meaning despite all historical relativism and natural determinism. The ends of religion were the escape from the restrictions of nature and history itself whereby the universal might achieve reconciliation with the individual, and history would thus be spiritualised. The

53 (A1894/1a) p.309f.

54 "Die christliche Weltanschauung und ihre Gegenströmungen" (A1894/1a) p.316.

55 Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/1) p.80: "Without religion there is only history of culture".

56 "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.316. Cf. "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.351: "Religion takes universality as its core". Cf. p.362: "the human is longing after simple, absolute and universally valid laws, which can never be found in technological progress or positivism, but only in religion".

goal of development was thus the liberation from all natural, social and political particularities, to the wholly unconditioned, the universal itself.⁵⁷ For Troeltsch, the human being, as creature both of nature and spirit, is characterised by an inevitable dualism,⁵⁸ and by an inherent tension.⁵⁹ The ultimate goal is the reconciliation between the two in the union of nature and spirit. It is this move towards a union that spurs on human life.

In this context, "faith" is determinative, yet this is not a faith in a supernaturally revealed absolute, but rather a trust in universally valid goals *despite* the impossibility of these universals being fully embodied in history. History is the arena of the individual; the universal can never be fully united with this individual, since "this universally valid goal, considered as something perfect and complete...lies beyond history".⁶⁰ Despite this individuality and relativism, however, Troeltsch's contention was that

within the individual and non-recurrent, there is something universally valid - or something connected with the universally valid - which makes itself known at the same time. The problem is

57 Cf. "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.320f.

58 Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.190 where Troeltsch regards human nature as "standing in constant opposition". Cf. p.217.

59 Cf. Review of Dorner (A1917/4), col.87, where tension is seen as the hallmark of genuine theology.

60 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.98.

to hold these two together in the right relation...The

Enlightenment conception [of the universally valid] stood closer to the basic urgings of the human ethos and perceived the main tendencies of history perhaps more correctly than the modern study of history with its concern for the microscopic...The problem is to define the scope of the relative and individual with ever increasing exactness and to understand with ever increasing comprehensiveness the universally valid that works teleologically within history. Then we will see that the relative contains an indication of the unconditional. In the relative we will find a token of the absolute that transcends history.⁶¹

The nature of this absolute, the universal, implies that it must remain transcendent and function as a *goal* towards which all human (and therefore finite) religion is working:

The absolute is the *goal*, characterised by a boundlessness and otherworldliness that transcend all history.⁶²

It is thus the *future*, rather than the past, which becomes determinative for Troeltsch's theology:

What is really important is the push (*Drang*) to the future, the elevation (*Aufrichtung*) of a Christian ideal which is not a patching up (*Ausflickung*) and improvement of the existing, but an ever new order of life standing in opposition to the natural drives of life, but based on the religious concept rooted in Christ.⁶³

It is only "the future which holds the key in its fulness".⁶⁴

61 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.106.

62 *ibid.* ET p.147.

63 Review of Weinel (A1903/23) col.2992.

64 "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.350. Cf. p.359: "[The ends of religion] concern the future, not the contemporary confessional confusion". Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.89: "It is a unity which rests in a goal, not in history".

"Redemption" is a "deed of the future and not of the past".⁶⁵ Consequently the absolute "always remains a goal, out in front".⁶⁶ In looking at the future

we find a constant corrective for our own value constructions; that is, we supplement and broaden our own being (which is inclined to become constricted) and we dissolve all naïve attempts to isolate and absolutise that which is given.⁶⁷

Insofar as history is seen as progressing to this universal, it becomes the "unfolding of divine reason",⁶⁸ as certain events are seen as significant, moving history towards the absolute goal. Yet there is no *necessity* that such a goal should be realised:

They always represent a situationally informed striving toward a future goal, a goal that is not yet completely realised and has not yet become absolute.⁶⁹

This goal forms the faith that the human is not subject to the forces of nature or the domination of the powers of history over which there could be no control, that he or she is not imprisoned in the "iron cage" of history and nature, but rather can move history itself towards its universal goal

65 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.65.

66 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.99.

67 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.701.

68 "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/1) p.76.

69 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p. 90. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.93 (Cf. sect.3): "The truth lies in the goal, not in the point of departure".

and thus obtain something of the creative essence of the Godhead.⁷⁰ Salvation was thus nothing other than a liberation "from the prison of ever-changing dissatisfaction (aus dem Gefängnis der ewigwechselnden Unbefriedigung)",⁷¹ where the "unconditioned worth of the inner person"⁷² achieves full recognition. By mastering the world of nature and history, the human being is released from this world to complete union with the Godhead where there is no domination, or oppression by forces beyond his or her control.⁷³

Religionsgeschichte is thus the history of salvation, a

history of the escape from dependence (Gebundenheit), of natural strivings, for a communion with God and for freedom of the spirit over the world, and over the mere blunt (stumpf) factuality of existence.⁷⁴

The goal of development is the return to God:

Religionsgeschichte is the process of salvation as the divine majesty and love leads humans out of the conditions of creation which ensnare them in need, pain, struggle and sin, back to God.⁷⁵

70 ^h"Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.343.
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71 *ibid.* p.347.

72 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.100.

73 Cf. "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.349. Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/1) p.82. Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.112.

74 "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.342.

75 Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.112, "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.38. How Troeltsch develops this is discussed in Chapter 8.

Eschatology was at the centre of the system: where absolute values could be perceived with absolute clarity and certainty then perhaps all doubt and unrest would cease,

but even clarity and certainty remain individual, until perchance the soul returns to the divine spirit.⁷⁶

Thus the complete overcoming of human dualism, where nature and spirit were united with no conflicts, is only something possible through a complete perception of the truth, itself possible only in God, who alone is the truth.

Troeltsch saw the universal goal as best embodied in Christianity:

We believe with good reason, that Christianity is until today and for always the truth which makes us free from the suffering of the world and the necessity of sin.⁷⁷

The goal of a reconciliation between spirit and nature lies at the heart of Christianity, which is characterised, according to Troeltsch, by the devotion of the whole soul to an eternal truth which renews and perfects humanity:

It alone takes the soul from the diversity (Mannigfaltigkeit) and confusion (Verworrenheit) of the world up to the truth.⁷⁸

The threat of the historical method to Christianity was

76 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.712.

77 "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.372. Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.218: "The task of preserving and reformulating ethical and ideal powers will remain alone with that religion which maintains an absolute good and an absolute goal, and that is Christianity".

78 "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.212. Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.112. Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.671: "Christianity is the best balance of transcendence and immanence; of inner-worldly and super-worldly values".

thus "not as great as all that".⁷⁹ A coherent systematic theology can be constructed upon the basis of the historical method:

Only the misguided thought habits of rational or supernatural dogmatism surround the word "relative" with all the terrors of the uncertain, the unstable, the purposeless.⁸⁰

The acceptance that the power of Christianity can remain a potent force means that "nothing can take from us our belief in redemption as the ultimate destiny of the world".⁸¹

Christianity was understood as "the highest development towards the yearned-for goal".⁸² It was

the highest expression of the religious consciousness...it reveals a soul united in its depths with God and an inner bond of humanity, an heroic power to overcome suffering and guilt and the final goal of life inclined to a future certainty which is the highest and final in the religious life of humanity.⁸³

The goal of religion is the goal of life - that the human

79 "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode" (A1900/9) p.747. Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.217. *The Absoluteness*, (A1901/23d) ET p.29. Cf. Bodenstein, op. cit., p.48.

80 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.86. Cf. p.158: "Only superficial acquaintance with science can estrange men from God, and only a superficial understanding of history can lead men to believe that religion must fade away because of the apparent contradictoriness of its different types of absoluteness."

81 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.425, ET p.159.

82 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.160.

83 "Logos und Mythos" (A1913/8a) p.815; Cf. p.823.

being should have the power to master his or her condition, thereby sharing in the creativity of the Godhead.⁸⁴ This is a faith that there can be meanings in history and all is not anarchy and chaos,⁸⁵ a faith that the absolute dwells somewhere within the human's finite approximations to the truth:

This is enough to provide us with the sense of the absolute which we need and which we can attain.⁸⁶

The absolute is with God; all human truth is relative, but in one way or another connected to the absolute. We live within approximate values, and thereby overcome the distinction between relative and absolute...My theology lives from the absolute which is contained in approximations to it. I see no other possibility to achieve a religious standpoint, and therefore it is preferable to me than radical Catholicism or Lutheranism.⁸⁷

To recognise a genuine development of the human spirit in history is what lies at the heart of philosophy of history, and it is this which Troeltsch regards as the real business of theology:

All that is necessary is to understand history...One can even speak of a latent theology of historicism.⁸⁸

84 "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.194: "The more religion unites the human with God against the world, the more the soul develops into the personality, which obtains something of the immutability (Unvergänglichkeit) of God." Cf. (A1896/1) p.78.

85 Cf. "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.68.

86 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.129. Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.671: Religion is deepened by "the concept of a supernatural value and life".

87 Review of Kaftan (A1912/8) col. 728.

88 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.69.

To move beyond historical relativism, to recognise meaning and development in history is to introduce theology:

If it is the scientific study of history that has made the burden so onerous, it is also the scientific study of history that frees men from this burden when it is thought through to the end.⁸⁹

The *Philosophie der Religionsgeschichte* moves quickly into the arena of universal *Geschichtsphilosophie*, as the systematic implications of a universally applicable historical method led to a *universalisation* of the problems of religion as the specific phenomenon could only be perceived as part of the whole. There is no distinctive method which differentiates the historical study of religion from the study of any other historical phenomenon. Consequently the philosophical and metaphysical problems involved in the study of *Religionsgeschichte* are not unique to religion but concern the study of history itself. Troeltsch's ^r_kproblem began with *Religionsgeschichte* but moved rapidly to *Geschichte* in general. The problems are intertwined and inseparable. It was not accidental that Troeltsch could speak at one moment of a *Philosophie der Religionsgeschichte* and at the next of a *Geschichtsphilosophie der Religion*, since the problems of *Geschichtsphilosophie* were identical to the problems of modern theology: how were absolute, universal norms to be connected with the relative historical world? This is the subject of the next Chapter.

⁸⁹ *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.160. Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.671.

Chapter Six: Troeltsch's philosophy of history6.11 Introduction: The continuity between
Religionsphilosophie and Geschichtsphilosophie.

The previous chapters have attempted to show that Troeltsch's *Religionsphilosophie* was concerned with the attempt to unite competing spheres of reality into an all-embracing synthesis. According to Troeltsch, this led ultimately to questions of *Geschichtsphilosophie*:

The problem of history for faith is much stronger than that of metaphysics or of natural science.¹

History was seen as movement, as the development of the spirit towards an absolute end. The analysis of the philosophy of history did not mark a significant breach in Troeltsch's career, nor a reappraisal of what went before, but rather draws out the conclusions of what had been discussed within the narrower confines of *Religionsphilosophie*, to its most universal level.² History is most fundamental, since it encompasses all aspects of the human spirit, all those higher values through which the human attempts to shape the future.³ On such a view, religion functions as a powerful mythological interpretation of the

¹ *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Section 6 (p.83).

² Cf. Gabriel, *Christlichkeit der Gesellschaft*, p.21; Yasukata, op. cit., p.123.

³ On this point, see Little, "Ernst Troeltsch and the Scope of Historicism", p.343: "Troeltsch spent a lifetime trying to define the scope of historicism".

movement of the human spirit towards its ultimate end.

Since it rested upon the subjection of religion to the universal canons of historical knowledge, Troeltsch's treatment of the philosophy of *Religionsgeschichte* led him naturally into a more extensive treatment of the philosophy of history:

As religion is a part of historical life, so the chief questions are in the historical area.⁴

The history of religion, like religious experience, was not to be separated off from all other spheres of life, but was to be integrated into a picture of the whole of reality. Religious history was *part of* universal history; religious experience was *part of* general experience.⁵ Consequently, *Geschichtsphilosophie* shows Troeltsch's concerns in their most universal context:

The more modern philosophical thought...concentrates on the contents and the values of the spiritual as being of at least as much importance as natural laws for the formation of a view of the whole (*Gesamtanschauung*), so the philosophical treatment of history becomes ever more important, as that arena of experience wherein are embedded these contents and values.⁶

Many commentators have suggested that Troeltsch's change

4 "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.333. Cf. Brachmann, *Ernst Troeltschs historische Weltanschauung*, p.25: "Absoluteness" was the "entrance gate to (Troeltsch's) philosophy of history". Cf. "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.495, ET p.117.

5 Cf. Troeltsch's review of Reischle (A1904/8) col.616.

6 Review of Medicus and Lask (A1903/6) col. 244f. Cf. Rainer Beer, *Selbstkritik der Geschichtsphilosophie bei Ernst Troeltsch*, p.105.

of faculty marked a real change in his concerns. It has been suggested that this marked the "collapse" in his theology.⁷ Troeltsch himself did not regard his concerns as having undergone any such fundamental change.⁸ He says of *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*:

It is the problem of *Die Absolutheit* in a much broader circumference and undertaken in the direction towards the totality of cultural values, rather than merely from the position of the religious.⁹

Troeltsch admitted he had "grown out" of the theological faculty, but he still continued to view the "religious as the centre of my cultural synthesis, of my philosophy of history".¹⁰ The circumstances of Troeltsch's change of

7 Cf. e.g. Reist, op. cit., pp.198ff. "The collapse of Troeltsch's theology can be seen in what we must recognise as his unwilling pilgrimage toward radical religious individualism" (p.199). Bodenstein (op. cit. p.51) saw Troeltsch as "transforming Christianity to a deepened religion of humanity".

8 Gogarten also saw Troeltsch's whole career as characterised by the concern with history, and saw no significant breach: "The problem of history has been the greatest problem of ~~theology~~ for more than a hundred years...The theological problem of history - that is, the problem of revelation and of faith - has become the problem of *Geschichtsphilosophie*...It occupied the life-work of that theologian of great insight - Ernst Troeltsch" (*Ich glaube an den dreieinigen Gott*, Jena, 1926, p.17).

9 "Meine Bücher" (A1921/29b) p.14.

10 *ibid.* p.15. Reist (op. cit., p.168) suggested that "it may be that when he left Heidelberg for Berlin he had already decided not to pack the concept of the religious *a priori* for the trip". (Cf. Drescher *Glaube und Vernunft*, p.8; Schrey, "Ernst Troeltsch und seine Werk", p.140). That Troeltsch moved to the discussion of history does not imply that he rejected the conclusions of his previous discussions of *Religionsphilosophie*. He expressed the intention to write a systematic *Religionsphilosophie*, and even while he was engaged in the production of *Der Historismus*, he continued to lecture on the subject, in the Winter-Semesters of 1915-16, 1917-18, 1919-20, and the Summer-Semester of

faculty hardly indicate a "conversion" to philosophy.¹¹

What worried the Berlin philosophy faculty was that Troeltsch was *too religious* to pursue the objective study of philosophy.¹² Troeltsch's *Geschichtsphilosophie* shows a marked continuity with his earlier work as a development of his religious concerns to their most universal context.¹³

1922. Cf. Benckert, *Ernst Troeltsch und das ethische Problem*, p.11: "The theologian became a philosopher only in the sense that the theologian was already a philosopher and the philosopher always remained a theologian".

11 This is documented by Pretzel in "Ernst Troeltschs Berufung an die Berliner Universität", in *Studium Berolinense*, Berlin, 1960, pp.507-14. Cf. Introduction by Apfelbacher and Neuner, in *Briefe* (G1974/1) p.23 and Yasukata, op. cit., pp.121ff. Cf. Review of Jastrow (A1905/1) col.14, where Troeltsch sees theology faculties as having a "natural inclination towards fanaticism". Cf. Gertrud von le Fort, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p.122f.: "As he saw the future of the theological faculties, he thought he would obtain more possibilities to address the human spiritual religious consciousness than in theology".

12 Certain of the letters Troeltsch wrote to von Hügel bear out that, even when his situation seemed most desperate during the hyper-inflation of the post-war years, Troeltsch retained a lively religiosity and a glimmer of hope. Cf. esp. *Briefe* (G1974/1), (31/1/20), p.101f. Cf. Letter to Bousset (G1976/1) p.51.

13 Cf. Dyson, *History in the philosophy and theology of Ernst Troeltsch*, p.29: Troeltsch underwent a "slow, maturing development", and Gerrish, "Protestantism and Progress", p.47: "Troeltsch spoke not of the collapse of his theology, but of its modification". Cf. R. Morgan, introduction in *Ernst Troeltsch: writings*, p.48. Cf. Yasukata, op. cit., p.122f., where he gives a very clear account of Troeltsch's dissatisfaction with the theological faculty. Cf. Review of Köhler (A1921/20) col. 269, where Troeltsch praises Köhler for having indicated "the incompleteness of my work, and the different directions from Ritschl to Dilthey, from the South-west German Kant School, and finally to a metaphysical conclusion".

The philosophy of history, as codified by Troeltsch, particularly in his massive yet unfinished, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*,¹⁴ began with the attempt to work out the guiding methodological principles which characterised the historical sciences. Troeltsch introduced little that was new into this first aspect of his discussion of *Geschichtsphilosophie*, which he called the formal logic of history. Rather his distinctive contribution to the philosophy of history was in what he saw as the second aspect: the attempt to draw out the relationship between the philosophy of history and the formation of a coherent set of values (a *Weltanschauung*) in the modern world.¹⁵ He aimed to assess the *implications* of the philosophy of history upon human life: it was this that he called "material" philosophy of history, and which was to have constituted the second volume of *Der Historismus*.¹⁶ Even though this volume remained unwritten at Troeltsch's death, the basis of the solution to the problems of the philosophy of history can be established from his many other writings on the subject:

On the whole I regard these London lectures [i.e. *Christian Thought*] as containing the next volume of my *Historismus* volume.¹⁷

14 A1922/22.

15 Cf. Beer, *Selbstkritik der Geschichtsphilosophie bei Ernst Troeltsch*, p.105, where he sees Troeltsch as initiating "an epochal beginning in the study of the philosophy of history."

16 Cf. "Meine Bücher" (A1921/29b) p.14: "The second volume will contain the promised sections on Europeanism and will develop the ethical-cultural philosophical positions of the present."

17 *Briefe* (G1974/1) p.148. Cf. esp. "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a), *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) and the last Chapter of *Der*

However, before this will be attempted, it is necessary to characterise the context and the problems of the formal logic of history upon which the material (action-oriented) philosophy of history is based.

6.12 The context of Troeltsch's philosophy of history.

6.121 The impact of Wilhelm Dilthey.

According to Troeltsch, the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) were historical disciplines: their subject matter was relative to its position within the historical complex. This recognition of the relativity of all historical phenomena characterised the most pressing problem in the philosophy of history. Troeltsch was certainly not the first to recognise this. Particularly influential on Troeltsch's philosophy of history was the thought of Dilthey, even though the exact nature of their intellectual relationship is problematic.¹⁸

In the same manner as he regarded Ritschl as his theological teacher, Troeltsch regarded Dilthey as his most important philosophical teacher.¹⁹ Just as a dialogue with

Historismus (A1922/22).

18 Cf. John Leland Mebust, *Wilhelm Dilthey's Philosophy of History and its influence on Wilhelm Herrmann and Ernst Troeltsch*, who suggests that Troeltsch "appropriated" Dilthey's thought. Cf. Apfelbacher, op. cit., Ch.IV.

19 Cf. "Meine Bücher" (A1921/29b) p.6. On the influence of Dilthey on Troeltsch, see esp. Helge Siemers, ">Mein Lehrer Dilthey?< Ueber den Einfluss Diltheys auf den jungen Troeltsch". On the basis of a close comparison between Troeltsch's early texts and those of Dilthey, Siemers points to significant differences between the two and suggests the only

Ritschl shaped Troeltsch's approach to theology from the beginnings of his career, so a dialogue with Dilthey shaped his approach to philosophy. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that Troeltsch never wholeheartedly rejected Dilthey in favour of Rickert and Windelband.²⁰ He considered his task in Berlin to be a "continuation of the work of Dilthey",²¹ and he conducted seminars on Dilthey's theory of history (*Geschichtstheorie*).²² However, it was not particulars in Dilthey's theory which proved to be influential but his theory taken as a whole. Troeltsch summed up what he saw as Dilthey's role in a review of 1916:

The more modern German thinkers retreat from the all-pervasive substantial Hegelian doctrine of the "objective spirit", and using Kantian methods, re-employ an Idealism filled with living content,

substantial influence was in the field of theological and spiritual history (e.g. "Die Aufklärung" (A1897/14a)) and concludes that the influence was "not all that great" (p.231f.), and was primarily *tactical*. Siemers' thesis helps redress the balance in pointing to Troeltsch's originality (against interpretations which stress "appropriation"), but underestimates the many points of contact between Troeltsch's philosophy and theology and Dilthey's *Lebensphilosophie*. See above, Chapter 3.15.

²⁰ Troeltsch suggested he had departed from a Diltheyan standpoint in a footnote for the second edition of "Die christliche Weltanschauung" ((A1894/1a) p.227n) and in "Meine Bücher" ((A1921/29b) p.8f). However, even in his positive estimations of Rickert, Troeltsch recognises that whatever the pre-dominance of logic in Baden neo-Kantianism, there was always a remnant of metaphysics behind the scenes (A1894/1a p.227n).

²¹ Review of Dilthey (A1916/1) col.13.

²² Cf. Berlin *Vorlesungsverzeichnisse* for S-S. 1919 to W-S. 1919-1920.

the more it becomes clear that it is the work of Dilthey that lies in this direction. He has framed the problems and to a great extent his solutions are in the main satisfactory.²³

In Dilthey, "as in Schleiermacher", there was continually "something new to discover",²⁴ and it was for this reason above all others, that Troeltsch called for a complete edition of Dilthey.²⁵

Whatever the exact nature of their relationship, what Troeltsch undeniably shared with Dilthey was a belief in the relativity of all historical phenomena.²⁶ The principles Troeltsch had already outlined in his essay on historical and dogmatic method in theology indicate that he considered all historical subjects as relative to the past and the present. Nothing was to be artificially isolated from its context, and

23 Review of Dilthey (A1916/1), col.13.

24 Cf. Dyson, (op. cit., p.74) who emphasises that Dilthey's influence was always tempered by Schleiermacher's attempt at a limitation and control of unfettered relativism: "If Troeltsch was indebted to Dilthey for the latter's more sophisticated use of individuality as a hermeneutical principle, it was to Schleiermacher's natural theology, with its ontological grounding for individuality, that Troeltsch turned faced by Dilthey's 'anarchy of convictions'". Cf. Niebuhr, op. cit., pp.19ff.

25 Cf. Review of Dilthey (A1922/8) col.231: "The present situation of the human sciences demands that Dilthey be published".

26 Cf. Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, tr. and ed. H.P. Rickman, p.112: "Historical consciousness increasingly proves the relativity of every metaphysical or religious doctrine which has emerged in the course of the ages...Something tragic seems to lie in man's striving for knowledge, a contradiction between will and capacity". Cf. p.121: "The study of all conditions of man on this earth, the contacts between national religions and concepts, inevitably increased the chaos of historical facts". There is a striking similarity between Dilthey's and Troeltsch's characterisations of historical relativity. For Troeltsch, however, there was a way beyond the chaos and the "anarchy of convictions".

everything stood in flux and relation, both to the past and to the present position of the observer.²⁷

6.122 The German context of Troeltsch's philosophy of history.

Although Troeltsch looked specifically to Dilthey as his philosophical teacher, an historical approach characterised the broader context of German thought.²⁸ Indeed it was this historical mode of thought which distinguished German thought from the deterministic and positivistic thought forms of western Europe.²⁹ According to Troeltsch, this dominant strand of German thought stemmed from Semler, the "father of relativism",³⁰ and from Lessing.³¹ It was the problem of

27 Cf. Review of Marck (A1918/18) col.259.

28 Cf. "Der deutsche Idealismus" (A1900/12a) pp.545,553,583; "Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert" (A1913/36a) p.626f.

29 On this point, see esp. Gustav Schmidt, *Deutscher Historismus und der Uebergang zur parlamentarischen Demokratie*, esp. pp.42ff. where the relationship between German thought and the thought of the "West" is carefully analysed. Cf. Klemens von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism: Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century*.

30 Review of Gastrow etc. (A1906/7) col.147. Semler was seen as a representative of anti-rationalist, anti-Deist thought which attempted a reconstruction of pietistic-mystic and arminian-deistic criticism.

31 For Troeltsch's view of Lessing, see esp. "Der deutsche Idealismus" (A1900/12a) pp.550ff. Cf. Review of Gastrow (A1906/7) where Troeltsch sees Lessing, in stressing the notion of the individual, as responsible for the abandonment of rational religion and the re-emphasis on the concrete and the empirical.

individuality and relativism which Herder and Kant, Schleiermacher and Hegel attempted to answer.³²

According to Troeltsch, it was against the idea of natural law with its universal claims that German thought with its emphasis on the individual and unique was directed.

Troeltsch's caricatures of German thought are clearest in the essays he produced during and immediately after the First World War, many of which were collected by Hans Baron in *Deutscher Geist und Westeuropa*.³³ Baron was concerned to underplay the emphasis on the importance of the natural law tradition in Troeltsch's essays and talks of the "struggle against the Enlightenment" in his sub-title.³⁴ Some of the essays are certainly directed against the rationalistic spirit of the Enlightenment,³⁵ yet, although Troeltsch emphasises the romantic and individualist nature of the

32 Review of Gastrow (A1906/7) cols. 146-9. Cf. "Die Aufklärung" (A1897/14a) p.352f. for a brief description of the development of the concept of historical relativity. Cf. "Das Wesen des modernen Geistes" (A1907/8b) pp.312ff, "Der deutsche Idealismus" (A1900/12a) p.574f., "Naturrecht und Humanität in der Weltpolitik" (A1922/23b) p.7f., ET. p.204.

33 (H1925/3).

34 *Deutscher Geist* (H1925/3) p.1.

35 Cf. "Der Geist der deutschen Kultur" (A1915/9), "Die deutsche Idee der Freiheit" (A1916/2e) where the idea of a cultural war is given some justification. Cf. Bernd Sösemann, "Das >erneute Deutschland<. Ernst Troeltschs politisches Engagement im ersten Weltkrieg", in TS. III, pp.120-144.

German tradition, he also points to the priority and the importance of the Natural Law tradition.³⁶ Troeltsch saw the need for tempering the German strand of thought, which left alone was a compounding of "brutalism" and "mysticism", with the Western European liberal natural-law conception of politics.³⁷

It was thus not merely out of mere philosophical interest that Troeltsch undertook the pursuit of the philosophy of history, but out of a very practical interest, which becomes apparent in the political essays in *Deutscher Geist* and the letters collected in *Spektatorbriefe*.³⁸ The union of the

36 See esp. "Naturrecht und Humanität in der Weltpolitik" (A1922/23b). Cf. *Der Berg der Läuterung* (A1921/11), p.18f.: "The modern nations because of their vast population, which require organisations to serve their needs for nutrition and preservation, are democratised. That is a natural consequence of European development - and brings, when understood in a deeper fashion, the appreciation (Würdigung) of the human personality, the fulfilment of its deep and legitimate ethical needs over and against the averageness of the other side".

37 Cf. Schmidt, op. cit., p.226: "Troeltsch could come to the conclusion that the political-ethical position of *Historismus* could complete a connection with western forms of constitutional government. *Historismus* could achieve a transition to western parliamentary democracy." Cf. p.308 for a favourable appraisal of Troeltsch's role in the Weimar Republic. Cf. H. Ruddies, "Soziale Demokratie und freier Protestantismus. Ernst Troeltsch in den Anfängen der Weimarer Republik" in TS III., pp.145-174, who relates Troeltsch's political activity to the crisis after the *Second World War*. Cf. M. Erbe, "Das Problem des Historismus bei Ernst Troeltsch, Otto Hintze und Friedrich Meinecke" in TS. III, p.91. T.J. Reed, (in *Thomas Mann: The uses of tradition*, p.295), however, sees this attempt to conciliate as characteristic of the tragic optimism of the Weimar liberals: "Troeltsch was clearly anxious to conciliate: a fatal flaw of moderates under the Weimar Republic was to make concessions to national traditions which made none in return. Appeasement began at home". On the relationship between Thomas Mann and Troeltsch, see esp. pp.294-297.

38 (H1924/3). Cf. Graf and Ruddies, op. cit., p.136: "The oft repeated

rational principles of natural law with the irrational principles of historicism became the most pressing political problem of the Weimar Republic:³⁹

At the heart of all the current ideas about the League of Nations, the organisation of the world, and the limitation of egoisms and forces of destruction, there is an indestructible moral core, which we cannot in its essence reject, even if we are painfully aware, at the moment, of the difficulties and the abuse to which it is liable. We may see the difficulties and the abuse clearly; we may seek with all our strength to overcome them, but what we cannot do and what we must not do, is to deny the ideal itself in its own essence, in its ethical significance, in its *connection with the philosophy of history*.⁴⁰

Just as Troeltsch's *Religionsphilosophie* always maintains a connection with real practical religion, so his *Geschichtsphilosophie* retains a vital link with the practical. Formal philosophy of history always requires a *material* philosophy of history.

claim that Troeltsch was concerned merely with the problem of method in his discussion of Historismus is unsatisfactory. His concerns were with the diagnosis and mastery of the ethical problems that flowed from the insight into the historicity of human culture".

39 Cf. Schmidt, op. cit., p.308.

40 "Naturrecht und Humanität" (A1922/23b) p.25, ET. p.220. My emphasis.

6.13 The poverty of naturalism.

The emphasis upon the unique and the individual in German thought, rather than on the law-governed and rational, stood in marked contrast to the methods adopted by the natural sciences. If the nineteenth century had resulted in the historicisation of all thought, it is equally true to say that it also led to the *mathematicisation* of all thought.⁴¹ The "other school" of neo-Kantians, under Natorp and Cohen, brought the primacy of logic to the fore.⁴² As has already been shown, the sphere of practical reason had become virtually superfluous.⁴³ Under the influence of Ernst Mach in Vienna, there was a growing belief in an all-pervasive positivism in science.⁴⁴ The predominance of the

41 Cohen even regarded the logical and rational as the essential characteristic of German thought. See esp. Troeltsch's review (A1916/4) col. 89.

42 Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.128. Troeltsch is highly critical of the Marburg school of neo-Kantians. The elevation of logic to an "absolute, canonical presupposition" meant there was "no space left for religion" (Rev. of Cohen, A1918/6, col.62). Troeltsch saw the mathematicisation of all thought as failing to solve the problems of real unity in the world, which "rests in life, not in dead thought" (MS *Einführung* p.10).

43 Cf. Review of Cohen (A1915/12) col. 385 where Troeltsch reaffirms his belief that their Kant interpretation was incorrect. Cf. A1916/4 and most importantly "Grundprobleme der Ethik" (A1902/4a). See above, Chapter 4.3.

44 On this point, see esp. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, ET, pp.71-90, and Giddens "Positivism and its critics" in *Studies in Social and Political Theory*. Troeltsch admitted that he lacked scientific and mathematical training, (Review of Ernst Cassirer (A1904/11) col.639) yet despite this, he reviewed a number of philosophical books of a relatively

positivistic method in science was not without repercussions in theology.⁴⁵ In the natural sciences, scientific data were seen as a given, not relative to their position in time, but as an ahistorical totality: the principles behind the world-view of "naturalism", as Troeltsch called it, were that everything was integrated into a static unchanging whole. This "naturalism" could not be denied to be important for the shaping of the modern world-view. Scientific progress could not go on without it.

However, what Troeltsch constantly affirms is that the method of the natural sciences cannot account for the diversity of human life.⁴⁶ Troeltsch hoped for a reworking

technical nature, and was certainly not ignorant of debates in physics and mathematics. Cf. eg. Review of Wlassek (A1917/24) where Troeltsch was particularly critical of "the degrading (nivellierende) effects" of Mach's modern equivalent of nominalism: "I am of the opinion that to have overcome every rational concept of truth, every necessity and universal is an error" (col.468).

45 The relationship between positivism in science and in theology is difficult to assess. Many of the arguments adduced to prove religious data on the basis of religious experience adopt a verificationist methodology and a tacit positivist epistemology. A recent attempt has been made by M.S. Fisher (in *Revelatory Positivism*) to draw out the relationships between the early theology of Karl Barth and the neo-Kantianism of the Marburg school. A similar form of positivism also runs through the pages of the orthodox critiques of Troeltsch. See esp. Th. Kaftan, *Ernst Troeltsch. Eine kritische Zeitstudie*, and Geck, "Warum ist die in Jesus Christ geschehene Offenbarung unüberbietbar?". Cf. Review of Schaefer (A1918/2) p.12.

46 Cf. MS *Einführung*, p.10.

of epistemology which took historical reality seriously, which he sees as essentially a parallel to Cassirer's naturalistic epistemology:

It would be good if the whole problematic [of epistemology] could be reworked giving due attention to history. This I have begun, and I intend it as a decisive alternative (Gegenstück) to this work of Cassirer's.⁴⁷

For Troeltsch, beside and within all natural life there is the world of the spirit, the arena of human freedom and creativity. Troeltsch's task was concerned with the integration of this spiritual life with the natural in a coherent whole, to provide a solution to the impasse of the Enlightenment. History, Troeltsch maintained, demanded an "answer as to its unity (Einheit), goal (Ziel) and meaning (Sinn)."⁴⁸ The human sciences could thus only erroneously be viewed as analogous to the natural sciences, since their subject-matter was always in a process of *development*. Spiritual ends worked themselves out within nature but could never be exhausted by it. Consequently the interaction of Spirit (Geist) and Nature (Natur) was the most pressing philosophical problem:

Since the eighteenth century one of the great themes of the modern spirit has been the battle between natural philosophy and the philosophy of history.⁴⁹

47 Review of Cassirer (A1921/12). Again it is in conscious dialogue with other authors that Troeltsch develops his own ideas.

48 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.12.

49 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.10. It is precisely this which marks out Troeltsch's concerns from the very beginnings of his career. See. esp. "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.249. Cf. "Der deutsche Idealismus" (A1900/12a) p.544. Cf. MS *Einführung* p.6 where Troeltsch talks of his *mediating* position: "the fundamental problem is not the rational and the irrational in themselves, but in setting limits

For Troeltsch, history

is the realm of freedom against nature and has laws of development, in which nature and freedom are bound together with one another.⁵⁰

6.14 The meaning of historicism.

Troeltsch's understanding of the problems of history was centred around the "crisis of *Historismus*".⁵¹ The German word "Historismus" conveys a number of meanings,⁵² a

to them both". See above, Chapter 1.

50 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.19. Cf. Review of Medicus (A1903/6) col. 246f.

51 For discussions in English of the meaning of *Historismus* for Troeltsch, see Iggers, op. cit., pp.287ff.; Reist, op. cit. p.228n3 (where he simply equates it with "relativism"); Little, op. cit., p.360 n.2; Rubanowice, *Crisis in Consciousness*, Ch.3, esp. p.50; Dyson, op. cit., Chapter Two, esp. pp.32ff; Ogletree, *Christian Faith and History*, Chapter Two; Coakley, op. cit., Chapter One, esp. p.6. Yasukata, op. cit, (Chapter Four, esp. p.151 n.27) suggests (following a suggestion from Hodgson) that "Historismus" should be translated "radical historicality". However, this tends to suggest the word, "Geschichtlichkeit" rather than "Historismus".

52 Cf. Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, p.3, where he suggests there was little or no consensus in the meaning of the term. Cf. his article "Historicism" in the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*. Cf. Maurice Mandelbaum, "Historicism" in *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Cf. D.E. Lee and R.N. Beck, "The Meaning of 'Historicism'", pp.568-577. The origin of the word "Historismus" is obscure (Cf. Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, and E. Rothacker, "Das Wort >Historismus<", pp.3-6. Iggers suggests that its use was well-established by the mid-nineteenth century (op. cit. p.456f.). H.R. Niebuhr, however, (in *Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion*, p.3) suggests that "the German word is of Troeltsch's own coinage".

discussion of which will help elucidate the problems Troeltsch was attempting to solve in his philosophy of history. The term, or rather, the principle it signifies, dominated the writing of history throughout the nineteenth century.⁵³

Troeltsch suggests at several points that the historical and the relative are equivalents.⁵⁴ *Historismus* often was nothing more than a name given to the idea of historical relativity. Indeed, it was most often used to imply the acceptance that uniqueness of character and development provided the most appropriate categories for the study of history. Consequently *Historismus* expresses the "philosophical position which, on the grounds of the historically conditioned and variable nature of all cultural phenomena, rejects, indeed classifies as crude, all claims to absolute validity".⁵⁵ In this sense *Historismus* conveys neither positive nor negative connotations, but is simply a given. *Historismus* here stands for

the fundamental historicising (*Historisierung*) of all our thoughts about man, his culture and his values.⁵⁶

53 For a clear account of the development of German historical sciences, see esp. Iggers, *The German Conception of History*. Cf. C. Antoni, *From History to Sociology* (esp. the introduction by H.V. White) and Eckart Kehr, "Neuere deutsche Geschichtsschreibung" in *Der Primat der Innenpolitik*.

54 This was already expressed in *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET, p.85: "If one should wish to say 'Christianity is a relative phenomenon', there is no reason to object to this, since the historical and the relative are identical".

55 H. Schnädelbach *Philosophy in Germany, 1831-1933*, p.35. Cf. pp.33-65. The sense of *Historismus* which is being used here is his "Historicism₂".

However, Troeltsch also uses the word "Historismus" to mean that history lacked any sense of direction.⁵⁷ In so far as this principle implied scepticism then the word could have a negative connotation.⁵⁸ This position had been most clearly exemplified by Ranke's "wie es eigentlich gewesen ist" dictum. *Historismus*, on this view, implied that the moral demands of historiography were dispensed with, since there could be no sense in which the past could be measured: every epoch stood immediately before God. All the historian could do was to show what happened and how it happened.⁵⁹

56 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.102. Cf. p.109. Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.89: "Relativity simply means that all historical phenomena are unique individual configurations acted on by influences from a universal context that comes to bear on them in varying degrees of immediacy." Cf. Coakley, "Theology and cultural relativism", p.228 n.22. Cf. Rubanowice, op. cit., p.61: "Historicism for Troeltsch was a given, a controlling premise lying at the heart of his thought". Cf. Little, op. cit., p.360 n.2: "For Troeltsch, the concept 'historicism' denoted fundamentally the situation of modern man, in which all human ideas, values, and meanings are seen to be inextricably bound up with the historical particularity of the circumstances in which they are formulated and expressed or in which they undergo development and transformation."

57 Cf. "Das neunzehnte Jahrhundert" (A1913/36a) p.628.

58 Cf. eg. *Der Historismus*, (A1922/22) p.108, where it is used to mean "relativistic scepticism".

59 This positivistic collection of facts suggests Schnädelbacher's "Historismus₁", and *Historismus* easily becomes an object of scorn.

There was also the sense in which "Historismus" stood alongside "naturalism" as a distinctive post-Enlightenment view of reality and in this sense implied a great deal more than being merely a synonym for historical relativism or scepticism.⁶⁰ On this view, which certainly accords with the more positive use of the word by Troeltsch, *Historismus* implies a certain commitment to human possibility and creativity alongside naturalism which, untempered by spirit, could lead to a "frightful withering away of life".⁶¹ Unlike Ranke's denial of the moral responsibility of the historian, Troeltsch's fundamental concern was to move beyond the anarchy implied by "Historismus₂".⁶² Thus "Historismus" could be constructive and could achieve a positive meaning.⁶³

60 Cf. Dyson, (op. cit. p. 37), who draws out the fullest implications of the word for Troeltsch, whose use of the word 'Historismus', "does refer to our estimate of the past; but it also relates to our understanding of the present and to our projects for the construction of the future. It refers, as might be expected, to historical data; but it ultimately involves certain philosophical affirmations about God and the world".

61 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.108. Cf. Niebuhr, op. cit. p.35n: "('Historismus') is designed in analogy to "naturalism" understood in the good sense of that term as referring to the natural sciences. The meaning of 'Historismus' seems best reproduced and the analogy preserved by using 'Historism'." Because this word has never become current in English I have either left "Historismus" in the German, or used the English word, "historicism", despite its distinctly negative connotations.

62 Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.125f.

63 This is Schnädelbach's "Historismus₃": "The world of human life, according to this view is not nature, but the product of human action" (p.36). The real threat came not from the anarchy of relativism but the restrictions on individuality imposed by ahistorical rationalism. Cf. Rubanowice, *Crisis in Consciousness*, p.52: "Troeltsch regarded historicism as basically valuable and beneficial".

In this respect "Historismus" implied the survival of the individual against the alienating powers of modern civilisation which aimed to remove all thought of the spirit.⁶⁴ Troeltsch saw this as a vital aspect of the meaning of "Historismus": the "growing rivalry" between *Naturalismus* and *Historismus* needed to be overcome in an all-embracing unity.⁶⁵

Unlike the English word "historicism", which was popularised in a post-war polemic by Karl Popper, as being expressive of deterministic views of historical development which threaten the basis of the liberal "open society" by denying the freedom and creativity of the human agent, Troeltsch's word "Historismus" did not carry these negative connotations.⁶⁶ Indeed, the third meaning outlined above

64 Iggers saw this to be at the centre of the meaning of *Historismus*: "The core of the historicist outlook lies in the assumption that there is a fundamental difference between the phenomena of nature and those of history, which requires an approach in the social and cultural sciences fundamentally different from those of the natural sciences" (op. cit., p.4).

65 The relationship between the different meanings of *Historismus* is brought out clearly by Schmidt (op. cit., p.313) who groups the meanings of the word into two: "(a) the belief that the truth, value and meaning of a living being are to be found, above all, in its history, and (b) that historical knowledge is an essential presupposition for the consideration of contemporary problems. In (a) is included the axiom that historical appearances are embedded in a greater ^{context} Therefore historical reality has the character of a heterogeneous continuum. Every point in this complex context receives its meaning only through contact with the 'questions of the heart' of the subject of reflexion."

66 Cf. Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, London, 1957.

implied a commitment to the very creativity of the human agent against naturalistic determinism. Although Troeltsch is equally critical of deterministic theories of historical development, and indeed much of *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* was devoted to their critique, he did not identify them with the term "Historismus".

However, it was not merely the denial of freedom and creativity that constituted the problems of historicism for Troeltsch, but also the shape and direction of this creativity. In so far as *Historismus* implied the full recognition of the freedom of the human spirit, it represented "a liberation and elevation (Erhebung)" from the dogmatic systems of the past.⁶⁷ *Historismus* did not need *overcoming* through a return to something analogous to the religious certainty of the past, since this would be a return to barbarism and the denial of the human creative spirit. What was needed was the creation of a set of universal values *within* the all-pervasive principle of relativism.⁶⁸ Consequently the title of von Hügel's German edition of Troeltsch's lectures intended for delivery in England, *Der Historismus und seine Ueberwindung*,⁶⁹ is misleading.⁷⁰

67 *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (A1922/22) p.10.

68 See above, Chapter 1. Cf Niebuhr, op. cit., p.100: "The result is the doctrine that all our values are relative to our historical situation, yet they are absolutely obligatory in that situation."

69 E1923/7a.

70 The English title *Christian Thought: its history and applications* (E1923/7) conveys the intention of the lectures far better.

History seemed to present an amorphous mass of knowledge which lacked the unity which characterised the natural sciences, and could only present relative truths: absolute truth, according to Troeltsch, had collapsed as historical knowledge began to be recognised as only ever incomplete and partial. In short the ground beneath one's feet began to shake.⁷¹ History presented a *crisis* of meaning as absolute security was shattered.⁷²

For Troeltsch, history was not something conceived as something merely of interest to the antiquarian, but was relevant to the present. The "crisis of historicism" was the challenge to redirect and to structure history around meaningful ends.⁷³ *Historismus*, had to be maintained which allowed for the possibility of human freedom as a viable alternative to the individuality-denying structures of the modern world, particularly the anonymous, alienating conditions of capitalism.⁷⁴ The fundamental condition for a

71 Cf. *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (A1922/22) p.6.

72 Cf. Rubanowice, *Crisis in Consciousness*, Chapter One, for a brief description of the cultural crisis confronting Troeltsch.

73 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect.6.5: "*Historismus* and criticism means without doubt a crisis for Christian thought" which required redirecting the connection with history, that is, of formulating afresh for the new situation.

74 "*Historismus*". Cf. F.W. Graf (in "Religion und Individualität") who sees this as the real crisis facing theology. Troeltsch was, "among the theologians of the twentieth century,...the crisis theologian *par excellence*" (p.218). Cf. Graf and Ruddies, *op. cit.*, p.136.

solution to the crisis was the recognition of human freedom. It was this sense of *Historismus* which points to the constructive intentions of Troeltsch's philosophy of history.⁷⁵ The philosophy of history drew out the "meaning of history for the world-view (*Weltanschauung*) and of the world-view for history".⁷⁶ It was this constructive sense of "Historismus" which was the purpose of *Geschichtsphilosophie*:

Thus seen, the problem of *Geschichtsphilosophie* was nothing other than the fundamental problem of contemporary spiritual life, nothing less than the problem of so-called *Historismus*.⁷⁷

The *direction* of the human freedom constituted a second problem. To understand the past was to formulate a world-view under which coherence and shape could be given to the present, in order that the future could be orientated around meaningful goals. The problems of history led directly to the problems of ethics, the problems of *integration* in a social framework. The emphasis on the unique and the individual provoked a crisis and a challenge

75 Cf. Rendtorff and Graf, "Ernst Troeltsch", in *19th Century Religious Thought in the West*, vol.III, ed. Smart et al., p.307: "The 'idea of construction' provides the positive answer to the so-called 'crisis of history', and is conceived by Troeltsch, not as a countermand to historical thinking, but as its essential outcome. The conversion of a historical *crisis* into a historical *construction* must therefore be regarded as the particular systematic contribution at which Troeltsch finally arrived".

76 *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (A1922/22) p.7.

77 *ibid.* p.9.

to find some form of direction. Historians failed to give this direction, to find a way out of the crisis, and left the way open for all manner of fanatic. Philosophers, too, could do nothing other than systematise. It was left to the theologian to utilise whatever was left of the powers of religion with its unconditional universality to help provide a sense of purpose to otherwise uncontrolled individualism. It was this perception of the universal which alone could limit individuality and integrate it within a system of meanings. Thus, historicism does not necessarily imply a Diltheyan "anarchy of values", or a Weberian polytheism, since "in the relative we will find a token of the absolute that transcends history."⁷⁸ The theological appropriation of historicism could thereby overcome the impasse of the Enlightenment.

6.15 An "Einstein of the religious world"? - Troeltsch's relativism.

This discussion of the meaning of historicism illuminates the scope and the nature of Troeltsch's relativism. It was in tackling relativism that Troeltsch confronted the most pressing problem of *Historismus*.⁷⁹ The character of

⁷⁸ *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.106. See above, Chapter 1.

⁷⁹ In contrast to Becker in *Neuzeitliche Subjektivität und Religiosität*, I take "relativity", rather than "subjectivity", to be more characteristic of the modern world-view. Troeltsch was not attempting to refound Christianity on a subjective basis, since he was all-too concerned with the need to forge compromises with the real inter-subjective natural world. For the problem of relativism with regard to Troeltsch, see especially Barney S. McNeely *History and Hermeneutic* where relativism is treated as the "uniquely modern theme"

Troeltsch's relativism was clearly perceived by A.C. Bouquet, who, in his doctoral dissertation, saw Troeltsch as a

kind of Einstein of the religious world, he appears at one stage to admit that we do not know whither we are going. Yet we are not left utterly in the grip of a critical uncertainty.⁸⁰

Troeltsch himself recognised a certain similarity with Einstein, and cites the Bouquet quotation with approval.⁸¹ Although it would be wrong to press the analogy too far, a comparison between the problems of historical relativism and Einstein's theory of relativity is illuminating.

Relativism constituted a particular problem for theology just as relativity did for the physical sciences.⁸² Yet neither was insurmountable. Just as physics was possible under changed conditions, so, on Troeltsch's conception,

(p.1) and H.R. Niebuhr *The Meaning of Revelation*: "no other influence has affected twentieth century thought more deeply than the discovery of spatial and temporal relativity"^(p.7). More recently there has been an extensive treatment of the nature of Troeltsch's relativism in Coakley, op. cit., Chapter One. For detailed treatments of the problem of relativism in theology, see the wide-ranging work by Runzo, *Reason, Relativism and God*, and eds. Hick and Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, esp. sect. 1.

80 A.C. Bouquet, *Is Christianity the Final Religion?*, p.241.

81 Cf. *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (A1922/22) p.219n. Cf. p.7.

82 Although Troeltsch often uses the words "relativism" (*Relativismus*) and "relativity" (*Relativität*) interchangeably, the former tends to imply the world-view of relativism and scepticism (similar to "Historismus₁"), and the latter tends to imply a metaphysical theory (similar to *Historismus₃*). On this point, see Coakley, *Christ without Absolutes*, p.27 n.37.

theology and religion could survive such a radical reorientation. The similarities with Einstein are clear: everything was related to the point of view of the observer.⁸³ Yet merely because the observer's position was not absolute, there was still the possibility for laws which functioned in an absolute way.⁸⁴ Relativity was not without its limits: Einstein, according to Troeltsch, was no sceptic.

Relativism presented a similar challenge to theology and philosophy, since by showing the limits of human knowledge more clearly, it presented a "crisis" which threatened cherished truths and called for new formulations and a new understanding of human possibilities. This was the challenge facing Troeltsch. Consequently, Troeltsch says of Einstein: "his relativity is also not an unbounded relativism, but it is...the absolute in the relative."⁸⁵

83 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.33: "The human being can no longer be thought of as the goal of the world."

84 Cf. *ibid.* Sect. 2.4b.

85 Cf. *Historismus* (A1922/22) p.219. There was a limited personal correspondence between the two men. Einstein wrote to Troeltsch during the First World War (believing him to be politically sympathetic) about the possibility of the leading intellectuals in all disciplines banding together to form a rational moral alliance to help bring about an end to the meaningless slaughter. By 1918, however, Troeltsch had lost faith in human reason "as it was everywhere impotent" (letter to Einstein of 1st May 1918, cited in Gilbert "Einstein und der Europa seiner Zeit", p.19). Instead of a flight "into the kingdom of the spirit and into the companionship of the few faithful", Troeltsch felt he had to maintain a contact with the real world and achieve the best possible solution there, "since things were in progress and no longer could be limited and controlled by Reason" (*ibid.* p.18f.). This was an example of Troeltsch's ever-present longing to come to terms or compromise with the real world. Einstein, speaking from the security of Switzerland, when faced by such a response, soon gave up his ideas of a moral alliance!

In her recent book, Sarah Coakley has presented a clear account of the nature and development of Troeltsch's relativism.⁸⁶ She delineates several types of relativism, suggesting that "relativism...need not be an all-or-nothing affair".⁸⁷ Throughout the early period of his career Troeltsch consistently affirms the constancy of human nature: there are certain truths which abide despite the historically determined (relative) situation.⁸⁸ History displays certain teleological tendencies and laws. There is thus the conception of something beyond, by which history can be measured.

By the time of the revision of "Was heisst >Wesen des Christentums<?" for the second volume of the Collected Works, in 1913, Coakley saw Troeltsch as confronted by the following question:

Should he move to a consistent espousal of epistemological relativism in the case of doctrinal truth, admitting that this might, in principle, lead to a range of disjunctive "truths"; or should he still attempt to ward off that possibility by a continued appeal to a unified teleological metaphysic?⁸⁹

86 Coakley, *Christ without Absolutes*, Chapter One. Cf. Coakley, "Theology and cultural relativism: What is the problem?", for a clarification of the meaning of cultural relativism for the study of theology, particularly with reference to the *Myth of God Incarnate* debate. She moves from a specific discussion of theological themes to a more general discussion of truth and validity in theology.

87 Coakley, op. cit. p.15; "Theology and cultural relativism", p.231.

88 Cf. "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode" (A1900/9a) p.745f. Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.217: "Human things grow slowly, and their great gods are restricted to a small number by the nature (Wesen) of the human".

89 Coakley, *Christ without Absolutes*, p.31.

By the time of *Der Historismus* this question had resolved itself into a statement of what Coakley calls a "value relativism" which still allowed for the possibility of agreed criteria for arriving at value-judgements.⁹⁰ According to Coakley, Troeltsch's mature statement of relativism implied that "relative truths do...correspond to an external state of affairs (whether metaphysical or historical) even though it may be a mystery quite how they do so".⁹¹ Thus what is true is true in virtue of its correspondence to a certain state of affairs (i.e. the Divine Life) but is also affected by a framework defining and reshaping it. Thus she affirms that "when theologians come into conflict, they can and do appeal to the correspondence that they believe that their view has with reality".⁹²

Rather than allowing for a theology which recognises the relativity even of the concept of truth, she introduces a picture of "reality" which can guarantee theological statements, a picture guaranteed by accepted criteria. Such criteria, however, are *subjective* and derive from the practical need to adopt a world-view in order to act meaningfully. To claim "objectivity" for such criteria is to move beyond the limitations of human possibility and it is

90 *ibid.* p.37.

91 *ibid.* p.43.

92 "Theology and cultural relativism", p.240.

upon this recognition that Troeltsch's theology as well as his perception of relativism are founded.⁹³ His confidence in Christianity stems from a subjective conviction that it best allowed for the survival of personalism and the possibility of acting under higher ends. At no point however does he rule out the possibility that other religions or world-views could achieve this personalism.⁹⁴ It was only the future which could confirm the truth of Christianity.⁹⁵

Having assessed the problems of *Historismus* the rest of this chapter will look at how Troeltsch aims to bring this future (where truth will be realised in its fulness) into the present, in the synthesis which marks the solution to the impasse of the Enlightenment.

93 Rather than relying on criteria which are not conditioned (Cf. Runzo, op. cit. p.77 n.66) Troeltsch assumes that Christianity corresponds to *something* even though we can say little about this.

94 Cf. Troeltsch's letter to Bousset (G1976/1 p.39) on the possibilities of Islam. Troeltsch's attitude to other religions was profoundly affected by such an approach to truth since no longer were they seen as competitors but were viewed as filled with genuine religious energy (Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.134). Religious proclamation is concerned not so much with antagonism towards other religions but rather to show what was distinctively Christian. Troeltsch's view was that Christianity was the most complete religion of the personality in distinction to the "half-complete religions of personality and the religions of impersonality" (*Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect.11.3).

95 See above, Chapter 5.22.

6.2 Solutions to the problems of Historismus.

6.21 Introduction.

The remainder of this chapter assesses Troeltsch's philosophy of history in more detail, concentrating upon his attempts to provide solutions to the problems of *Historismus*.¹ In discussing *Geschichtsphilosophie*, Troeltsch talks of the "formal logic of history",² and certainly many of his ideas bear a formal and technical character. He does not attempt, however, to formalise history or merely to point out the principles which he sees as guiding the philosophy of history. Beyond any discussion of the formal logic of history was the material philosophy of history which he hoped would constitute the second volume of *Der Historismus*. Just as his early work on Kant was an attempt to show that the concrete and the living had a role within the formal and *a priori*, so his philosophy of history attempted to combine the formal or universal with the individual.³

1 There have been several attempts to systematise Troeltsch's philosophy of history: Lessing, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie Ernst Troeltschs*; Beer, *Selbstkritik der Geschichtsphilosophie Ernst Troeltschs*; Brachmann, *Ernst Troeltschs historische Weltanschauung*; Schmidt, op. cit., esp. Appendix 1, pp.307ff. The most important recent work is Graf and Ruddies, "Ernst Troeltsch: Geschichtsphilosophie in praktischer Absicht", which emphasises the importance of the material philosophy of history (ethics). In English, see esp. Dyson, *History in the philosophy and theology of Ernst Troeltsch*, and Rubanowice, *Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of History* (both unpublished dissertations), Kenneth Thorne Henderson, "Ethics and the Control of History: a study of Troeltsch", Wilhelm Schenk, "Ernst Troeltsch's conception of History", and Iggers, op. cit., esp. pp.174-195.

2 Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.29.

3 Troeltsch saw this as the great problem of philosophy which had been most clearly recognised by Fichte, (Cf. Review of Raich, (A1906/15)

This attempt at combination is clearly expressed in Chapter Two of *Der Historismus*.⁴ There had been numerous attempts at a solution which would overcome the relativistic scepticism of a Renan and thus arrive at the possibility of the absolute or the universal active in the relative or the individual.⁵ However, the philosophers who attempted to see strict logical necessity in history were guilty of a restriction of reality, whereas those who gave free rein to the individual spirit were guilty of making history anarchic and meaningless. Troeltsch talks of a tension between the universal and the individual and it is this that he seeks to overcome in a synthesis between two.⁶ Thus his problem remained constant: how could the formal be instilled with life without thereby losing all structure and meaning? In short, how could the transcendental subject penetrate concrete reality?⁷

p.681f.) and his solution remained as one of the most "hopeful". This problem was to conceive at one and the same time, the "rational-universal and the individual currents of reality". Cf. Brachmann, op. cit., p.29.

4 Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) esp. pp.119ff.

5 Cf. *ibid.* pp.125ff.

6 Cf. *ibid.* p.130.

7 Cf. *ibid.*, pp.680-81. See above, Chapter 2.3.

Like all aspects of his work, Troeltsch entered into the discussion of the philosophy of history, not in an intellectual vacuum, but through critical dialogue with his colleagues and contemporaries. The influence of Dilthey has already been discussed, but in the context of the mature *Geschichtsphilosophie* of *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, Troeltsch is often seen as being a critical disciple of the Baden neo-Kantians, Rickert and Windelband. Troeltsch incorporated many of Rickert's insights into his own philosophy of history, and indeed, the lengthy Chapter Three of *Der Historismus* adopts the Rickertian position as the starting point for the massive discussion of the concept of historical development.⁸

In a review of the second edition of Rickert's *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft*, Troeltsch clearly expressed his indebtedness to Rickert:

I can only repeat my express conviction that we possess the best means of orientation which modern philosophy presents in this logical-epistemological philosophy...Although my own philosophical work did not begin from a Rickertian standpoint, in effect I have followed Rickertian themes and I have found the Rickertian method to be wholeheartedly correct (*glänzend bewährt*), and I always return to it when I am looking for clarity about such questions.⁹

In a note added to the second edition of "Die christliche Weltanschauung", Troeltsch again points to the importance of Rickert for the clarity of his own philosophical thinking.

⁸ Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22), esp. pp.150-157, and Chapter Three, *passim*.

⁹ Review of Rickert (A1913/22) col.440.

He recognised that much of the terminology he had previously adopted under the influence of Dilthey for the discussion of history would have been better expressed using Rickert's terms.¹⁰ It has been shown over and over again that Troeltsch borrowed a great deal from his colleagues, and indeed made a virtue of eclecticism:¹¹ he was not attempting to introduce new ways of discussing the problems of philosophy, but rather aimed to draw upon the insights of his massive reading to bring the thoughts of many diverse thinkers into a unified approach. However, at critical places, Troeltsch differs significantly from his predecessors and contemporaries.¹²

The structure of *Der Historismus* emphasises Troeltsch's eclecticism: it is a collection of extended discussions of other thinkers concluding with a short treatment of the nature of cultural synthesis. As with Troeltsch's previous two volumes of collected works, many of the discussions had been published in virtually identical form elsewhere, and consequently there is little sense of unity in the work.¹³

10 "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.227n. Cf. "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.449 n.32: "The whole of this present study rests essentially upon what I have learnt from Rickert". Cf. "Meine Bücher" (A1921/29b) p.9, and Drescher, "Ernst Troeltsch's Intellectual Development" pp.15ff.

11 Cf. Drescher, *Glaube und Vernunft*, p.94: "He is eclectic from principle".

12 This point was recognised by Ritzert (in *Die Religionsphilosophie Ernst Troeltschs*) since, although he asserts that Troeltsch "completes the annexation of the Baden neo-Kantians", he recognised at the same time, that "despite obvious points of contact...he presents something essentially individual and gives a quite unique presentation of the problems of religious truth" (p.19).

13 Cf. Schaaf, *Geschichte und Begriff*, p.4: "*Der Historismus* is basically a collection of more or less connected essays taken from the

Much of it is repetitive and loosely constructed. Its style, particularly in Chapter Three, is laborious and ponderous.¹⁴ Troeltsch's own ideas often cannot be easily separated from those with whom he is in active debate.

What will be suggested, however, is that certain points are continually emphasised which indicate Troeltsch's own contribution to the philosophy of history, which, when seen in the light of the rest of his work, help explain his overall theological and philosophical purposes. Although Troeltsch certainly borrowed many of the concepts and theories of his contemporaries, he differed decisively at one significant point. According to Troeltsch, none of them provided an adequate answer to the problems of *Historismus*, since all either overemphasised one aspect (i.e. spirit or nature) at the expense of the other, or were content with methodological pluralism which failed to account for any unity between these two aspects of reality. What Troeltsch aimed to achieve was a coherent unity or *synthesis* between *Historismus* and naturalism, whereby the individual could be integrated in the universal context.

Historische Zeitschrift, the Kantstudien, Schmollers Jahrbüchern and Dioskuren". Cf. Graf and Ruddies Bibliographie under A1922/22 (p.205).

14 Cf. Rubanowice, Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of History, p.26.

6.22 Troeltsch and the Baden neo-Kantians.¹⁵

The distinctiveness of the historical method from the natural scientific had already been discussed at length by Troeltsch in the essay, "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie", published in 1903, almost twenty years before *Der Historismus*.¹⁶ Here Troeltsch first discussed the concept of individuality in detail. It was this concept in particular that differentiated the method of the social and historical sciences from the natural sciences. Troeltsch found the method for the social and historical sciences developed by Windelband and Rickert as liberating, since it allowed for the possibility of extracting individuals from the relativistic flux of history. Along with Rickert, Troeltsch recognised that history involves the construction of specific value-units or historical individuals which have to be abstracted from the flow of happening.¹⁷ In the

15 There are few discussions of the Baden neo-Kantians available in English: there is a useful introduction by Beck (in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*); Iggers, op. cit. pp.147ff.; Schnädelbach, op. cit.; H.A. Hodges (in *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey*, pp.75,226), and T.A. Willey, *Back to Kant*, pp.131-152. More recently there have been a number of reprints and studies from Germany. (E.g. H-L Ollig, *Der Neukantianismus*, pp.53ff.).

16 A1903/4a. It was written as a response to Rickert's *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*. Rickert's basic thesis was that the world, as the totality of objects which are relative to values, is culture, and the world as the totality of objects which are related to laws, is nature. Cf. *Science and History*, ET, Princeton, 1962, Chapter Four.

17 Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.150.

construction of any historical individual there was an objective character which preceded any evaluation on the part of the historian or sociologist:

The personal position of the historian with respect to these values is at this point a matter of indifference.¹⁸

Troeltsch uses the terminology of Windelband to describe this historical as opposed to natural scientific method; it is "idiographic" rather than "nomothetic".¹⁹ Troeltsch had a particularly high regard for his Heidelberg colleague whom he described as a "most cultivated spirit (fein kultivierter Geist)".²⁰ He saw Windelband as setting the metaphysical programme, particularly the problem of objectivity in theology, which Troeltsch tried to answer. He was deeply influenced by him, both philosophically and on a personal level.²¹ This influence is apparent in Windelband's deep awareness of the need for universal norms if any debate was to be resolved in philosophy:

The presupposition of the critical method is faith in universal purposes...Philosophical investigation is only possible between those who are convinced that a universally valid norm (Norm des Allgemeingültiges) stands above every individual activity, and that it is possible to find it.²²

18 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.691.

19 Cf. *ibid.* p.694.

20 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.550. For Troeltsch's assessment of Windelband, see his review of Rickert's appreciation (A1916/25).

21 Cf. Review of Rickert (A1916/25) col.470.

22 Windelband, *Präludien*, II, p.122f. The problem of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in Windelband was discussed by Troeltsch in his review article on Windelband's *Geschichtsphilosophie* (A1917/3) col.320.

Windelband's principles for the philosophy of history had been outlined in his Heidelberg rectoral address of 1894, "Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft":

The empirical sciences seek, in their pursuit of the knowledge of reality, either the universal in the form of the laws of nature, or the particular in the form of what is historically determined; they study, on the one hand, the permanently identical form, and on the other hand the completely determinate content of the real event. The one kind of science is concerned with laws, the other with events; the one teaches about what always is, the other what once was. Scientific thought, if new and artificial expressions might be permitted, is in the one case 'nomothetic', in the other 'idiographic'.²³

For Troeltsch, the chief problem that arises is how historical individuals, when viewed "idiographically", can be linked with the "nomothetic", law-governed view of reality where everything was seen as determined by the principles of causality and conservation of energy. How was the unity of reality to be maintained given this plurality of method?²⁴ Troeltsch admittedly recognised that Windelband's method as developed by Rickert was one step beyond positivism since it recognised that values were present in an objective sense in history. There was, however, no requirement for the historian to consider that these values should conform to any set of higher values. All history could show is a multitude of value units but not a set of universal values. Troeltsch's concern, however, was precisely with the need to

²³ Windelband, "Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft" in *Präludien*, II, Tübingen, 1922, p.130f.

²⁴ Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) pp.150ff.

relate historical value-constructs to a higher, normative conception of truth.

Troeltsch's answer moves significantly beyond Rickert's: the notions of analogy and type go beyond strict immanentism, and imply a more universal set of values.²⁵ Thus in history there is a certain

uniformity of aspiration, just extensive enough to produce ideally connected developments...We assume that the impression and influence we receive from the other are the manifestations of something which does not wholly coincide with our experience of it.²⁶

In describing the relationship between empirical history and the philosophy of history in an article on historiography for the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Troeltsch recognised this as the fundamental problem of *Historismus*. It was that

regarding the significance of that (historical) process for the living and operative will of each particular age - the will which is nurtured by the events of history, and yet manifests at every instant a creative power of its own.²⁷

Troeltsch shared the view with Rickert that historical totalities were unique individuals,²⁸ but this did not mean that they could share nothing in common with one another,

25 Cf. Rickert, *Science and History*, p.31. Cf. Apfelbacher, op. cit., Chapter IVb.

26 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.724f.

27 "Historiography" (A1913/35) p.721.

28 Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.150; "Historiography" (A1913/35) p.720.

which indicated that "civilised life, for all its particularity, also has its communal side".²⁹ It was this "communal" side to all value constructs which laid the foundation for objectivity.³⁰

Troeltsch points out that Rickert himself had seen that the historian could never be completely indifferent to human values, even from the scholarly standpoint. Rickert's method for the study of history implied a certain commitment, but such a commitment could only be a "conviction" and as such was worthless for the historical discipline whatever its value for the individual might be. For Troeltsch, however, the individual stance to historical values was

unavoidable for every comprehensive historical comparison and evaluation, and above all for the treatment of the problem of culture, for ethics and for the philosophy of religion, in so far as the latter is a philosophical investigation of the concrete historical religions and their hierarchical ordering in terms of value.³¹

Troeltsch could thus not accept the "plurality of principle accepted by Rickert as ultimate".³² He aims to overcome

29 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.724.

30 Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.44.

31 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.727.

32 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.713. Stephen Sykes, in his extensive exposition of Troeltsch's essay, "Was heisst >Wesen des Christentums<?", sees the vital importance of this aspect of Troeltsch's philosophy of history: "No exposition of Troeltsch's view at this point can avoid the question whether he now flatly contradicts all that he has said above about the impartiality or the objectivity of the historian's approach" ("Ernst Troeltsch and Christianity's Essence", p.157). Troeltsch was not interested in history for history's sake, but in the theological appropriation of the truth exposed by the historical method. He was not intending to make Rickert's method the method of theology, but was far more concerned with the use theology would have to make of the

Rickert's methodological pluralism in a manner which allows for the

breaking through of the metaphysical depths of life into the phenomenal realm of space and time.³³

This point is brought out most clearly in their respective estimations of the role of psychology. Rather than being a strictly nomothetic discipline as it was for Rickert, Troeltsch asserts that psychology is a "self-contained philosophic discipline which in many respects forms the presupposition of transcendentalism".³⁴ Troeltsch sees the subject as able to stand outside the empirical nomothetic sphere:

It is self-evident that our concern is with interconnected goals that emerge and are actualised only in particular living individuals whose work establishes the interconnection.³⁵

historical method. Sykes considered that Troeltsch's enterprise rested on the sand of the profession of faith in a spiritualised Christian tradition and that his "philosophy of history had been decisively impregnated with Christian assumptions" (p.169). In refusing to countenance the Rickertian method as the method for theology, Troeltsch recognises that the solutions to the problems of philosophy of history do indeed rest on Christian assumptions, since, on his view, it is only upon these assumptions that any solution to the problem of Rickertian pluralism is possible: "the last secret of these processes is faith in the Reason which reveals itself [in history] and the power of the will to affirm such a faith" (*Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.167). Cf. Coakley, op. cit. p.34 n.48.

33 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.726.

Troeltsch's modifications to Kant, which have been discussed above, (Chapter 2.3) allow for precisely this interpenetration of the phenomenal with the noumenal.

34 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.720.

35 *ibid.* p.722.

Thus however much the concept of the "Idea" as an organising principle in history might have been superseded by Rickert's value-immanentism, it had nevertheless not been completely replaced. For Troeltsch, "psychophysical beings" are more than empirical data for perceiving consciousness: they "are for themselves"³⁶, as they operate as independent forces. The perception of tendencies, convergences and developmental types attains a new metaphysical significance in that it indicates a "dominant, transcendental force":

This principle rests on a common power that first arises from the natural life of the soul and it brings about an inner unity of spiritual values.³⁷

6.23 Historical individuals.

Troeltsch could thus not remain satisfied with the level of immanent criticism, but was forced to ask a further question:

What is the relation between the knowledge of historical value-structures and the construction of one's own present values?

³⁸

For Troeltsch, history itself could present no regulative set of absolute norms, yet it was, at the same time, in Schleiermacher's terms, the picture book of ethics. Ethical

36 *ibid.* p.725.

37 *ibid.*

38 *ibid.* p.696.

values were present in the past and thus the study of history provides the arsenal of values: "Our criteria derive from the critical selection out of our cultural inheritance".³⁹ The weakness of Christianity and of much philosophy of history, was that it had underestimated the importance of history in displaying ethical truths.⁴⁰ However, history presents no structure in itself. Structure is *imposed* upon history.⁴¹ For Troeltsch it was this imposition of a structure upon history that opened the way for the solution to the problems of *Historismus*.

Troeltsch agreed with Rickert and Weber that elements of history had to be selected and grouped around their immanent dominant values,⁴² yet, he insisted that such selection was undertaken for a *purpose*,⁴³ for the future. What was important here is the notion of

abstract selection of particular elements of experience for a definite intellectual end.⁴⁴

39 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.167. See below, Chapter 9.1.

40 Cf. *ibid.* p.165.

41 Cf. *ibid.* p.170.

42 Cf. Max Weber, "Subjectivity and Determinism", in Giddens ed. *Positivism and Sociology*, pp.23-32.

43 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.175.

44 "Historiography" (A1913/35) p.720.

In the essay, "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie", the "pressing problem" was that of the relation between history and norms".⁴⁵ This problem had not fundamentally changed even in the posthumous lectures, published as *Christian Thought: Its history and applications*. The leading question of the modern world was

whether, and how far, a conceptually assured and clarified Ethic can master and limit historical relativism.⁴⁶

The task which Troeltsch regards as the most "intimate secret of the urge to know history" is the "relating of actual historical values to a value-system that ought to be recognised as valid".⁴⁷ For Troeltsch, there is an ethic attached to academic research itself. It does not go on in a vacuum, but rather is only undertaken

if acquaintance with the past and alien valuations has significance for our own valuations.⁴⁸

The "a priori of scholarship" is the acknowledgement of absolute purpose:

Such historical insight, it will be said, is always bound up with subjective estimates of what ought to be.⁴⁹

45 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.697.

46 *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.43.

47 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.700.

48 *ibid.* p.701.

49 "Historiography" (A1913/35) p.718. Cf. "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.707. Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.113.

Meaningful scholarship is thus geared around this purpose, and all so-called value-neutral labours are merely the preliminary. Troeltsch goes on by asking the question:

Of what help are the historical value-constructs to us in the production and structuring of the content of such an [obligatory] ideal, recognised as valid for us; that is, in giving [material] content to the formal content of absolute values?⁵⁰

The chaos of value-judgements can be overcome "by comparison with systems of values which it is the task of ethics to construct".⁵¹ Although all historical totalities were constructed around their own immanent values, the need to create some sense of synthesis for the future forced a *halt* to the anarchy of convictions.⁵² To judge the values of our culture required a

free faith in the future, in the ability to unify everything in life (*Zusammenfassung aller im Gesamtflusse des Lebens*), in the unconditional trust in the rationality (*Vernünftigkeit*) of the whole world. That is as far as we can go (*Das ist alles, was wir können*).⁵³

In *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, the unity between the spheres of nature and of spirit is centred around the concept of the historical individual wherein a unity is

50 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.703.

51 "Historiography" (A1913/35) p.722f. Cf. esp. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.157.

52 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.157.

53 *ibid.* p.177.

created from the meaningless diversity which human life presents. The ability to shape this historical individual rests with the personality which creates "a synthesis of natural conditions and value or meaning or freedom".⁵⁴ The ability to shape the future is what is preserved in the possibility of this act of individualisation, the justification for which rests in the "self-production of the personality".⁵⁵ Consequently

all historical ideal formations (Gesetzeszusammenhänge und Sinnzusammenhänge) must be so conceived that within them, the self-production (Selbsterzeugung) of the personality is possible beyond these pressing forces.⁵⁶

The most urgent problem is that of shaping the future.⁵⁷ This involves the ethicisation or the spiritualisation of the natural world.⁵⁸ This is what Troeltsch sees as providing a solution to the problem of how spiritual values could be actualised or break through into the natural world.⁵⁹ Thus

54 *ibid.* p.40.

55 *ibid.* p.51.

56 *ibid.*

57 Cf. *ibid.* p.113.

58 Cf. *ibid.* p.88.

59 Cf. *ibid.* p.95.

there is a marked continuity between all stages of Troeltsch's career. At the beginning Troeltsch regarded this problem as the "original riddle",⁶⁰ and in *Der Historismus* it remains the "continuing riddle" (bleibende Rätsel).⁶¹

The answer to the riddle rested only in the decision to act according to higher ends: "beyond that there was no other proof".⁶² Finding the value under which history is judged, and around which the future was shaped, is "a matter of faith in the deepest sense of the world".⁶³ Troeltsch goes on: "in faith then the individual itself creates its ideal out of history".⁶⁴ This act of creation was the "leap of faith" in the same sense as Kierkegaard's, but it was not a decision for an emptiness and something other-worldly, but rather "the leap is not possible without faith that it carries us to the goal",⁶⁵ a goal which will redirect the

60 "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/1) p.212.

61 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.88.

62 *ibid.* p.170. See below, Chapter 7.25.

63 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.175.

64 *ibid.* p.188.

65 *ibid.* p.179.

course of the natural world. The human situation was such that this could not be otherwise:

Without faith, without errors, without martyrs there can be no apprehension of truths and values...Also here there is a 'justification by faith', indeed, this is probably the most universal meaning of this splendid protestant dogma.⁶⁶

6.24 The solution to the problems of historicism: the return to religion.

According to Troeltsch, the possibility of the unity of freedom and scientific determinism as a solution to the "continuing riddle" was recognised most profoundly by Leibniz who saw reality as a "whole", yet refused to restrict it to the monism of a Spinoza.⁶⁷ Priority was given to the individual, to the spirit or the person which united its very real feeling of freedom with scientific causality.⁶⁸ In such a way a new synthesis of science and religious freedom was achieved. This influences Troeltsch's work from the very outset. He recognises the need for a "monadological idealism", that is, the recognition of the irrational, of the spirit, at work in the rational, in nature, as early as 1894.⁶⁹

66 *ibid.* p.185.

67 "Leibniz und die Anfänge des Pietismus" (A1902/12b) p.503.

68 *ibid.* p.497. Cf. "Der deutsche Idealismus" (A1900/12a) p.537.

69 "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.248. In a review of Cassirer's *Leibniz' System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen* (A1904/11), col.642, Troeltsch calls for a *theological* use of Leibniz over and against his appropriation by the Marburg neo-Kantians: "A treatment of Leibniz as part of the history of theology is as equally justified as a treatment from the point of view of logic and

Troeltsch saw the autonomous personality as reflecting the Leibnizian monad, as the finite irreducible fact of the universe, not as an empty form, but as a combination of irrational and rational:

The irrational, which is independent of the mind and nevertheless is a substance connected with it, above all in the concept of God and in other minds, and the irrational of the numerous (*vielmälig*) individual and new creations, seems to me to be the most fundamental thought, and to have had a far greater importance for Leibniz himself, [than was recognised by the Marburg neo-Kantians].⁷⁰

In *Der Historismus* Troeltsch specifically drew out his connection with Leibniz.⁷¹ The personality becomes the seat of the synthesis between the past, present and future, as it undertakes action in accord with what it "dares" to see as absolute ends.⁷² That which is, and that which ought to be, are combined in the act. There is an indwelling (*Ineinander*) between fact and spirit, the natural and the ideal, the necessary and the free, and the universal and the particular.

In short, the necessary contradiction which characterises all human existence is overcome in the personality conceived

epistemology" (col.643).

⁷⁰ Review of Cassirer (A1904/11) col.643.

⁷¹ *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.209.

⁷² *ibid.* p.214.

as analogous to the Leibnizian monad. In the dare and the act the absolute makes contact with the relative and so is made "living and creative".⁷³ The absolute is considered as a "will to creativity and to form" whereby the finite spirit is empowered by the unconditioned divine ground. The solution to *Geschichtsphilosophie* is the union (Zusammentreffen) of the relative and the absolute in the concrete individual.⁷⁴

This synthesis aimed to achieve an integration between individuality and universality, and thus ensure the creative capacity for the personality over and against unbridled individualism, the impotence of monism, and the depersonalisation of capitalism which characterised the modern world. The ground for this unity was not a product of the finite world, but rather came from outside, from the recognition of the divine ground to all existence. To be meaningful, human life itself required the acceptance of a divine, absolute ground as the basis for unity.

The philosophy of history, seen as the universalisation of *Religionsphilosophie* moves back to theology, to the analysis of this relationship with the "divine ground". Troeltsch's system has thus moved full-circle. From the specific (the analysis of religion), Troeltsch moves to the universal (the metaphysics of history) and returns to religion as alone able to achieve a solution to the impasse of the Enlightenment.

⁷³ *ibid.* p.212.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p.220.

Troeltsch's theology, which is the subject of the remaining chapters, thus marks the conclusion to Troeltsch's work.

Chapter Seven: Troeltsch's outline of theology.7.11 Introduction: "The systematic theologian of the
>religionsgeschichtlichen Schule<".

This chapter aims to show how Troeltsch incorporates the results of his investigations of *Religionsphilosophie* and of *Geschichtsphilosophie* into a systematic theology.

Troeltsch's interest was in *Religionsphilosophie* and the *Gechichtsphilosophie der Religion* as integral parts of theology, that is, in drawing out the systematic theological implications of the philosophical and comparative historical study of religion:

If we are to remain purely with such a universal history of religions, so we only contribute to an increase in the anarchy of modern historicism.¹

Troeltsch outlines the programme for a systematic theology in the essay "The Dogmatics of the 'religionsgeschichtliche Schule'.² The first strand was the "historical investigation of the development of Christianity itself".³ This was the task of showing that Christianity was

¹ Report of the II. International Congress for *allgemeine Religionsgeschichte*, (A1905/11), col.2760.

² (A1913/2).

³ "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.3, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.502. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 1. Troeltsch traces this branch of systematic theology, the "historical justification of Christianity within *Religionsgeschichte*", back to Schleiermacher. Following Wyman, the dictated sections of the lectures on *Glaubenslehre* are referred to by their section number, and Gertrud von le Fort's lecture notes by the page number in F1925/2.

"universally supreme" for our own culture, not in the sense that this is scientifically demonstrable, but as something grounded in faith.⁴ The standard that emerges in historical enquiry is not objective nor is it arbitrary: it is something based on the convincingness of the historical analysis of the tradition and in its ability to retain a genuine religious power relevant to our own situation.⁵

This concern with the systematic implications of the historical method meant that Troeltsch moved significantly beyond most of his colleagues in the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*:

The so-called *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* goes back entirely to 'spiritual' religion and is therefore ecclesiastically impotent. My own theology is certainly 'spiritual', but for that very reason it seeks to make room for the *historical* element, and for the natural and sociological factor which is bound up with [this].⁶

Troeltsch thus attempted to overcome the theological impasse recognised by Johannes Weiss:

Every dogmatics which employs biblical concepts is always in a more or less clearly perceived danger of stripping these concepts of their original historical character by reinterpreting them to new purposes in accordance with new viewpoints.⁷

4 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect.1.1. Troeltsch attempted this in his *Philosophie der Religionsgeschichte*. See above, Chapters 4 and 5.

5 Cf. "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.10f., "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.509f.

6 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.935f, ET. p.904, n.504a. For Troeltsch, Christianity is a complex mixture of Church, Sect and Mysticism, none of which can be ignored at the expense of another. Each is integral to the whole. See below, Chapter 9.2.

7 Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, ET, p.81. For Troeltsch's views of Weiss's Christology, see the letter to Bousset, (G1976/2) p.28f: "For Weiss, Jesus is a gruesome fanatic (ein grauenhafter Schwärmer) which in itself is coherent, but does not match

Weiss's own solution appeared unsatisfactory:

Though in retrospect we certainly can say as a judgement of faith that Jesus established the Kingdom of God within his Church, it is just as certain that such a conception or expression is far removed from the sphere of Jesus' ideas.⁸

For Weiss, there could be no synthesis between dogmatics and historical theology: any tension between them was overcome in a judgement of faith. For Troeltsch, however, this was a denial of the meaning of history for theology:

The historical method must be carried with its complete shameless (unbefangener) conclusions into theology. Thus arises the demand of the construction of theology as an historical (historisch), universal-historical (universalgeschichtlich) theology...on a *religionsgeschichtlichen* basis.⁹

After the historical criticism came the systematic construction, since

it is impossible to construct a theory of Christianity as the absolute religion on the basis of a historical way of thinking or by the use of historical means.¹⁰

This was the distinctively "theological" moment which Troeltsch considered to be at the heart of historical theology:¹¹

his actual context." Over the years, however, Troeltsch gradually came to share something of this eschatological view of Jesus' message. Cf. Coakley, op. cit, pp.51ff, p.59.

⁸ Weiss, op. cit., p.79.

⁹ "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode" (A1900/9a) p.738.

¹⁰ *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.63.

¹¹ Cf. "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.3, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.502. Troeltsch thus regarded the *Social Teaching* as "admittedly only a preparation for my actual task" (*Briefe*, (G1974/1) p.93).

What theology is concerned with is not the history of religions in general but *normative* knowledge acquired through the scientific study of religion.¹²

We are thrust back to history itself and the necessity of constructing from this history a religious world of ideas which shall be normative for us.¹³

It is because he drew out the systematic consequences of the historical method for theology that he came to be regarded as the systematic theologian (*Systematiker*) of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*:¹⁴

We are concerned with the *religionsgeschichtliche* attitude only in so far as it has been appropriated, or can be appropriated by theology.¹⁵

The second aspect of historical theology^{is} the investigation_L

12 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.25.

13 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.10, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.509.

14 Cf. "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.1, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.500. Graf (in "Der >Systematiker<", p.235f), suggests that Troeltsch did not speak of himself as the systematician of the school, but was only regarded by others as such. Cf. Bodenstein, op. cit., p.37: "He drew the consequences in a clear and sober fashion, and thus became the *Systematiker* of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*".

15 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.3, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.502. Cf. Pannenberg, "Toward a theology of the history of religions" esp. Pt.4 (pp.96ff.), "The reality-reference (*Wirklichkeitsbezug*) of religious experience and its significance for the understanding of the history of religions". Pannenberg calls for a theology of the history of religions tested "in every case to what extent the underlying experience of the divine mystery expressed in a religious phenomenon is able to illuminate the reality of existence as it was experienced *then* and as it presents itself in contemporary experience, and therewith to confirm its claim to open up an access to the divine mystery" (p.118).

of the "power which lies deeper than any historical formulation which it may have produced".¹⁶ Under Troeltsch's formulation of the historical method, the authority once secured by revelation would have to be guaranteed by a metaphysics of history. The goals and values of history could not be imposed from above, but were to be found in the very analysis of history itself. Troeltsch saw the need to search for the law of development from "out of the different claims to revelation, universality and unique truth in relation to the essence of religion".¹⁷ Meaning was perceived in history by the critical powers of the human being, and not through the revealing powers of God. The formulation of the criteria under which the past was understood as meaningful, as the work of God, was thus at the same time a reformulation of theology under the impact of the historical method:

The central science for us in *Religionsphilosophie* is the determination of the essence and meaning of Christianity through the use of the philosophy of history.¹⁸

16 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.12f., "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.511.

17 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.11.

18 "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori" (A1909/31a) p.767. See below, Section 7.2.

7.12 The function of Religionsphilosophie in Troeltsch's systematic theology.

Troeltsch regarded the second task of systematic theology as that of *Religionsphilosophie* or "*prinzipielle Theologie*".¹⁹ This is the attitude which analyses and assesses the truth of religion, which "does not depend on the distinctive dogmatic content of Christianity".²⁰

Troeltsch did not attempt to locate the essence of Christianity in this aspect of theology, that is in a form of vague intellectualised mysticism, in the religion of reason.²¹ Rather he saw dogmatic theology as the explication of the essence of Christianity, as the combination of historical and metaphysical statements oriented around the future development of Christianity. He did not attempt to bypass history in favour of some form of spiritualised religion as others had done, but rather sought to incorporate it in an all-embracing synthesis. For

19 "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.504. The English translation, "theology in the distinctive sense of the word" ("The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.5) is misleading. A better reading might be something like "fundamental theology" (Cf. Gerrish, "The possibility of a historical theology", p.105). In *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2), p.1, Troeltsch calls *prinzipielle Theologie*, the "doctrine of religious certainty". Cf. Yasukata, op. cit., pp.90ff.

20 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.5, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.504.

21 Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.413: "It is the mystics who best encourage the pursuit of the problem of *Religionsphilosophie*, even if they tend to underestimate the historical mediation and conditionedness (*Bedingtheiten*) of this experience of God". See above, Chapter 3.29.

Troeltsch, theology was the attempt to provide a synthesis between the historical and the metaphysical for the purposes of the present and the future.

In his essay, "Religionsphilosophie",²² Troeltsch explains this relationship between the philosophy of religion and religion itself, in terms of the religion of the people (Volksreligion) and the religion of the educated (Bildungsreligion), a distinction he had first introduced in the essay "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion".²³ He

believes in an intellectual upper class which will always be 'broken' by passionate reactions from below.²⁴

Theology is concerned with the combination of the "life" embodied in the religion of the people with the rationality of the intellectual religion. An "historical, comparative, doctrine of revelation assessed by *Gechichtsphilosophie*" is combined with the "alien rationalism of pure scientific logic".²⁵ The potency of rational religion can only be supplied by historical religious forms.²⁶ Troeltsch thus

22 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7). Cf. MS *Religionsphilosophie*, Chapter 2.

23 "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1896/1) p.108. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.16f. Cf. Drescher, *Glaube und Vernunft*.

24 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.30.

25 "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1896/1) p.134.

26 Cf. "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.10: "A religion based upon philosophy is an illusion". Cf. MS *chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.7: "Nothing is to be expected from philosophy, which is for the most part, only for the most intellectual classes". Cf. Ritzert, op. cit., p.56: "In truth, Troeltsch's theory of the actualisation of the religious *a priori* springs directly from Kant's conception of religion which could never cloak mystical experiences completely with rational validity".

emphasises the importance and indispensability of the cult:

If Judaism had been mystic by nature, faith in God would never have conquered the world.²⁷

The distinction between philosophy and theology reflects the dualism between science and myth, between reason and nature.²⁸ In the end the problem

resolved itself into the relationship of religion and theology, and further into the problem of experience and reflection, or experience and thought...theology is the reflection about religion, the raising of questions about the previously personal religious convictions and their connections from every angle with all the other most important spiritual powers.²⁹

Accordingly, theology concerns itself with the reconciliation of *Volksreligion* with *Bildungsreligion*. It was "this fact which gave theology its fundamental task",³⁰ that of holding the two aspects in balance. The "naive religion requires control" by reason.³¹

27 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.44. Cf. p.46: "The power (Stosskraft) of and achievement of the phenomenon clings to the concrete. Mysticism is not that which is left in the sieve after analysis". Cf. p.47: "The cult is not a detraction (Trübung) but is something essential in all religions".

28 Cf. "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.137ff.

29 Süskind, "Zur Theologie Troeltschs", p.13. The business of theology was the "modification and raising of the naive, merely psychological, immediate religious certainty into a scientific theological conviction explained and corrected by the most universal thought possible and grounded epistemologically."

30 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.132. Cf. "Main problems" (C1905/1) p.281, *Die Trennung* (A1907/2) p.63f., and MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.47.

31 MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.15. Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1896/1) p.108. Cf. "Glaube III" (A1907/22a) col.1447.

Theology is concerned with the process of combination, with relating all sides of the study of religion around a set of unified practical aims, that is, with creating a compromise for the day. Thus, theology is not "scientific" but is rather something modified by the practical interests of the church, by the exigencies of the present task:

The essential role of theology within the discipline of religion is the practical departure point and practical interest.³²

Religionsphilosophie in turn sets about reforming or purifying religion, but can never succeed in any attempt to replace the mythos, that is, the cult and the historical forms, by an empty rational religion.³³ It helps to prevent excesses and carries out the role of "supervision" (*Beaufsichtigung*): to ask for more is to ask too much of what can only function as a corrective. This purification or supervision "is all that science can do (for religion)", but, Troeltsch asks, "is not this service great enough and indispensable enough to justify the work of such a science?"³⁴

32 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.126. Cf. Paul, op. cit., p.161n.: "Troeltsch in this context agrees with Ritschl...in that they both identify religious knowledge as practical rather than theoretical." For Troeltsch, however, there is no question of practical *knowledge*. All there can ever be is a process of *getting to know*. See above, Chapter 3.23.

33 Cf. Süsskind, op. cit., p.57 who re-emphasises the need for critical philosophy in the analysis of religion, but once again affirms that in theology there can be no certainty: indeed there could be no progress in theology if it was certain of its propositions. "The concept of the religious *a priori* does not mean that everyone must come to religion or that everyone could come to religion but rather that everyone should."

34 "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.288. Cf. Drescher, op. cit., who

7.13 Religious and philosophical language.

The relation of philosophical language to religious language involves the relation of the cultic and the symbolic to the rational *a priori*, or in Troeltsch's own terms, the mythos to the logos. Theology must treat religion under the "recognition of the polarity of life and thought, of mythos and logos".³⁵ It is the duty of theology to connect the religious interpretation of the world with modern scientific world-views without reducing the power of religion:³⁶

Not its adequacy as objective knowledge, but its adequacy as an expression of religious real-estate (Grundbesitz) is the measure of its epistemological value. It always remains symbol, whatever its scientific reworking or purification. Its specific religious character abides in the vitality of the symbol.³⁷

recognises this purification as the essential interpretative feature of Troeltsch's thought: "the emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the religious; the setting together of pure religiosity and mysticism; the function as a criterion of the scientific (epistemological) element against the mythological (psychological): that is the most pure and concentrated Troeltsch. It is here that his heart beats; it is here that the religious *a priori* is rooted (p.62)." On the concept of purification, see below, Section 7.23.

35 "Logos und Mythos" (A1913/8a) p.835. Cf. MS *Einführung*, sect 2.

36 Cf. Günther, *Die Grundlagen der Religionsphilosophie Ernst Troeltschs*, p.57.

37 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 3.8, p.45.

The two forms of thought (Denkformen) must be connected.

It is

here [that] the fantasies of a poor tinker like Bunyan have just as much right as the thoughtful sublimity of a Schleiermacher.³⁸

The "logos" of philosophy can never replace theology, which as a synthesis for the present includes symbolic expressions of religious practice and experience, which embody a "life" absent from philosophy.³⁹ "Religion cannot be reduced to a science".⁴⁰ Troeltsch sums this up in a review article of 1916:

Christianity appears to me today, in spite of all upsets and lassitude, still richer and deeper than any kind of rational metaphysics, and a solution to the crisis of religion through a universally recognised metaphysics I hold for scarcely probable. Therefore I hold to what is there: it really is not *that* little.⁴¹

According to Troeltsch, the modern theologian could choose one of two options to bring about a synthesis for the present: he could either "open up a new epoch for religion", an epoch in which purely personal religious conviction is

38 "Logos und Mythos" (1913/8a) p.834.

39 See above, Chapter 3.15.

40 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.53. Cf. p.27 (on the use of the Bible): "The main thing is to remember that the Bible is there and that we must learn to read it correctly, that is without critical and dogmatic worries, without continual scientific concern, but simply as a religious person".

41 Review of Oesterreich (A1916/12) col. 233. Cf. Review of Kaftan (A1912/8) col.728. See above, Chapter 3.25.

paramount, or he could take up the traditional exercise of presenting living faith to the living religious community, so that normative religion might arise from the historical.⁴² The second option could be the only real solution, for nowhere but in the cult and the religious community could there be a power for life.⁴³ Troeltsch outlined the problem by asking whether the religious conviction is solely individual, or,

must it always stand in connection with the great historical powers of religious history and community and through this connection attain the necessary depths and strengths and necessary organisatory social effects?⁴⁴

Although he admitted that his work "was in the main in quite a spontaneous vital agreement"⁴⁵ with his own, Troeltsch criticised Eucken's philosophy of religion from this point of view:

The concept of universal religion itself can only be abstracted on the basis of the primary religious reality which is present only in the positive religions.⁴⁶

42 Cf. "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.161f.

43 Cf. MS *Religionsphilosophie*, p.21. It was only in its realisation in cultic behaviour that religious experience could even begin to be described. Cf. Niebuhr, *Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion*, p.79: "Troeltsch recognised the individualistic and anti-social character of mystic religion and came to regard religion in history - specific religions having social organisation and cult - as the primary object of philosophy of religion".

44 "Religionsphilosophie" (A1904/7) p.131. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 6.2, p.81.

45 Review of Eucken (A1902/7) col.386.

46 Review of Eucken (A1902/7) col.386. Cf. Review of Dorner (A1905/10) col.764. In the whole of Eucken's Nobel prize winning volume, *Die Wahrheitsgehalt der Religion* (ET by W Tudor Jones, of Second Edition, *The Truth of Religion*) there is merely a handful of references to the history

The "logos" must be conceived as interactive with the mythos as the religious *a priori* actualises itself in real time.

7.14 Faith, myth and reason.

Troeltsch talks of faith as the epistemological moment of religion, not as the trust in a revealed teaching as true but as the acceptance of a productive and original appearance of a new religious power, of new capacities for life. The myths and symbols of religion are thus very important as expressions of this power which gains expression in the imagination (Phantasie). Heroes and myths belong to this specific mode of religious knowledge. They become the "self-forming representative expressions for the religious whole (Ganze) which dwells within them".⁴⁷ There is thus a dynamic relation between the symbols and the myths of the tradition, and the present, as it attempts to assimilate the powers of religion in a manner which made sense in the modern world. Faith is thus

a mythical-symbolic-practical peculiarly religious way of thinking and knowing stemming from the historical-personal impressions.⁴⁸

of religion. Religion, for Eucken, seemed little more than a vague intellectualised mysticism. For Troeltsch's constructive criticism of his one-time friend (the two fell out over their differing attitudes towards the First World War), see the discussion in "Aus der religiösen Bewegung der Gegenwart" (A1910/22), pp.30-34. Cf. Hans Rollmann, "Troeltsch, von Hügel and Modernism", p.37 n.9.

⁴⁷ "Glaube III: dogmatisch" (A1907/22a) col.1440.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* col.1440.

The myth is the means by which practical religious powers are transmitted and communicated, which a systematic theology then subjects to scientific investigation. "Theology remains in essence the connecting of science and myth".⁴⁹ It is bound to experience something of a conflict, in that the knowledge imparted by the naive myth is something which can never be fully rationalised: faith is a practical-religious concept which must always be something different from the rational knowledge of the natural sciences. Genuine religion appears not in the annihilation of the myth but where the myth embodies representations of practical values. Even in its highest sublimation, myth must remain myth and can merely be purified by scientific investigation.⁵⁰ Religious concepts cannot be amenable to the proofs of objective science: "the ultimate proof of their certainty is that they are meaningful (bedeutsam) for faith".⁵¹ Hence

the epistemological value of faith rests in the practical mastery of the riddle of life by grasping a practical conviction of redemptive power in the community of God.⁵²

Troeltsch emphasises the need for myth, but at the same time

49 *ibid.* col.1443.

50 This was the case even in metaphysics: "I believe that metaphysics...is not a firm science (Wissenschaft) but is always symbolic" (Review of Oesterreich (A1916/12) col.233).

51 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.164.

52 "Glaube III" (A1907/22a) col.1443.

he aims to show that a religion applicable to the modern world may require certain new myths which nevertheless retain a link with the tradition. It is this that is the distinctive task of modern *Glaubenslehre*.⁵³

7.15 The task of Glaubenslehre.⁵⁴

The third aspect of Troeltsch's theological programme is the task of dogmatics or *Glaubenslehre*. It was this aspect which marked the constructive task of theology as it attempted a synthesis between the historical and philosophical sides of religion. This constructive task is outlined in the concluding section Troeltsch added for the German edition of the essay on the dogmatics of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*.⁵⁵ Rather than ending with an account of possible objections to the historical method as he had done in the English edition, he appended a few pages on the positive aspects of the *religionsgeschichtliche* method, seen in the light of the theological question, "how do I find the soul and love again?"⁵⁶ What mattered was how the study of

⁵³ Cf. *ibid.* col.1444.

⁵⁴ On this subject see esp. Walter Wyman, *The Concept of Glaubenslehre*; Darrell Davis Perkins Jr., *Explicating Christian Faith*; Birkner, "Glaubenslehre und Modernitätserfahrung" in TS. IV, pp.325ff.; Coakley, *op. cit.*, esp. Chapter Three; Klemm, "Die Identifizierung des christlichen Glaubens in Ernst Troeltschs Vorlesung über Glaubenslehre", pp.187-198.

⁵⁵ "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.519-524.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* p.522. Cf. "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.3, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.502. Cf. Wyman (*op. cit.*) p.130: "Our question is how do I find the soul and love again? That is, that question of the present is how can the human personality be meaningful and valuable".

religion should affect the future. Thus, the essential task for theology was

that of the religious life itself which, after the collapse of the old dogmatic churches in ruins and the rapid advance of secularisation, is slowly gathering itself for a new profundity.⁵⁷

Troeltsch provided a specific role for dogmatics as that aspect of systematic theology specifically concerned with the future practice of religion, alongside *Religionsphilosophie* or "prinzipielle" theology and historical theology. Troeltsch felt dogmatics to be the distinctively theological moment which moved beyond these two preliminary aspects of his systematic theology. "What we mean by dogmatics" is "the specific ultimate theological problem, viz...the exposition of a normative religious system".⁵⁸

The third and "real and specific" task of systematic theology is the exposition of the specific conceptions implied in Christianity, a "dogmatic unfolding of the protestant-Christian principle"⁵⁹ in the relations between God, the world, the human, redemption, social communion (Kingdom of God) and hope (eternal life). It proceeds by relating the historical tradition, which because of its uncertainties, cannot be an "immediate object of faith", to the present experience of the individual "in the experience

57 "Wesen der Religion" (A1906/5b) p.499, ET p.120.

58 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.6, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.505.

59 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.19.

of redemption".⁶⁰ It does this by drawing the power and vitality from the tradition to inform and revitalise the present, providing the means of anchoring the confusion of the present in the possibilities for new life which have always invigorated the tradition. At the end of his career Troeltsch re-affirms that one of the greatest tasks of the present

is to mould (verarbeiten) the new and the deep sources of our spiritual life to form a unity to preserve us or to reveal the their meaning for the necessities of life (lebensnotwendige Bedeutung)...It has to be a union of the richest traditions and the deepest regard for history with living power and freshness.⁶¹

Troeltsch's work on dogmatics was thus more than merely a formal duty forced on him at Heidelberg. The lectures on *Glaubenslehre*, in particular, have been disputed as providing anything but "corroborative evidence" for positions definitively taken elsewhere.⁶² However, much of their content was dictated and Gertrud von le Fort's lecture notes often agree very precisely with the articles on dogmatics in the first edition of the enclopaedia of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.⁶³

60 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.14, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.513.

61 *Der Berg der Läuterung* (A1921/11) p.20. "The remembrance of Dante serves merely to place the problem before us with the greatest seriousness".

62 Cf. Reist, op. cit., p.156. Reist is correct in recognising that the sources for an assessment of Troeltsch as a systematic theologian would be in the lectures on *Glaubenslehre* and in the articles in the *R.G.G.* However he refuses to sanction the possibility that any coherent dogmatics can be constructed from Troeltsch's system (p.192f.) since "the dismissal of the concept of the supreme validity of Christianity" meant "the death blow for Troeltsch's theology" (p.198).

In so far as his *Glaubenslehre* was concerned with this "attainment of a religious clarity in the confusion of modern life",⁶⁴ then it marked not the low point or "collapse" of his theology, but rather the high point. The acceptance of the historical method meant a move beyond the confessional dogmatics of the past, and thus dogmatics acquired a more universal significance. Thus Troeltsch wrote to von Hügel:

I am more a theologian for humankind in general, for the inquiring (Augeregten) and searching than for a specific church community.⁶⁵

Dogmatics was concerned with the *religionsgeschichtliche*

63 Walter Wyman, (in the introduction to *The Concept of Glaubenslehre*, esp. p.xv.f., n.55) provides a full defence for the use of the lectures in the exposition of Troeltsch's system: "Only by ignoring Troeltsch's position in the *Glaubenslehre* could Bodenstein arrive at the conclusion that Troeltsch never rendered an account of what Christianity is". Marta Troeltsch, in her introduction to the *Glaubenslehre*, comments that von le Fort's notes "represent a faithful record of the lectures, which was only possible for one who was completely immersed in the thought-world of the speaker" (F1925/2) p.VI. The lectures on *Glaubenslehre* were repeated from the Summer-Semester of 1896 eleven times until the Winter-Semester of 1914-15. The title for the lectures given in the Heidelberg *Vorlesungsverzeichnisse* was sometimes *Glaubenslehre* and sometimes *Dogmatik*. In his first two semesters at Heidelberg (Summer-Semester 1894 and Winter-Semester 1894-5) Troeltsch had lectured on "Christliche Dogmatik". See below, Bibliographical Appendix.

64 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.19 (amended), "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.518.

65 *Briefe* (G1974/1) p.61.

attitude as it was appropriated by theology, "in so far as it is compatible with a personal affirmation of the religious life",⁶⁶ and was no longer an expression of the theological formulations of the supernaturalist clerical systems of the past.⁶⁷

Troeltsch's acknowledgement of the limited access to the truth⁶⁸ leads him to emphasise again and again that he is looking at dogmatic propositions not as they are in themselves, but only as they stand in relation to the human. In talking about God we have but limited access, only a "ray which shines in our soul".⁶⁹ We analyse not God, but our own idea of God:

In *Glaubenslehre*, we acquire only information about ourselves.⁷⁰ There can be no question of proof. Consequently there must be a great deal that is purely personal in dogmatics which leads to a "heavy responsibility as well as an ease of error".⁷¹ A theology of consciousness instead of a theology

66 "The dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.3, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.502.

67 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 11.3. Cf. p.30 where Troeltsch asks, "Do we want to recognise modern life which has surreptitiously flowed in everywhere quite painlessly, also as a source for *Glaubenslehre*?"

68 See above, Chapter 3.23.

69 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.131.

70 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.132. Troeltsch is here standing close to Ritschl's epistemology where God can be known only in relationship. See above, Chapter 4.21.

71 *ibid.* p.131.

of facts (Tatsachen) must be more subjective. What Troeltsch is attempting is to describe the contents of the consciousness in so far as this can be thought of as "God-filled".

In the article on faith in the *R.G.G.*^{1,72} Troeltsch discusses the essence of faith as "the practical experience of elevation (Erhebung) to God".⁷³ The essential character of Christianity rests not in the church or in its dogmas, but in the practical domain, in the "breakthrough of pure ethical religiosity"; Christianity knows only a *Praxis* which flows forth from God:⁷⁴

Dogmatic statements are...only expressions about the preconditions and contents of the Christian faith-consciousness, which means a practical-theoretical complete life-stance (Gesamtlebensstellung) to God, the world and the human.⁷⁵

The specific and decisive task of theology rests in dogmatics, conceived as the appropriation of the living power of religion, that is, as "practical theology".⁷⁶ First and

72 "Glaube III: Dogmatisch" (A1907/22a).

73 *ibid.* col.1438.

74 *ibid.*

75 *Glaubenslehre* (1925/2) Sect. 11.2.

76 Troeltsch sees this *practical* ethical interest as of prime importance in Dante: "It is not aesthetics which we look for today in the poet, but ethics, that ethics, which through the inspiring (seelenbewegende) life-generating power of art, gives it a living and vivid privilege (Vorrecht) over all philosophers, theoreticians and preachers" (*Der Berg der Läuterung*, (A1921/11), p.8). "Such an ethic is the essence of Dante's poetry" (*ibid.* p.12). Gerrish (in "Ernst Troeltsch and the possibility of a historical theology") points out that in considering dogmatic theology as an essentially practical discipline, Troeltsch modified Schleiermacher's conception of it as a part of historical theology. According to Gerrish, Troeltsch's material difference was that

foremost, dogmatics provides resources for the clergy in their need to give leadership to the church, but beyond this, it also provides a basis for encouraging development of the faith of the whole community.⁷⁷ Dogmatics is the

unfolding of the body of thought about faith on a scientific and *religionsphilosophischer* basis and under the acknowledgement of modern scientific thought, for the education and guidance...of the clergy. At the same time it should also serve to deepen the understanding of religious thought for all those who are interested.⁷⁸

This conception of dogmatics naturally moves beyond "science", since

science is concerned only with that which is universally in conformity to law and universally valid. No science can determine the life-values which emerge in the process of evolution. These can be grasped only by an intuition which feels, apprehends and interprets (*gestaltende*) them.⁷⁹

Glaubenslehre is the

scientific reworking and reformulation of faith, but not the transformation of faith into scientific-rational knowledge. Rather it supports the practical-religious-contemplative character of faith.⁸⁰

he did not consider it proper to force historical considerations into the metaphysical as Schleiermacher had done. Practical theology is however only arrived at at the "end of an historical enquiry, [thus]...present religious experience continues to receive its life and power from the vital world of history" (p.110), and in this sense it could be regarded, even for Troeltsch, as historical theology.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 3.8.

⁷⁸ "Dogmatik" (A1907/4a) col.109.

⁷⁹ "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.18, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.516.

⁸⁰ *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 3.9.

Dogmatic statements are expressions of the appropriation of an absolute or religious motivation for action; such expressions can never be scientific, in the sense that they can be open to proof, yet they can nevertheless be justified as expressive of the religious synthesis between spirit and nature:

The dogmatic system does not merely have the logical-theoretical meaning of a unified representation of religious faith, but also the practical-religious meaning which enacts the inner transformation of religious life in a similar manner to the transformation of the scientific picture of the world through the construction of the system of a body of thought about the faith (Glaubensgedanken).⁸¹

Glaubenslehre is thus not merely a description of the contemporary stand of the faith, but at the same time, a reformation of this faith through contact with the modern world:

Glaubenslehre admittedly is not concerned with scientific propositions but with specifically religious propositions about the power of the personality, not with those of science. The latter merely gives us the systematic-logical axioms which determine our perceptions. But *Glaubenslehre* is to be conceived of as a whole approach to the world (Weltanschauung) which makes contact with the whole of our spiritual environment, thus also with science.⁸²

81 *ibid.* Sect 1.5.

82 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.18. On the relationships between science and *Glaubenslehre*, see esp. Wyman, *op. cit.*, Chapter 4.3. Wyman sees Troeltsch as a neo-Kantian in his attempt to *downgrade* *Glaubenslehre* to the sphere of practical knowledge. He stresses the importance of the practical dimension of Troeltsch's thought in countering the common charge of excessive subjectivism. "So far from being a program for religious individualism, Troeltsch's theology is situated firmly in and correlated to an appropriation of the Church" (p.121). Troeltsch, in his "essentially confessional enterprise" is making "a romantic protest against the spirit of the times" (p.125). Wyman, however, sees Troeltsch's greatest deficiency in failing to

Dogmatics addresses the same problem as idealist philosophy: the problems of nature and spirit, of freedom and determinism, or, more generally, the dualism of the human condition, yet it moves beyond the impasse of the critical philosophy of the Enlightenment in expressing a reconciliation, or a synthesis, between these two spheres by a reformulation of the religious expressions of unity made in the past:

The exercise of *Glaubenslehre* is here the work of harmonisation which every era has to carry out for itself.⁸³

The demands of the present for synthesis are thus vitally integrated into the dogmatic formulations of the past in the production of a dogmatics for the present:

From time to time it may well be necessary to relax the connections to history and to make room for individual religious production, but the individual religious production is basically only a new standpoint towards history and making the given more fruitful.⁸⁴

The fundamental problem of a *religionsgeschichtliche* dogmatics is thus that of relating the historical tradition to the experience of the present, or as Troeltsch prefers to

connect this practical ecclesiastical sphere to the scientific. From what has been said above (Chapter Four) it would seem that Troeltsch did not wish to separate religion from science, nor to restrict it by a positivistic approach to the world, but to achieve (in Kantian terms) an interaction between pure and practical reason. *Glaubenslehre* is an expression of this interpenetration of the creative, divine, infinite power of freedom with the determined, finite creature.

83 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.48. Cf. p.59.

84 *ibid.* Sect. 6.2.

say, the blending of "historical-religious statements" with "metaphysical-religious statements".⁸⁵ In the *R.G.G.* article, "Glaube IV: Glaube und Geschichte", Troeltsch summarises the task of *Glaubenslehre*. Since it has become impossible to believe in a supernatural revelation, it is

much more necessary to look at the redeeming and elevating work of God in the present. But this present work of God on us and in us comes down to us only as an historically mediated knowledge of God as a captivating and elevating power working on us.⁸⁶

The human is forced to see things only through a "veil" (Schleier), but nevertheless does not interpret experience arbitrarily, but in terms of a historical tradition which has been handed down. It is only the subjective appreciation of the past which can allow the human to make sense of the present: it does not stand alone, but rather has at its disposal a living tradition.

There is naturally an historical basis in any modern dogmatics: religious concepts are not formulated afresh for each generation, but rather the tradition is adapted to meet the needs of the present. There must always be some connection with the historically given, if something is genuinely able to be called Christian. In the tradition the powers of religion are revealed, and the task of the theologian is to ensure that these powers can remain strong

85 Cf. "Prinzip, religiöses" (A1913/18) col.1846. Cf. "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.15, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.513.

86 "Glaube IV" (A1908/6a) col.1456. Cf. Apfelbacher, op. cit., p.68: "Troeltsch himself is firmly convinced that one should not found a new religion, but must hold to a new theological position which can elucidate the connections of the Christian tradition with the modern modes of the experience of reality."

in the present.⁸⁷ Troeltsch thus aims to achieve the closest possible connection with the "living power of historical Christianity" which will produce "a dogmatics of today serving the needs of today".⁸⁸ Historical religion provides the power to invigorate the present. Dogmatics is an amalgam of two separate strands of thought, which when combined form the whole which is today's Christianity.⁸⁹

87 Cf. "Offenbarung III: Dogmatisch" (A1907/1b) col.920.

88 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.18f., "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.517.

89 Consequently the "religious principle", the idea behind religion, could never alone be the saving power. It required "symbolic form" ("Prinzip, religiöses" (A1913/18) col.1845). The principle relies on its connection with history for its "life (Lebendigkeit) and power (Kräftigkeit)" (ibid. col.1846). There is thus a vital connection with ahistorical power, with a community, even if this is not a particular confession. This historical connection has often been underemphasised, e.g. by Birkner, (op. cit., p.337), who regarded Troeltsch's Glaubenslehre as "individual confession, a presentation of personal conviction: in a word, it is private dogmatics". Yasukata (op. cit., p.65f.) also sees Troeltsch's fatal flaw as his "mysticism", his failure to allow an interpenetration of Church, Sect and Mysticism. Drescher (in Glaube und Vernunft, p.56), also regards the unifying element in Troeltsch's thought as mysticism. Klemm (op. cit., p.191) counters this view by emphasising that the problem of faith and history captures the thought of the Glaubenslehre in one word. Troeltsch does not present a mystical theology expressive of the contemporary religious consciousness alone, but rather invigorates this by connecting it with the tradition. Mysticism might be expressive of contemporary religiosity but it needs a vehicle for expression in the world, even if this vehicle is not always identical with the confessional churches. All the forces of the modern world must be brought into contact and invigorated with the religious principle.

7.16 Dogmatics and Glaubenslehre.

Troeltsch continues to use the word "dogmatics" (Dogmatik) to delineate this aspect of his systematic theology, yet, at the same time, he recognises that it might be misleading. What he means by dogmatics is not a fixed truth, but a body of religious statements which is open to adaptation to meet the demands of the present:

The time of the unified Church with its unique claim on salvation, of a unified spiritual life, of an all-embracing dogma has its power and greatness. Yet this era is definitively (unwiederbringlich) past.⁹⁰

A return to the unified conception of the past is "quite impossible"; rather a new dogmatics must adapt itself to the "vital, changing character of our world":⁹¹

For modern protestantism which no longer views the bible as the source of all teaching, and which sees the religious means of representation in the bible as primitive symbols of the religious world of feeling, there is no longer any dogmatics in the distinctive sense, but only representations of faith as free expressions of the imagination, which are brought to their most thoughtful and universal expression in scientific *Glaubenslehre*, and thereby regulated.⁹²

What had to be guarded against was the desire to objectify

90 "Schleiermacher und die Kirche" (A1910/6) p.35.

91 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.17, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.516.

92 "Dogma" (A1909/25) col. 105.

dogmatics in the sense of making them hard and fast for all time: it had to be recognised that others could come to different conclusions and still have access to a very real living religious power. Troeltsch saw this as one of the most important aspects of the Schleiermacherian legacy:

The Schleiermacherian method is religiously still very important, because it makes us indulgent (milder) when we see different people drawing different conclusions. We will be able to be more understanding if we do not clamour for objective accuracy (Richtigkeit).⁹³

A return to the fixed conception of the truth, and the immutability of dogmatic statements, would be nothing more than a "petrification":

Dogmatics is everywhere a petrification (Versteinerung) of religion, or the herbarium of its dried representations. The great geniuses have nothing to do with it...Living religion, however, is made effective through powerful...pictures (Bilder) of the imagination (Phantasie).⁹⁴

If this petrification was what was implied by the word "Dogmatik", Troeltsch recognised that it might be better to substitute the word "Glaubenslehre" (doctrine of faith), which "would clearly indicate the confessional and subjective character of the undertaking".⁹⁵ Troeltsch puts this succinctly in the article, "Dogmatik", in the *R.G.G.*¹:

All in all this "dogmatics" is no longer dogmatics, as it no longer recognises any dogmas, but is only a representation of the

⁹³ *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.132.

⁹⁴ "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.418. Cf. Review of Jülicher (A1913/17: "The 'practical' which we need rests more in the knowledge of the real life of today than in catechisms and homiletics").

⁹⁵ "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.17, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.516.

Christian body of thought from all the forces (Gesamtmacht) of Christianity... Dogmatics works also for the community and for the proclamation, no longer as normative doctrine but as an independent concentrated (zusammenfassende) work of thought (Denkarbeit) which acts as a guide to the clergyman, which thereby educates him for his own corresponding work of thought.⁹⁶

Troeltsch, however, continues to use the word "dogmatics" in preference to *Glaubenslehre* since it "has a certain advantage because of its customary use, and thus can appeal to inherited usage".⁹⁷

7.17 Troeltsch's Schleiermacherian roots.⁹⁸

In this dogmatic task, Troeltsch is following closely in the tradition of Schleiermacher.⁹⁹ Indeed, he maintained that

96 "Dogmatik" (A1907/4a) col.109.

97 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.17, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.516. Cf. Gerrish "Ernst Troeltsch and the possibility of a historical theology", p.110: "Perhaps the reason why the old term persists is not merely custom, but the inflexibility of the new term, which lacks German cognates as well as conventional English equivalents".

98 On this, see Wyman, op. cit., esp. p.203: "Troeltsch's *Glaubenslehre* remains a fascinating indication of the not yet exhausted constructive possibilities remaining in the theological heritage of Schleiermacher."

99 Troeltsch emphasises the need to treat Schleiermacher as a figure of idealism concerned with the problems of idealistic philosophy which had occupied Kant and Hegel, rather than as a figure of *Vermittlungstheologie*. Cf. Review of Huber (A1904/3) col.161: "[Schleiermacher] is a theorist of knowledge and a Kantian, and attempts to produce an epistemological foundation of the religious phenomenon in the laws of consciousness". Cf. Review of Franck (A1907/25) col.694. Troeltsch had been occupied with Schleiermacher at least from his second Heidelberg Semester (Winter-Semester 1894-5) when he lectured on "Schleiermachers Leben und Lehre". See below, Bibliographical Appendix.

"I am satisfied that there is nothing better than in essence to follow Schleiermacher".¹⁰⁰ Over and again, Troeltsch recognises his indebtedness to Schleiermacher. Indeed, he says of himself in the *Glaubenslehre*:

No theologian of the present keeps so close to the method and intent (Sinn) of Schleiermacher, or feels himself in such inward agreement with him.¹⁰¹

Troeltsch regarded Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* as

the most profound (innerlichste) and the deepest dogmatics which has been produced up until today.¹⁰²

His programme was

the great programme of all scientific theology...It needs working out, not replacing by new inventions...This will then lead to a justification for the practical life of the church.¹⁰³

Schleiermacher had recognised that

all scientific theology had to produce a programme which enables it to be scientific study of the total historical phenomenon of Christianity and at the same time ^asupport for a living religious preaching.¹⁰⁴

Troeltsch thus places himself in a direct line of descent from the Schleiermacher of the *Brief Outline*:¹⁰⁵

100 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.54.

101 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.130.

102 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.56.

103 "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.226, ET p.80.

104 "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.222, ET p.77.

105 From the Winter-Semester of 1897-8, Troeltsch lectured on several occasions on "theologische Encyclopädie".

[This inspired sketch] was victorious and in its essentials established history as completely free and shows the great historical religious figures and personalities; dogmatics (Dogmatik) makes effective for the community the life-content presented in them as the principle of conservation and mediation, interpreting the historical data in a religious way for faith.¹⁰⁶

Troeltsch clearly perceives his similarity to Schleiermacher who, he maintained, had attempted a synthesis between historical and dogmatic theology (as that oriented around living religious preaching).¹⁰⁷

However, a new programme was now needed, since Schleiermacher's synthesis was only temporary and had been rendered necessary by the spectacular advances in the historical knowledge of Christian origins. Christianity was no longer *self-evidently* the highest religion.¹⁰⁸

Troeltsch's systematic task was to create this new synthesis.

In claiming Schleiermacher as his theological inspiration, Troeltsch was engaging on a tactical assault on those of his opponents who also claimed Schleiermacherian authority for their theological systems:

[Schleiermacher], more than any other, is the point of contact for

106 "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.210, ET p.67.

107 Cf. "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.201, ET p.59. As has been shown Troeltsch saw dogmatics as being essentially concerned with the practical, and even points to Schleiermacher as having recognised this (even though he called it "historical"). Here Troeltsch is influenced by Süskind's Schleiermacher interpretation which showed how Schleiermacher's "historical theology" was influenced by practical considerations (ibid. p.202 n.5, ET p.60 n.2).

108 "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.210, ET p.67. Cf. Review of Mulert (A1909/6) col. 279.

modern science of religion. I probably put myself in *too* close a contact with him, which, in part, is for tactical reasons.¹⁰⁹

Herrmann, for instance, accused Troeltsch of a misrepresentation of Schleiermacher and claims the master as the inspiration for his own system:

[Troeltsch] has no justification to count himself as an epigone of Schleiermacher...I believe along with many others that Schleiermacher's *Reden* showed us the right way to understand religion as distinct from the ethical will and scientific knowledge...Schleiermacher followed in the tracks of Luther along this path.¹¹⁰

Herrmann then goes on to accuse Troeltsch of following a positivist method in his tendency towards rationalism.¹¹¹

Troeltsch does not regard Schleiermacher's importance to rest primarily in this affirmation of the independence of religion from ethics, but rather in his connecting religion with the rest of culture. Consequently in an equally polemical piece, Troeltsch presents his own interpretation of Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* as intimately connected with the sociological organisation of the community of faith. The idea of a personal relationship with Christ becomes coherent only "in the context of his sociology of the religious consciousness".¹¹² Without this connection to the

109 *Briefe* (G1974/1) p.55.

110 Cf. Herrmann, "Wilhelm Herrmann über Ernst Troeltsch", p.233f.

111 Cf. Review of Reischle (A1904/18) col.616.

112 "Schleiermacher und die Kirche" (A1910/16) p.27. Cf. "Die Restaurationsepoche am Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts" (A1913/38a) p.607. Cf. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, p.59: "The philosopher of religion could not establish any necessity, either to recognise a particular fact as redemptive, or to give the central place in one's own consciousness to any particular moment".

community, Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* "remains purely dogmatic and in many places impossible to understand".¹¹³ Troeltsch's Schleiermacher was not the Schleiermacher who established individual religious experience as the basis of religion, but rather his

programme is in fact that demanded by the situation for a unification of the independent culture of the world and the internalisation of religion.¹¹⁴

Over and again Troeltsch emphasises Schleiermacher's attempt to incorporate modern scientific thought into his theology and into his concept of the Church.¹¹⁵ Troeltsch held that, even in his more clerical phase, Schleiermacher saw that the purely "dogmatic element of religion could never be independent from the sociological".¹¹⁶ Even though modern religion was characterised by an internalisation, historical forms were still necessary if such a religion was to gain life and power.¹¹⁷ The modern forms of social

113 "Schleiermacher und die Kirche" (A1910/16) p.27.

114 *ibid.* p.33

115 Cf. "Grundprobleme der Ethik" (A1902/4a) pp.568ff. and *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.19. On Schleiermacher's concept of the Church, see Gerrish, *Tradition and the modern world*, Chicago, 1978, Chapter One.

116 "Schleiermacher und die Kirche" (A1910/16) p.28.

117 Cf. Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, p.52: "I had set myself the task of presenting the God-consciousness developed in the Christian Church, as we all have it within us, in all its expressions, so that it always appears as pure as possible in each of its individual elements and so that the individual determinations that arise in this way and strive toward unity can be viewed together, just as the feeling itself is always the same".

organisation as reflected in the doctrine of natural law, required a reconciliation with the "Christian-living thought (christlich-lebendiger Gedanke)":¹¹⁸

It was precisely here in the combination of these two that Schleiermacher's greatness rested.¹¹⁹

It was also precisely here that Schleiermacher's critics had been most vociferous. This reconciliation with culture was regarded by many as "a relic of the Enlightenment which had not been finally expurgated from his system".¹²⁰

Troeltsch shared a continuity of intention with Schleiermacher in attempting this reconciliation of theology with modern culture without identifying the two:

That religion which is reconciled with culture is usually nothing but bad science and superficial morals; thus it loses its religious salt.¹²¹

Neither Troeltsch nor Schleiermacher desired an identity between culture and theology, even though they saw the two as vitally connected.¹²² Right from the beginnings of his

118 Cf. Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, sect. 314: The task of theology was "to preserve and strengthen the principle which was formed during the preceeding epoch (its main duty), and also, at the same time, to tender and protect expressions of free spiritual power, which can alone initiate reforms".

119 "Schleiermacher und die Kirche" (A1910/16) p.33.

120 *ibid.* p.33.

121 "Die Kirche im Leben der Gegenwart" (A1911/8a) p.100.

122 See below, Chapter 9.4.

career, Troeltsch recognised his continuity with Schleiermacher in this attempt to connect theology and culture. Schleiermacher

founded his theology on his ethics, that is on his philosophy of history and of the spirit. That is exactly what I am attempting in my essays...Just as Schleiermacher constructed his theology on his ethics and paved the way for the understanding and justification of Christianity through the analysis of religion and its development in history, so it is also my presupposition that the human spirit has to be seen in the full context of the development of its manifold fundamental drives (*Grundtriebe*), which create and perfect the content of the spirit as they are driven in a certain way forwards in interaction with the material world.¹²³

Troeltsch's concern is in establishing a synthesis whereby the concrete historical and natural world might be spiritualised in development towards the goal of human progress: it was this aspect that provided the point of contact with Schleiermacher:

From here on, Ethics, like *Glaubenslehre* can be formed in a free synthesis of Christian powers for the present.¹²⁴

Consequently Troeltsch is vehement in his opposition to constrictive interpretations of Schleiermacher's system:

I merely wish to emphasise that Schleiermacher has to be treated as a whole and not only as a representative of his clerical

123 "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.28. Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1895/2) p.368: "Only since Schleiermacher has there been a *Religionsphilosophie* which is not the philosophical treatment of the objects of religion but a treatment of religion itself conceived of as a coherent independent arena of life which develops according to definite laws."

124 "Grundprobleme der Ethik" (A1902/4a) p.653. On the concept of "wholeness" and its relation to Schleiermacher's vision, see Troeltsch's review of Reischle, (A1904/8), col.616. Cf. Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, sect.16: "The theologian comprehends the whole".

Glaubenslehre, and that the whole vision of Schleiermacher is seldom judged in sympathy with his fundamental conception of science.¹²⁵

Schleiermacher corrects Kant, not merely by emphasising the independence of the phenomenon of religion, but also by showing that historical reality itself can reflect something of the absolute:

If Kant's words show us what the eighteenth century perceived above all else, namely, the multiplicity and conditionality of everything historical in antithesis to the demand for unconditioned truths, Schleiermacher exhibits the attempt of German idealism to overcome this historical relativity by a way other than that of ahistorical rationalism, namely by ontological speculation concerning history - speculation that, through reflection on the very multiplicity of history, leads to a unitary ground of all life.¹²⁶

Troeltsch recognised that, given the limited knowledge of his time, Schleiermacher was quite justified in linking the historical with the absolute in the way he did.¹²⁷ However,

125 Review of Kattenbusch (A1903/19) col.1950. Although Troeltsch regards Kattenbusch's history of theology from Schleiermacher as a very clear exposition, he criticises his failure to bring theology into contact with the rest of learning which was precisely what Schleiermacher was attempting. Cf. Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, p.60: "Those who believe they can hack away at science with a sword, fence themselves in with weapons at hand to withstand the assault of sound research...and establish a binding Church doctrine that appears to everyone outside as an unreal ghost".

126 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.40.

127 Cf. "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.211, E.T. p.68. Cf. "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.8, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.507. At other times, however, Troeltsch is prepared to criticise Schleiermacher for his "travesty in the shape of an ecclesiastical, biblical dogmatics" ("The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.7, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.506). Cf. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, p.255: "A confessional ecclesiality functioned as the unquestioned foundation of theology and could therefore acquire immunity from criticism. This, of course, was not Schleiermacher's intention, but it plainly shows the limitation of

given the vast progress in the historical sciences through⁶⁰
the nineteenth century, the task of the "reconciliation
(Vermittlung) and delimitation (Abgrenzung) of scientific
thought and religious proclamation",¹²⁸ was infinitely more
problematic:

Schleiermacher was of no value as a historian or a bible
critic.¹²⁹

By Troeltsch's time the "prince of the church", as one who
combined both the religious and scientific spirit in the
"finest balance"¹³⁰ had become a far more daunting
occupation.¹³¹

Troeltsch also points out another difference from
Schleiermacher:

his concept of theology".

128 "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.201, E.T. p.59 (amended).

129 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.26.

130 Cf. Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, Sect.9.

131 Schleiermacher appears to have recognised the future problems which
would face the theologian: "Shall the tangle of history so unravel that
Christianity becomes identified with barbarism and science with
unbelief?...I can only anticipate that we must learn to do without what
many are still accustomed to regard as inseparably bound to the essence
of Christianity" (Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, p.60f). He was
perhaps fortunate in being able "peacefully to lie down to sleep" (ibid.)
before the *religionsgeschichtliche* method and the rise of modern science
had assaulted Christianity from all sides.

Schleiermacher was fighting a heavy, but admirable battle against monism. His dogmatics is everywhere impregnated with pantheism and a mood inspired by Spinoza and Goethe which also is close to the modern world but only in a ridiculously debased form. Over and against this our *Glaubenslehre* shows not the slightest inclination towards monism. It is personalistic from top to bottom.¹³²

The debasement of monism since Schleiermacher's day threatened the very possibility of individuality and of personal autonomy. For Troeltsch, it had to be avoided at all costs. Thus he affirmed:

Christianity is in general the decisive and fundamental orientation towards personality-religion against all naturalistic and anti-personal understandings of God.¹³³

Troeltsch points to the close connection between *Glaubenslehre* and ethics in his own work as he builds upon that of Schleiermacher. The function of dogmatics or *Glaubenslehre* was to utilise the religious powers resting in the historical tradition for directing future activity. Troeltsch's primary concern was thus ethical regeneration. In one of his few concise definitions of essential Christianity Troeltsch makes this clear:

Christian faith is faith in the the divine regeneration of man who is alienated from God - a regeneration in union with God and social fellowship so as to constitute the kingdom of God.¹³⁴

How Troeltsch sets about connecting the past to the present

132 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.130. Cf. "Die Religion im deutschen Staate" (A1913/37a) p.87.

133 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 5.3.

134 "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2) p.13, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.512.

for the future is the subject of the remainder of this Chapter.

7.21 The essence of Christianity.

The clearest exposition of the relationship between *Religionsgeschichte* and theology is given in the essay "Was heisst >Wesen des Christentums<?".¹ The immediate context of this essay was provided by Harnack's influential lectures on the essence of Christianity, which were published as *Wesen des Christentums*.² Troeltsch regarded this work as "more or less symbolic of the historicising trend in theology".³

The history of the problem of the essence of Christianity is complex and it dominates much of nineteenth century theology.⁴ Many historians and theologians were concerned

1 (A1903/18a), ET, "What does 'essence of Christianity' mean?". The German word "Wesen" like the English word "essence", has certain Idealist metaphysical and Platonic connotations. Because of this, certain commentators have preferred to use other words as translations. (Cf. eg., Stephen Sykes, whose discussion of the essence of Christianity is entitled *The Identity of Christianity*). On this subject, see W.A. Brown, *The Essence of Christianity*, and Hans Wagenheimer, *Das Wesen des Christentums: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*. Cf. Apfelbacher, Chapter 4.II.

2 A. von Harnack, *Wesen des Christentums*, ET, by T.B. Saunders, *What is Christianity?*

3 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.386, ET p.124.

4 Cf. Sykes, *The Identity*, Part Two, which traces the development of the concept through the "early modern" theologians, ending with Karl Barth. He stresses the idea of conflict and power in the idea of essence. Unity between theological and religious opponents is not achieved through doctrinal agreement but through a shared commitment and worship. The "tyranny of intellectuals" is overcome in practice, as the "context of communal worship permits doctrinal dispute. Dispute is not an end in itself; rather it is a means of drawing all things into a unity in Christ" (p.286). Although Sykes considers Troeltsch a member of the mandarin class, and lacking this perception of the importance of practice, it will be seen that Troeltsch's theology is similarly centred around action and practice, if not prayer and worship.

with the attempt to answer the question, "What is Christianity?"⁵ At the turn of this century the publication of Harnack's book reawakened interest in the problem of the nature of Christianity, and led to a number of responses.⁶ Although Harnack's book was the immediate context of Troeltsch's essay, a number of Ritschlians had produced their own versions of the essence of Christianity at the end of the nineteenth century, before the publication of Harnack's book.⁷

5 Schleiermacher is often credited with having first introduced the idea of the essence of Christianity into theology. Cf. e.g., *Brief Outline*, sect. 74: "Every historical whole may be considered not only as a unity but also as a composite, each of whose different elements has a career of its own, though not only in a subordinate sense and with a constant relation to the other elements". Everything was "included within the total career of Christianity" (Sect. 84). Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 1 (p.9) for Troeltsch's description of Schleiermacher's development of the *Wesensbegriff*. Cf. "Prinzip, religiöses" (A1913/18), col.1843, for a discussion of the development of the concept of "Wesen" or "Prinzip" through the Nineteenth Century.

6 A discussion of these debates can be found in the articles by Mayer "Wesen der Religion" and by Wendland "Wesen des Christentums" in the R.G.G.¹. Wendland (col.1973), sees the function of the *Wesen des Christentums* in systematic theology as "that of finding the enduring...Every new era will attempt the always unsolved exercise of bringing the two seemingly incommensurable complexes of Christianity and the world into ever new combinations with one another which will, however, inevitably always remain in conflict."

7 Cf. eg, Julius Kaftan, *Das Wesen der christlichen Religion* and *Die Wahrheit der christlichen Religion*; Reischle, *Die Frage nach dem Wesen der Religion*; Wobbermin, *Die Wahrheitsbeweis für die christliche Religion*, and *Das Wesen des Christentums*. Cf. from a different perspective, Bousset, *What is Religion?*. On this point, see esp. W.A. Brown, op. cit., Chapter VII, pp.223-87.

Troeltsch's purposes were much broader than merely a discussion of Harnack's book; he was concerned with the broader issues involved in any attempt to define the essence of Christianity.

7.22 Troeltsch and Harnack.⁸

As has been shown above (Chapter 5.13), Harnack had arrived at a relatively simple criterion for assessing the validity of Christian dogma;⁹ yet as a theologian whose interests rested in the application of Christianity as a living religion, such a criterion acquired greater significance. Harnack thus arrived at the double use of his critical standard. His book was shot through with "concern for learning out of the historical subject".¹⁰ Everything true in Christianity proceeded from the assumption that every human was a moral person, and that everything that Jesus said was beyond controversy and signified a "natural attitude".¹¹

8 For a discussion of Troeltsch's view of Harnack's *Wesen des Christentums* see Stephen Sykes "Ernst Troeltsch and Christianity's essence", (in Clayton, (ed), op. cit., pp.139-170, reprinted as "Troeltsch and the relevance of epistemology" in *The Identity of Christianity*, pp.148-173. References are to the Clayton volume), p.145f.

9 Troeltsch saw Harnack (Review of Dorner, (A1901/12) p.266) as attempting to show the "original character of Christian beginnings (Urzeit)" .

10 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.432, ET p.163.

11 Cf. "Adolf von Harnack und F.C. Baur" (A1921/8) ET p.6.

According to Harnack, the whole of Jesus' message could be reduced to two themes: ^{that God} was the Father, and that the human soul was of infinite value.¹² In the Gospel message of "Eternal life in the midst of time",¹³ Jesus revealed absolute religion itself. Jesus himself thus gave the historian the criteria for true religion:

[The historian] assumes the royal function of a judge, for in order to decide what of the past shall continue to be in effect and what must be done away with or transformed, the historian must judge like a king.¹⁴

According to Troeltsch, Harnack's method stimulated the imagination into a contemplation of the real in a manner most like Dilthey, replacing the advantages of a Hegelian logical construction with the benefits of a lively and individualising intuition. However, according to Troeltsch, Harnack did not share Dilthey's tragic sense of life, but rather saw that the

richness and suggestive power of history do not deprive him of the sense of direction and least of all of faith in the absolute truth of Christianity.¹⁵

Harnack's conception of the Gospel was not merely as a presupposition for the assessment of dogma but became a call

12 Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, p.8.

13 *ibid.*

14 Harnack, *Reden und Aufsätze*, IV, p.7.

15 "Adolf von Harnack und F.C. Baur" (A1921/8) ET p.12.

to the present. There was a confrontation with the individual in that "disposition which the Father of Jesus Christ awakens in men's hearts through the Gospel".¹⁶ The same formula which allowed us to say that a particular teaching or an affirmation in the creed was correct, also allowed us to test our own faith, a faith concordant with the Gospel, and not based on those temporary formations which lead to cultic worship. Troeltsch similarly points to the need for a double use of the critical standard in any formulation of the contemporary essence of Christianity, but cannot simply locate it in the past, as Harnack had done. It develops along with the criticism of the tradition itself.

Troeltsch's criticism of Harnack shares much with Loisy's in that they both pointed to the deficiencies involved in Harnack's equating of the essence of Christianity with his version of the Gospel.¹⁷ However, although Loisy was "one of the finest and most noble of the personalities of the modernists",¹⁸ he also showed that it was just as deficient to locate the essence of Christianity in the Church, as the mysterious arbiter of the truth.¹⁹ According to Troeltsch,

16 Harnack, *History of Dogma*, III, p.896.

17 See above, Chapter 5.13. Troeltsch saw this as an arbitrary and severe restriction. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 3.4: "The Bible is a witness for revelation, but not the revelation itself". Cf. p.27: "We cannot forget two thousand years".

18 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.27.

19 Cf. "Der Modernismus" (A1909/7a) p.59f. For a short discussion of Troeltsch's reception of Loisy's *L'Evangile et L'Eglise*, (Paris, 1902), see Hans Rollmann "Troeltsch, von Hügel and Modernism", p.41, pp.44-46. Cf. Letter to von Hügel (G1974/1) pp.63-69. For Troeltsch's attitude to the Modernists, see esp. "Der Modernismus" (A1909/7a) pp.45-67, *Die Trennung* (A1907/2) esp. p.76f., and "Katholizismus und Reformismus"

Loisy "displays here a remnant of unhistorical catholic-dogmatic thought".²⁰

For Troeltsch, Christianity could not be identified with any one of its forms. In portraying the types of church, sect and mysticism in the *Soziallehren*, Troeltsch had shown the variety of the forms of Christianity throughout

(A1908/1). Writing in 1906, Troeltsch expressed that he was in "personal contact with the leaders of the [Modernist] movements and I have the greatest respect for their scientific and religious character, and I receive numerous writings...It is from this movement alone that some kind of healing is to be expected, and the whole cultured world (gebildete Welt) should approach these movements with understanding and sympathy. Without the protection of such a spirit, the separation of the Catholic Church [from the State] could only be achieved with the help of a law of repression (Knebelungsgesetz), and nobody would want that!" (*Die Trennung* (A1907/2) p.76f. n.37). Consequently, Troeltsch saw the publication of the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici* (on 8th September 1907) as the "day of destiny for European Catholicism" ("Katholizismus und Reformismus" (A1908/1) col.17), it was the day on which "all the saints in Dante's heaven shed a tear" (col.26). Troeltsch saw Modernism as a parallel to developments in protestantism, but was critical of it for failing to draw its method to its logical conclusions: "The Modernists led themselves into deception with their assertion of the method of immanence, i.e. their espousal of personal inner certainty: their justifications of supernaturalism were in effect mere affirmations of the intensity of personal religious life" (col.22). Indeed Troeltsch saw this return to subjectivism as nothing other than a return to mysticism, where the Christian religion could no longer be separated from the non-Christian. According to Troeltsch, this was, indeed, more clearly perceived in the Encyclical than by the Modernists themselves!

20 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.398, ET p.134. On Troeltsch's relationship to Catholicism, see esp. Gertrud von le Fort, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p.88. Although she suggested that Troeltsch's view of Catholicism was limited by the study of confessional differences (*Symbolik*), when she asked, "Herr Professor, would you ever let us talk you into becoming a Catholic?", she was surprised by the answer. Troeltsch "replied smiling, 'That wouldn't be the worst thing!'"

history.²¹ That one form was closer than another to the essence of Christianity was not something that could be shown from the study of history.²² However, to evaluate the tradition, the theologian was forced beyond the mere presentation of the various forms of Christianity into a *criticism* of the traditions from his or her own particular standpoint. This was the "art of seeing the whole", the formation of a creative synthesis which viewed all manifestations, whether in church, sect or mysticism, together. Thus the conception of essence was

not merely an abstraction from the manifestations, but at the same time a criticism of these manifestations, and this criticism is not merely an evaluation of that which is not yet complete in terms of the driving ideal, but a discrimination between that which corresponds to the essence and that which is contrary to it.²³

For a theological appropriation of *Religionsgeschichte*, the theologian had to *judge* history. The aim of history was to show us

what has been, so that its significance and meaning for human life as a whole can be evaluated.²⁴

21 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 2.2.

22 Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.66.

23 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.407, ET p.141.

24 *ibid.* (A1903/18a) p.408, ET p.143. Cf. Hans Frei, "The relation of faith and history in the thought of Ernst Troeltsch", p.59: "To employ essences is to write history 'with concern', for 'importance' is no merely factual judgement".

7.23 The purification of Christianity.

The object of this task was to *refine* and *renew* the tradition so as to make it conform ever more to its essence.²⁵

Everything is directed to the "further cultivation of Christianity".²⁶ Religion was not to be thought of as something complete, "but rather, revelation was in process. In the place of the mechanical concept of revelation is the dynamic".²⁷ The purpose of the study of

25 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.55, for the conception of *Glaubenslehre* as the "cont^loller" and "orderer" of faith.

26 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.163. Yasukata bases his interpretation of Troeltsch on the idea of *Gestaltung* or "shaping afresh" which he sees as Troeltsch's distinctive *Leitmotiv* (See esp. p.xxii, pp.21ff.). He points to a modification made for the second edition of *Die Absolutheit* (p.viii) where Troeltsch speaks of his task as that of the "*Gestaltung* of the Christian world of ideas which corresponds with the contemporary world." Yasukata also points to another important aphorism: "Wesensbestimmung ist Wesensgestaltung (To define the essence is to shape it afresh)". ("Was heisst?" (A1903/18a, p.431, ET p.163). "The essence is an intuitive abstraction, a religious and ethical critique, a flexible developmental concept, and the ideal to be applied in the act of shaping and recombining for the future" (p.27). Cf. p.65f.: "[Troeltsch's] dilemma, which implies also the modern impasse of Christianity, is, in my view attributable to his personal adherence to Spiritualism...he attempted 'a Christian-social mastering of the situation' with special emphasis being laid upon the Spiritualism...for the reason that Spiritualism 'is the religiosity that is congenial and corresponds to the modern individualistic culture.' That is obviously a dilemma - a dilemma which, in my judgement, was fatal to his entire scientific endeavor". What needs to be emphasised, however, in any such interpretation is the vital importance of history and the tradition in the construction of the concept of essence. Without this emphasis it is easy to see Troeltsch's theology as collapsing into a form of individualism or mysticism. A shaping is always a shaping of something given.

Religionsgeschichte for theology was thus the purification and deepening of real religion.²⁸ In short,

the purpose of scientific work on religion is therefore to influence religion itself. Religion, like every other sphere of culture, needs to be harmonised and adjusted with the rest of life, and it can only in this way learn to separate kernel and husk and to bring the kernel into ever new and fruitful relationships with other areas of life.²⁹

However, the scientific study of religion could never show what constituted "real religion". Such a task was thus not necessarily hostile to religion,³⁰ rather it could help to remove the peripheral trappings of religion to reveal the true and abiding religion which lay beyond historical criticism.³¹ Often what had stood on the periphery appeared

27 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.41. Cf. Sect.3.

28 Cf. Schleiermacher's conception of polemics as pointing out the "diseased condition" of the Church. (*Brief Outline*, Sects. 32-68).

29 "Wesen der Religion und der Religionswissenschaft" (A1906/5b) p.468, ET. p.93. Cf. "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.359.

30 Troeltsch recognises the importance of Overbeck for the historical study of religion, but he refuses to countenance his conclusion that it leads necessarily to a destruction of religion. See esp. the review of Overbeck, (A1903/20), col.2433, where Overbeck is seen as the theological equivalent of Nietzsche. Cf. "Rückblick" (A1909/18a) p.198, ET p.57.

31 On this point, see esp. Drescher, *Glaube und Vernunft*, pp.89ff. Troeltsch also speaks of the religious *a priori* as serving to "establish what is essential" in the appearances of Christianity, without thereby reducing religion to a thoroughly rational form. Cf. esp. "Main Problems" (C1905/1) p.286. See above, Chapter 3.29.

to Troeltsch closer to essential Christianity than any ecclesiastical formulation. Indeed, it was "immediately obvious" that Kierkegaard and Tolstoy stood closer to the real preaching of Jesus than did any ecclesiastical dogmatics.³² The theological task is that of criticism of all that is produced out of

apathy and banality, passion and short-sightedness, stupidity and malice, indifference and mere worldly cleverness.³³

The criticism of the tradition in the construction of the essence of Christianity attempted to move Christianity ever closer to the absolute. Real religion as expressive of the absolute in history, however, was beyond criticism. It was the *trappings* of religion, and the inadequacies of religious statements (theology) that had to be purified:

One forgets that only *Religionsphilosophie* and theology but never religion itself are subject to historical (religionsgeschichtlichen) criticism.³⁴

This was indeed a complex task but it was what a modern theology demanded: the reform of theology and religion

32 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.406, ET p.140. Cf. Die theologische und religiöse Lage der Gegenwart" (A1903/16a) p.14f. "Grundprobleme der Ethik" (A1902/4a)) p.600. *Social Teaching* (A1912/2) p.847f., ET p.728f: "(Tolstoy's Christianity) is the radical early Christian Ideal, shorn of its apocalyptic elements, which also refuses the aid of modern technical rationalism". Cf. Gertrud von le Fort, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p.89.

33 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.410, ET p.144.

34 "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.500. This is not included in the English version. Cf. "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.349: "Religion itself is, and remains in everything essentially identical." Cf. Sykes, *The Identity*, Chapter Two.

through contact with living history was "in the nature of things and can never completely cease".³⁵ *Glaubenslehre* was thus not the

expression for the unification of a group of ready-formulated propositions, but rather, is an attempt to develop new formulations appropriate to the present - a rejuvenation (*Verjüngung*).³⁶

There was much that was good in the tradition, but there was also much that failed to live up to essential Christianity, since the tradition itself was also part of the creative activity of human beings, of attempts to refine and move towards the absolute.³⁷ All criticisms and all refinements could be nothing more than a "compromise between good and evil".³⁸ All manifestations of the essence were seen as limitations on the absolute, yet it was the hope of Christianity that by continual refinement, it would move ever closer towards the absolute. Only then would the essence be fully realised. Under this conception of the absolute, religious concepts were seen as merely progressions to a goal and not as absolutes in themselves. They developed in history as the absolute was grasped ever more fully. Truth in its fulness remained in the future.³⁹ In this sense

35 "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/1) p.105.

36 "Prinzip, religiöses" (A1913/18) col.1844.

37 Cf. Sykes, *The Identity*, Chapters One and Three. See above, Chapter 5.22.

38 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.410, ET p.144.

39 See above, Chapter 3.23.

then, the absolute itself was developmental, since divine revelation belonged to history, not as an accomplished fact, but as a process of continuous realisation. God's

peculiar manifestation rests not in his being, but in his becoming (Werden), thus not in nature (as something static) but in history.⁴⁰

The pursuit of *Religionsgeschichte* was consequently not necessarily destructive to theology, but rather presented the theologian with a new challenge.⁴¹ The challenge was that of viewing history as the dealings of God with man⁴² or as the arena where the majesty of God was revealed.⁴³ It implied a faith in the "being (Sein), the absolute and the eternal in the endless stream of becoming and finitudes (Endlichkeiten)".⁴⁴ The power of religion was the power revealed in history which gave to the human being the ability to shape the world around meaningful ends,⁴⁵ to perceive the

40 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.139. See above, Chapter 5.22.

41 Cf. "The Dogmatics" (A1913/2), p.3, "Die Dogmatik" (A1913/2a) p.502. Cf. *Briefe* (G1974/1) p.58f. The destruction of supernatural knowledge led to "a battle ordained by God, nothing other than the ancient (uralt) battle of the divine against the world".

42 "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.341.

43 "Ueber historische und dogmatische Methode" (A1900/9) p.739.

44 "Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.311.

45 "Christentum und Religionsgeschichte" (A1897/10a) p.341.

divine in history. Revelation was the breakthrough of the unified "spiritual power or principle" symbolically linked with institutions.⁴⁶

7.24 The principle of religion.

This power was the religious *Prinzip* or "dynamic Principle"⁴⁷ which runs through the whole historical complex:

By *Prinzip* nothing else is meant than the driving force (Grundtrieb) or power (Grundkraft) behind the individual psychological appearances.⁴⁸

Troeltsch equates the word "Prinzip" with "Wesen". It is

always a universal concept of a specifically historical kind which formulates a totality for the purpose of presenting in this universal also the formulation of the factually developing driving power (Triebkraft) of the whole.⁴⁹

46 "Prinzip, religiöses" (A1913/18) col.1844.

47 Cf. Translator's note to *The Absoluteness*, (A1901/23d) ET. p.21 n.3. Cf. Wyman, op. cit., p.85: "The values which emerge in the historical process are metaphysically significant: they are objective and inwardly necessary". Wyman sees the principle as resting not on subjective decision, nor on the self-objectification of the divine spirit, but rather as a formulation of the communal spirit (Gemeingeist) of the particular community. His criteria for the formation of the principle are intelligibility and adequacy to the contemporary community. Troeltsch, however, requires one more element, that is, an attachment to history. Intelligibility and adequacy can be nothing more than pragmatic principles. A connection with real history (if not traditional Christian history) moves beyond these pragmatic principles to a living religion.

48 "Prinzip, religiöses" (A1913/18) col.1842. Cf. "Geschichte und Metaphysik" (A1898/2) p.56.

49 "Prinzip, religiöses" (A1913/18) col.1843.

The principle

expresses the whole religious position...and derives from the universal method of contemporary historical-psychological thought and merely has the exercise of bringing the infinitely manifold appearances to a single formula, which means the unified root and the driving force of the whole phenomenon (Zusammenhang).⁵⁰

Troeltsch, following Weber, uses the term "Ideal Concept" (Idealbegriff) as the name for the historical totality extracted from the flow of history which becomes the subject matter of the social and historical sciences. It is virtually synonymous with the definitions given to "Prinzip".⁵¹ Troeltsch, however, is not interested in the Ideal Concept *per se*, but rather in its application to theology. His problem was, how could the values of the past unified in the Ideal Concept be related to the current situation? How could they acquire a "living power" for the present?⁵² He went on:

A positive evaluation [of the past] will mean confidence in the ability of the ideas to persist, to be purified and to be strengthened, which means that the phenomena themselves are regarded in the light of the future.⁵³

The Ideal Concept as it is used in theology thus aims to

50 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 5.2.

51 Troeltsch discusses the "Ideal Concept" (Idealbegriff) at length in Section V of "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a).

52 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.424, ET p.156ff.

53 *ibid.* p.424f, ET p.157.

establish a new combination or synthesis

of the gains of the past and the living present, by taking from history the ideal contents of the values of life and energetically referring whatever attests itself to our judgement as important to the idea of ultimate values in our own accustomed way.⁵⁴

The formulation of the Ideal Concept

is nothing more than a formulation of the Christian idea in a manner corresponding to the present, associated with earlier formulations in laying bare the force for growth, but immediately allowing the latter to shoot up into new leaves and blossoms.⁵⁵

The "Ideal Concept", as the name given to the value-neutral explanatory concept constructed using immanent criticism, could serve as a tool for academic research,⁵⁶ but for Troeltsch's purposes it had to be linked with present-day values. Troeltsch's use of this term is significantly different from his "friend" Weber's.⁵⁷ Unless the Ideal Concept was attached to the creation of values in the present, it lacked any relevance for future action. For Troeltsch, it was this future dimension that was vital in the study of philosophy of history.

54 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.709.

55 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.431, ET p.162.

56 On the sociological use of the Ideal Concept, see esp. Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Cf. Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*, pp.141-144.

57 For an assessment of this friendship see Graf, "Friendship between Experts. Notes on Weber and Troeltsch" (in eds. Mommsen and Osterhammel, *Max Weber and his Contemporaries*, pp.215-233) p.229, n.1 & 2. For the relationship of Weber to Rickert and Windelband, see Guy Oakes "Weber and the Southwest German School. The Genesis of the Historical Individual" in Mommsen and Osterhammel, (eds.), op. cit. See below, Chapter 9.9.

The *Prinzip* became the new authority which had once been represented by the Bible.⁵⁸ However, unlike the Bible, it was not something which was merely presented passively to the observer, but rather required an active response: there was a "strong subjective element".⁵⁹ The human was called upon to *create* a sense of purpose and meaning out of history.⁶⁰ A theology of *Religionsgeschichte* rested upon the individual's appropriation and reformation of the historical tradition in the attempt to grasp its absolute meaning.⁶¹

58 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 1.2.

59 "Prinzip, religiöses" (A1913/18) col.1843.

60 "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1896/1) p.78f. Cf. Hunzinger, op. cit., who sees this as "nothing other than the introduction of the 'dogmatic' method into an ostensibly historical method" (p.24). Cf. Troeltsch, "Prinzip, religiöses" (A1913/18) col.1843: "In this formulation [i.e. the principle] biblical and historical theology make way for systematic theology".

61 Cf. Perkins, *Explicating Christian Faith*, p.66.

7.25 The personal decision.⁶²

What became of decisive importance for Troeltsch's theology was that, since the dualism of spirit and nature could not be overcome by any return to objective absolutes and could only be found in the personal appropriation of an Ideal or an absolute motivation, then it was only in the moment of decision to accept these higher ends for action that absoluteness was guaranteed:

Everything converges on the matter of present decision in the great world struggle.⁶³

In short, "the personal remains the keystone".⁶⁴ Ultimately

62 On Troeltsch's view of the decision (Entscheidung) see especially Benckert "Der Begriff der Entscheidung bei Ernst Troeltsch" where a convincing case for the concept of decision as being the key to Troeltsch interpretation is offered. Only in the decision are the two spheres of reality united (p.426f.). "Decision, axiomatic deed (Tat), dare (Wagnis), taking a position (Stellungnahme)" are the concepts Benckert uses for his interpretation which is based on the broad spectrum of Troeltsch's work, as well as unpublished lecture notes from his time in Heidelberg (Cf. his *Ernst Troeltsch und das ethische Problem*). He does not, however, develop the ideas at length as to the content of what the individual is deciding for or against. This, he suggests, would be the next task for the interpreter (p.441). H.G. Little ("Ernst Troeltsch and the scope of historicism") also sees the theological implications of historicism as leading to the "question of human decision and responsibility...the formal logic of history discloses for Troeltsch the structural system within which 'decision' and 'responsibility' stand as discriminable components of human life" (p.356). Cf. Wyman, op. cit., pp.79ff.

63 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) ET p.121. Cf. "Was heisst >Wesen des Christentums<?" (A1903/18a) p.411, ET p.145.

64 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.39.

everything rested on a "personal conviction", "the modern principle of autonomy",⁶⁵ but,

there is no other way to obtain a criterion that will enable us to choose among competing historical values. It is in short, a personal ethically oriented religious conviction acquired by comparison and evaluation.⁶⁶

Glaubenslehre is

the living interpenetration of historical influences and immediate relative religious productivity of the individual.⁶⁷

The acceptance that everything was relative seemed to leave no room for values, the acceptance that everything was determined seemed to leave no room for freedom and creativity, yet in so far as meaning and value were glimpsed in history, then there was an inevitable urge to a resolution of such antinomies in the "autonomous individual judgement".⁶⁸ This was most clearly stated in the essay "Was heisst >Wesen des Christentums<?" Ultimately, the definition of the essence of Christianity, that is of the abiding values present throughout the Christian tradition, was accomplished by an individual decision, "an overcoming of space and time in the judgement itself".⁶⁹ At this point

65 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 6.3. See above, Chapter 1.3.

66 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) p.94. Cf. p.90. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.37.

67 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect. 2.5.

68 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.710.

69 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.430, ET p.161.

Troeltsch allied himself closely with that philosophical and literary tradition which emphasised action; this was the "courage to think" of which Hegel spoke; "in the beginning was the act" as Faust said. The synthesis was the

daring to bring a living idea forward out of history for the present time, and, with the courage of conscience grounded in God, to set it within the intellectual world of the present.⁷⁰

Dogmatics sought to point out the inner connection between the historical and the present so as to "attain the courage to affirm present religious propositions".⁷¹ The "dogmatic, normative concept" used to judge history must necessarily be different from the historical essence "because it concentrates on a coherent Christian Spirituality to be affirmed only in an act of will".⁷²

The future, that which ought to be, becomes incorporated in the past in the moment of decision:

The new formulation of the principle leads to a new submersion, a deepening into the fulness and breadth and continuity with the historically given which is at once a re-evaluation of the consequences: that is, the adaptation (*Anpassung*) to the present and future.⁷³

70 *ibid.* p.448, ET p.176. Cf. MS *Einführung*, pp.41ff. See above, Chapter 3.15.

71 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.130.

72 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.450, ET p.179.

73 "Prinzip, religiöses" (A1913/18) col.1843. Cf. Perkins, *op. cit.*, p.4: "The past is significant in so far as it forms a unity of development with the present and conditions the present." "A further, and equally important, question is 'What is the significance' of the event?" (p.10). "It involves an existential attitude and is only possible as a personal decision". (p.11). Cf. Morgan: "Troeltsch and the dialectical theology", p.61: "If the matter is considered from the side of decision, rather than from Troeltsch's idealistically determined use of the word 'revelation', it appears that his correlation of

This is

the synthesis of history and the future which in the last analysis can only be fully sure of continuity in personal, subjective certainty because it is conscious of having grown out of living and deeply comprehended history itself.⁷⁴

Genuine revelation can only be that which gives "life-giving power":⁷⁵ there is no longer the need for dogmatic theories about the means of grace, or of where ultimate revelation is vested, but rather, the bible and the tradition, as well as the sacraments derive their revelatory character in so far as they serve "to make present (Vergegenwärtigen) the Christian

revelation and faith (*Glaubenslehre* Sect.3) differs in idiom rather than substance from that of Bultmann's kerygmatic theology". There is evidently some point of contact between Troeltsch and existentialist theologies. A close analysis between Troeltsch, Gogarten and Kierkegaard has been made by Drescher (in "Entwicklungsdenken und Glaubensentscheidung" in *Z.Th.K.* 1982, pp.80ff.). Drescher concludes that Troeltsch never allowed for a complete identification between naive faith in the absolute with the absolute itself, and therefore the "schöpferische Synthese" can never lead to a complete realisation of the absolute in the present. For Gogarten, on the other hand, faith is in the absolute, present in its fulness in every moment of decision (p.102). Troeltsch's admiration for Kierkegaard seems more founded upon his being an outsider, rather than on any substantial unity. Troeltsch's leap of faith (*Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.179, p.312) proves nothing, or guarantees nothing. It merely is a very provisional recognition of the possibility for a higher motivation than the merely natural. Cf. Perkins: "The urgency of decision is not diminished when a historicist approach is utilised, but the decision is less arbitrary" (p.14). See above, Chapter 6.23.

⁷⁴ "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.448, ET p.176.

⁷⁵ Cf. "Offenbarung III" (A1907/1b) col.918.

truth".⁷⁶ Troeltsch's concern is to arrive at a synthesis between the past and the future by

personally seizing the necessary, rational content of reality and of the historical process in its present form, and to align oneself through correct intuition with the creative course of world teleology.⁷⁷

The idea of the judgement stands at the heart of *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, and thus marks an important continuity between all stages of Troeltsch's career.⁷⁸ In the lectures on *Glaubenslehre* Troeltsch had shown that the problem of the possibility of human creativity was the crux of the religious view of the personality; in his work on the religious *a priori*, Troeltsch tried to show that the creative personality was the fundamental *a priori* on which all religion was ultimately grounded; so too, in the appropriation of values from history, the personality was at the centre. The dualism of the human condition was overcome in the possibility of the "individual and the living" which affirms the "priority of life and actuality over

⁷⁶ Cf. "Gnadenmittel" (A1910/15) col.1476.

⁷⁷ "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.435, ET p.166. Cf. Klemm, op. cit., p.198, who equates the personal decision with a re-introduction of the universal into Troeltsch's system: "The consciousness (Bewusstheit) - also in its unscientific and pre-theoretical forms - bestows onto Christian faith a universality which is its distinguishing mark, and therefore furnishes a legitimation, which was formerly bestowed by the claim to the absoluteness of Christianity - where the formula of the absoluteness of Christianity itself is the version of the problem of supernatural revelation made by the *religionsgeschichtliche* School".

⁷⁸ Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) pp.165ff. Cf. "Was heisst" (A1903/18a) p.430, ET p.161.

abstraction",⁷⁹ and which allows for values to emerge within, but stand outside, the causal chain.⁸⁰ In religion, there remains something beyond scientific explanation: this is something "individual" and "irrational".⁸¹

7.26 Subjectivism.⁸²

The attempt to bring the normative (that which ought to be) into contact with the descriptive (that which is) created a logical problem:

The great obstacle to this procedure [of historical method], however, lies in the fact that ethics must derive its knowledge of values from the facts of history...We are thus confronted with a logical circle.⁸³

79 Cf. Perkins, op. cit., p.93: "The fact that Troeltsch inclined toward an anti-rationalistic affirmation of life, despite the theoretical difficulties which such an affirmation entailed, lends support to the contention that Troeltsch, was in certain respects 'a harbinger of contemporary existentialism'." Any irrationalism, however, is tempered by a synthesis with rationalism. See above, Chapter 3.25.

80 Cf. Perkins, op. cit., p.238: "The aptness of a theological description of the existential experience of faith is greatly enhanced by an awareness of the metaphysical dimensions of human personality".

81 "Moderne Geschichtsphilosophie" (A1903/4a) p.712, Cf. p.717.

82 On the idea of subjectivity, see Becker, op. cit., who uses it as the "index of an epoch" (p.180ff). Most important is his observation (p.187) that "the rational constitution of truth in the modern concept of subjectivity finds its limits in the irrationality of life". Becker, however, emphasises this irrational aspect of Troeltsch's work at the expense of the rational, and centres Troeltsch's theology around "a systematisation of a mystical understanding of the self, which Origen began and Augustine continued" (p.255). This emphasis on the mystical tends to neglect the importance of the historical and social in Troeltsch's theology.

83 "Historiography" (A1913/35) p.722.

Troeltsch recognised that this logical circle could only be overcome subjectively. There was no objective necessity that descriptions should lead to norms, that knowledge of the relative could ever lead to knowledge of the absolute.⁸⁴ According to Troeltsch, it was "better not to try to deny [subjectivity] but rather to recognise it freely and openly".⁸⁵ Subjectivity could not be evaded, but rather required honest "insight".⁸⁶

Troeltsch's view of subjectivism did not mean that the individual became the *absolute* authority; rather it implied the recognition of the limited and relative character of all authority, the "short-sightedness and sinfulness" of the human being.⁸⁷ In humility, the subject acknowledged that "Christ also comes to us through history to create new life

84 This basic point was made by G.E. Moore at about the same time (in *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge, 1903).

85 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.436, ET p.167.

86 "Historiography" (A1913/35) p.722. On this point, see Mebust, (*Wilhelm Dilthey's Philosophy of History*, p.243) who sees Troeltsch as adopting a Diltheyan mode of non-objective knowledge: "Dilthey's attempt to establish a non-objective mode of knowledge precluded from the outset the possibility of making that knowledge objective and publicly verifiable." However, Troeltsch's recognition of the cultural relativity of knowledge and understanding does not preclude knowledge: knowledge and understanding rest on accepted criteria and are relative to the *action* of the individual. For Troeltsch, historical knowledge was always oriented around material or practical ends. See above, Chapter 3.23.

87 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.437f, ET p.168.

even in us":⁸⁸

Personal appropriation is the distinctive and final source [for *Glaubenslehre*]. I apprehend this not in fleeting outbursts, but because I feel a power come to me which is stronger than I...This is what the reformers meant by *testimonium spiritus sancti*.⁸⁹

The recognition of the ultimate subjectivity of all religion led inevitably to the idea of tolerance, to the subordination of doctrinal incompatibility behind the unity of feeling and atmosphere.⁹⁰

If this were taken seriously, then the members of the different churches would recognise that they were working towards a common end and would thus tolerate differences of opinion.⁹¹ Thus the

88 *ibid.* Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.37.

89 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.38f.

90 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.438, ET p.169; Cf p.439, ET p.168, where Troeltsch praises Harnack's *Wesen des Christentums* since it worked outside the official ecclesiastical institutions to influence many thousands of Christians who were "confused and distrustful of official theology". Cf. Troeltsch's view of Dante (in *Der Berg der Läuterung* (A1921/11) p.7) whom he saw as catholic, "but not in the sense of the narrow and belligerent confessionalism of later Europe. In truth he stood far closer to the supra-confessional strivings towards unity of spirit and faith, which once again enliven the torn and exhausted humanity of today". "Therefore the present Dante celebration should hold fast to the symbols and leave it up to the confessions to judge as to the reality of the symbols whilst at the same time concentrating on the supra-confessional and human" (p.9).

91 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.15: "There is no compulsory truth any longer; rather all share in it. Nobody sees the anti-Christ in Catholicism any more. The Protestants have achieved union...Even the Salvation Army enjoys rights and recognition".

subjectivism of the definition of essence can have a unifying effect, and the existing historical community in turn will always lead this subjectivism in search of a concrete contact to the historical forces ⁹²

The implications of Troeltsch's personalism are clear:

By virtue of this disengagement, Christian personalism enters

92 "Was heisst?" (A1903/11a) p.439, ET p.169. Karl-Ernst Apfelbacher, in one of the first Roman Catholic dissertations on Troeltsch (*Frömmigkeit und Wissenschaft*, Munich, 1978) since the massive work by Emil Spiess (*Die Religionstheorie von Ernst Troeltsch*, Paderborn, 1927) suggests that Troeltsch's personal religiosity hangs together with his theology (p.36f.), and that the "religious-mystical life position" formed the basis for Troeltsch's work (Chapter 5). Apfelbacher concludes that Troeltsch's work was a "life-history before God", and his book is the attempt to write a "mystical biography" (p.271). On this view theology and philosophy were secondary to the "original" phenomenon of religion which was in the mystical experience of the individual. The role of theology and philosophy were to render this experience in coherent language. If there is an original phenomenon of religion which underlies all rationalisations, then such a phenomenon must be super-confessional and stand before all theology and philosophy, and some kind of ecumenism can be justified. Apfelbacher thus presents Troeltsch as having "interconfessional relevance" (Cf. pp.242-251). Hartmut Ruddies, in his review of Apfelbacher's book (in the *Mitteilungen der Ernst-Troeltsch-Gesellschaft*, II, (ed.) Horst Renz) suggests that this ecumenical interpretation "expresses more of the strategic theological intentions of Apfelbacher himself, than the concrete concept of Troeltsch's work" (p.105). Wyman, too, in a far less charitable review in the *Journal of Religion*, 1980, pp.353-355, criticises his "unfortunate thesis of mysticism and of his collapsing of the perennial reflective task of theology into the personal path of faith" (p.355). Coakley however (in *Christ without Absolutes*, p.196), also recognises the ecumenical possibilities in Troeltsch, which again are based on the priority of experience over intellect: "The capitulation of faith to the intellect, is, as Troeltsch justly perceived, the bearer of spiritual desiccation; it is no less, one might add, the promoter of continuing mutual incomprehension between warring ecclesiastical factions." Troeltsch's epistemology (Chapter 3.23) and his conception of the absolute as resting in the future (Chapter 5.22), have profound implications for tolerance and ecumenism.

freely and vigorously into the perspectives of the modern understanding of the world.⁹³

All history, all aspects of the tradition are seen as resources where the human can learn to understand the nature of the goal towards which history is moving. Consequently no fanaticism can be justified, and tolerance will be the mark of the new transformation of Christianity.⁹⁴

There are inherent dangers in Troeltsch's method; indeed he was well aware that the lack of certainty was potentially dangerous for the very survival of Christianity. He summarised this aphoristically:

Death is possible in a system of danger.⁹⁵

There is no objective criterion for whether or not one stands in continuity with the tradition: again this is something ultimately subjective. Troeltsch asks:

Are we not going beyond what is distinctively Christian? We deny this question. Christianity is the only stable religious capital which we possess, and a new religion only exists in books. Where religion really is alive, it will need nothing new, merely a transformation. We are not afraid for the future of Christianity.⁹⁶

93 *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) p.160.

94 Cf. *The Absoluteness* (A1901/23d) p.121, 127, p.136, p.160, esp. p.135. Contrast the response to Theodor Kaftan (A1912/8, col.728) where Troeltsch likens possession of the absolute to "all manner of infallibilities and mass-psychology". See above, Chapter 6.22.

95 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.439, ET p.169. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.94. Cf. "Glaube und Geschichte" (A1908/6a) col.1456: "The future might have its own worries".

96 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.37.

All that can be affirmed is that Christianity is maintained when one's religious ideal derived from and was in accord with the historical formations of Christianity. Thus, it is still possible to say in faith that

Christianity is affirmed when one has the Father of Jesus Christ in one's daily struggles and labours, hopes and sufferings, when one is armed with the strength of the Christian Spirit for the great decision to be taken in the world and for the victory of all the eternal, personal values of the soul.⁹⁷

The ultimate criterion then is nothing more than the assurance of faith, a faith in the survival of these "eternal, personal values of the soul":⁹⁸

Something fully new can only develop when there are shown to be religious powers which are stronger than those of Christianity. These are nowhere to be found: Christianity has not been surpassed.⁹⁹

Troeltsch is however perfectly willing to accept the fact that with a presentation of Christianity along these lines it is quite possible that it will dissolve, since it will no longer be able to provide those powers capable of combining with the forces of the modern world. He wrote to Harnack as early as 1900:

In certain senses a new religion has come into being in the modern world because it has drawn into itself quite new contents and a new perception of the world.¹⁰⁰

97 "Was heisst" (A1903/18a p.440, ET p.170).

98 Cf., Dyson, op. cit., p.140: "The primary motive underlying his treatment of 'individuality' and 'development' is precisely a concern to safeguard the human factor against attempts to deny the freedom and spontaneity of the human spirit".

99 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.49. Cf. "Prinzip, religiöses" (A1913/18) col.1844: Troeltsch thus sees "the religious principle as far from being exhausted. It continues to be effective so long as it is not overcome by

In another letter, written to Rudolf Otto in 1902, Troeltsch recognised the fact that perhaps his theological method was "the gate which has shut out the roots of Christianity".¹⁰¹ Indeed, by 1922, Troeltsch was not willing to claim that his position represented the essence of Christianity but merely that it "stems from Christianity".¹⁰² However, although he often spoke of the possibility of new ice-ages and even, at one stage, the chance that humanity might once again climb back up the trees,¹⁰³ he continues to see in Christianity an abiding power.

Troeltsch's attitude to subjectivity is highlighted in his discussion of von Hartmann in the second edition of "Was heisst >Wesen des Christentums<?" in GS. II.¹⁰⁴ This was provoked by the peculiar controversy over the "Dreus

any stronger forces".

100 Letter to Harnack, 23/3/1900, Cited in Apfelbacher, op. cit., (G1978/1) p.98.

101 Letter to Otto, (G1978/1) p.59.

102 "Ein Apfel vom Baume Kierkegaards" (A1921/5) E.T. p.314f.

103 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.324.

104 A brief analysis of the differences between the two editions of this essay is made by Sykes in Morgan and Pye, *Ernst Troeltsch: writings on theology and religion*, p.180f. Cf. Coakley, op. cit., p.90f.

sensation",¹⁰⁵ which, according to Troeltsch, had been taken far too seriously, but which had served to reawaken interest in the perennial problem of faith and history. Troeltsch suggests that even von Hartmann's account of Christianity confirms the approach to the concept of the essence of Christianity which Troeltsch himself had outlined, in that it was dependent on a subjective evaluation of the tradition.

However, Troeltsch suggests that those under the influence of von Hartmann were in fact endeavouring to make an anti-Christian religion spring from Christianity with their philosophy of "pessimistic pantheism". They had moved along the same lines as Troeltsch, but had arrived at the conclusion that the "essence of Christianity is exhausted".¹⁰⁶ Troeltsch suggested, however, that to anybody with a real knowledge of history, this construction would appear as "pure fantasy".¹⁰⁷

Unwittingly, however, von Hartmann had forced Troeltsch to state exactly what he considered to be the essentials for a continuity of Christianity: these were the "personalist Christian belief in God and salvation" which was something which has to be explained in a new manner for the new generation:

the super-worldly (überweltlich) depth of personality cannot be

105 For Troeltsch's view of the Drews sensation see the essay "Aus der religiösen Bewegung der Gegenwart" (A1910/19a), pp.36-43 and the discussion by Gerrish, in "Jesus, Myth and History", and Rupp, op. cit., Chapter 3.

106 "Was heisst?" (A1903/18a) p.442, ET p.172.

107 ibid. p.443, ET p.173.

expounded after the manner of cultureless original Christianity, nor again in the hierarchical style of medieval culture, nor yet again in the bourgeois vocational ethic of early protestantism, but a new solution of this fundamental problem of all religious ethics must be sought.¹⁰⁸

What was wrong with all competing accounts was that the greatest gain of history, the "idea of personality", had been "swallowed up".¹⁰⁹ The essence of Christianity was

the urge towards freedom, conquest of the world and a union with God which takes place precisely in the most personal forms of life, as driven on by prophetic religion and Christianity...We seek God as he turns towards us in the present, and in this respect that which he says to us in Christ and in the prophets is by no means superseded, but rather remains the only power which provides among us simple health and living profundity.¹¹⁰

In short, Troeltsch was

certain that no higher truth lays in pessimistic pantheism but that any such truth lies in the direction of religious personalism which has to overcome suffering and sin through a higher life and not merely to succumb to it.¹¹¹

Troeltsch sees his task as the "second act of protestantism"¹¹² in uniting historical reality with the

108 p.444, ET p.174 (amended).

109 ibid. p.446, ET p.175.

110 ibid.

111 ibid.

112 ibid. p.447, ET p.176.

"essence of faith". These two sides have

to find each other again and again. The task of theology consists in their unity, whether the two tasks are carefully shared out and solved as far as possible independently, or whether they are brought together again in a great, comprehensive account of Christianity which is at once both history and faith.¹¹³

This urge to synthesis occurs throughout Troeltsch's writings and rests upon the the fundamental need to relate higher purposes to innerworldly (historical) purposes. It is this that Troeltsch attempts in the metaphysical sections of the *Glaubenslehre*, which forms the subject of the next Chapter.

113 *ibid.* p.451, ET, p.179.

Chapter Eight: The interpenetration of the human and the divine:

Troeltsch's metaphysical theology.

8.1 Introduction: Glaubenslehre and ethics.

In his *Glaubenslehre*, Troeltsch surveys the relations of God, the human and the world as formulated in the Christian faith. He presents an amalgam of the traditional historical formulations of Christianity, and the modern world with its distinctive philosophical and metaphysical presuppositions. His intention is to show the future possibilities of the powers of religion. The central question he addresses is, "What is the human considered from the religious point of view (Gesichtspunkt)?"¹ The metaphysical side of theology,² as the second dogmatic task after historical theology, and as presented in the second part of the *Glaubenslehre*,³ can be elucidated purely formally with its logical relations exactly worked out, but it remains abstractly metaphysical unless it can achieve connections with the individual who stands in

1 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.129. On the content of the *Glaubenslehre*, see esp. Wyman, Chapter Five.

2 Cf. Wyman, op. cit., p.162: *Glaubenslehre* "employs a philosophical apparatus borrowed from idealism to explicate conceptually the content of Christian symbols". Troeltsch had previously presented the basis for a metaphysical theology in "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1896/2) pp.188ff.

3 (F1925/2) Sects. 11-36, pp.127-384.

history. Ultimately the test of any religion is whether it provides this practical power:⁴ all the resources of philosophy and all the triumphs of the tradition are null and void unless there is the experience of redemption which enables the world to be instilled with absolute and unconditional meaning.

Troeltsch's *Glaubenslehre* is built upon his *Religionsphilosophie*, but does not remain at the purely philosophical level. It is primarily concerned not with metaphysical speculation, but with showing that spiritual ends can be *achieved* through the assimilation of the power displayed historically into the individual's own heart for the present day.⁵ The metaphysical theory of the personality which shares in the divine will, is thus merely a background for the real business of religion, which is concerned with the ethical deed (*Tat*) of the will.⁶ All that can help ethics to survive as a potent force is the individual's experience of rebirth and of new life. However, although it rests on a mystical experience, *Glaubenslehre* soon moves to ethics:

The doctrine of the mystical union (*Gotteinigung*) or the Indwelling (*Einwohnung*) of Christ is the centre and the ground of all practical-religious achievement, and the radiating centre of religious ethics.⁷

4 Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.115.

5 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.926, ET p.791f.

6 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.163. Cf. MS *allgemeine Ethik*, p.17. (Hereafter *allg. Ethik*. For details of these, and of other lectures, see Bibliographical Appendix).

7 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.857, ET p.737.

Glaubenslehre is thus vitally related to, and often indistinguishable from ethics.⁸ Thus despite all the speculative intricacies and inadequacies of Troeltsch's system, the criterion of success in this presentation of the Christian faith, is that it should continue to allow the individual to overcome the forces of the world working against the free exercise of the autonomous ethical personality.⁹ A reaction to romantic mysticism was necessary and stemmed from

the distinctive nature of Christianity itself; which is never merely individualised mysticism, but also, at the same time, ethical driving power; a recognition of the divine will requires fellowship and a religion which can only be nourished by a living cultus. The cultus cannot be anything other than in some sense the worship (*Verehrung*) of Jesus as the revelation of God. Thus even Schleiermacher moved back to the Church after the spiritualist-individualist ideas of his youth.¹⁰

Christianity must thus continue to provide the power to transform meaninglessness into meaning. As such it stands in opposition to the modern world and its success or failure rests in the potency with which it can provide the power for the divine to encroach upon human affairs. In short, the

8 Cf. Wyman 1983, op. cit., Chapter V, esp. p.143.

9 According to Gertrud von le Fort, Troeltsch saw the contemporary ethical question as "one of the most burning and decisive" (MS *praktische christliche Ethik*, (hereafter, *pr. chr. Ethik*) Vorlesung, p.16). Cf. Benckert, *Ernst Troeltsch und das ethische Problem*, p.14; Cf. p.16; Cf: "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.322f.: "The leading task of modern Christianity is above all in the arena of ethics."

10 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.937, ET p.797f.

theological objective of *Glaubenslehre* is to ensure that the higher world of spiritual absolute ends empowers and so transforms the natural world.

8.2 The problem of freedom and grace.

In an article on the grace of God, Troeltsch reckons this concept as the highest in the Christian doctrine of redemption, and indeed it is here that "the actual distinctiveness of Christianity" rested.¹¹ Troeltsch sees this concept as vitally concerned with raising up the creature from the suffering of the world (*Weltleid*) to salvation and deification (*Gotteinigkeit*), to a union of the creature with the "creative and active freedom of God". Troeltsch talks of a higher motivation for action above that of natural necessity, which is, in the language of Christianity, ultimately the adoption of the will of God itself. All achievement in this world must remain finite and all attempts at good must remain tinged with selfishness. What is truly good comes from God alone and can only be attained through devotion to him in union with his will.

Redemption requires a breach with the finite world, since finite plans can only fulfil finite ends. Thus salvation can never be fully accomplished in this world: this is what is at fault in eudaemonism and utilitarianism. Rather, in devotion to God, and in the union of wills, there is a deification (*Vergöttlichen*) of all human objectives.¹²

11 "Gnade Gottes III: Dogmatisch" (A1907/10a) col. 1470.

12 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect.12.4.

However, a logical problem remains. This is

the great problem of freedom as the goal of the human spirit, which remains a deed of the human and is nevertheless a devotion to that which does not derive from the human, but from God.¹³

The highest ethical achievement is to move beyond finitude by giving over the self "to that divine power active in us".¹⁴ Freedom is thus at one and the same time the work of the self and nevertheless a work of God present within it: all freedom is bound up together.¹⁵

Grace and freedom do not present a contradiction, but belong to one another in the most intimate way.¹⁶

Freedom and grace are no longer contradictory, but are concepts which *need* one another. There can be no effect of the divine spirit without freedom, but also no human sense of duty without being drawn up towards the divine. The concept of freedom has thus changed. It is no longer a question of what a human *can* do, but what the human, confined in nature, *should* do. Being torn apart from this natural situation gives life to freedom...Freedom and grace are two names for the same thing...There is no autonomy without theonomy: freedom is the breakthrough of the divine within us. Complete autonomous ethics is identical with faith in the grace which reveals itself in autonomy...[Ethics] is God making himself effective in humans (Sich-selbst-wirksam-machen Gottes im Menschen).¹⁷

13 "Gnade Gottes III" (A1907/10a) col.1470.

14 *ibid.* col.1471.

15 Cf. *Politische Ethik und Christentum* (A1904/6) p.33: "The free Christian personality is free first of all only in God and before God, and the community of these personalities around God's will."

16 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.13; Cf. Vorlesung, p.27: "Grace and freedom are one"; Cf. p.28: "Where freedom is, there also is grace"; Cf. MS *allg. Ethik*, sect.7.

17 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.29.

The dialectic of grace and freedom is solved in the notion of the creature's return (Rückverwandlung) to God. It learns its confines in the act of devotion,¹⁸ and in this devotion is raised out of them to union with the infinite itself.¹⁹ Troeltsch recognises the antecedents of this view of the concept of grace in the teaching of Paul, Augustine and the mystics, yet each of these traditions presented distortions of the concept.²⁰ Augustine, for instance, was too clerical,²¹ and the mystics too Platonist. Protestantism had neglected the individual's role in its over-emphasis of the saving events of Christ's death. According to Troeltsch, Jesus set himself up against any form of heteronomous morality of authority, "against the whole spirit of obedience".²² This spirit of Jesus' teaching was gradually transformed to the clerical *Einheitskultur* of the Middle Ages, and only at the Reformation was there a return of the idea of the individual. However, the concept of

18 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect.12.3.

19 "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.203.

20 Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.11, Vorlesung, p.27.

21 For Augustine's concept of Grace, see esp. *Augustin, die christliche Antike und das Mittelalter* (A1915/6a) pp.167ff.

22 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.6. Cf. Vorlesung, p.17f.

autonomy did not develop very far. Thus "happy old Geneva became the Eldorado of the strong serious morals (Sittenernstes)".²³ Against the classical Eudaemonism of the Renaissance, Kant and Fichte re-established the primacy of autonomy.²⁴ In this modern concept of autonomy was embedded a modern subjectivism, yet this was not arbitrary (Willkür).

Each of these traditions raises problems centred around the relationship between God and the human: of how the one can be active in the other:

In fact in the problem of freedom, difficulties remain which are insoluble...what is good in freedom is that which is valid (das Gültige) and obligatory (das Seinsollende), which does not stem from humans but from God. Nevertheless what is free in freedom is the act of humans through which they make the divine their own.²⁵

Only in religion could there be a move beyond this impasse. Everything had its own relative freedom in the sense of an interpenetration of the divine (as the unconditioned) in the finite (the conditioned):

In this separate sphere of life, there takes place a real interpenetration of the human and the divine spirit.²⁶

In the creator's ordered and rational world, the creature is

23 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.19.

24 Cf. *ibid.* p.20: "In opposition to the *Weltanschauung* which recognises everything as determined by natural powers, they re-affirmed the world of freedom". See above, Chapter 1.

25 "Gnade Gottes III" (A1907/10a) col.1473. Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.13: "The question as to the relationship between the divine effects on the finite just cannot be answered".

26 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) sect.1.

raised up as a creative spirit, so that out of creation, it becomes a participant in God's creative power.²⁷ The antinomy thus comes to its end in

the interpenetration (Ineinander) of the finite and the infinite which is inconceivable for human thought, through which the finite is brought to its summit in the breach with its own independence and finitude, and returns to God.²⁸

However, this solution "can only be personal and immediately practical".²⁹ It is thus only in practice that the traditional conflicts of synergy and monergy can be cast aside:

This is a realisation of God in us: when we are good, so we allow God to work in us.³⁰

Hence the overcoming of this dialectic of freedom comes to expression in the "pious feeling" (frommen Gefühl) that "we are in God but we are not identical to him".³¹

Thus

autonomy and theonomy do not contradict one another provided that the divinity of a law is not derived from an outwardly revealed statutory law, but from the unity (Verbindlichkeit) of all ethical

27 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect.12.4.

28 "Gnade Gottes III (A1907/10a) col.1474.

29 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.160.

30 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.27. Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect.12.4b.

31 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.175.

reason itself. Just as theoretical reason leads to the logical unity of the universe as its deepest basis,...so also the agreement of ethical judgements and their universally necessary formal character leads to the concept of an ethical universal reason (Weltvernunft), which reveals itself in the individual being...Thus the most universal conception of the ethical (Sittlichen) already contains the religious element of foundation (Begründung) and sanction, but this revelation is purely inward, the ethical reason (Vernunft) of God in the heart. Theonomy is thus merely the stressing (Hervorhebung) of the religious presuppositions already contained in the concept of autonomy itself.³²

God and the human are not essentially to be divorced from one another...Our ethical judgements are not merely on the surface but demand a penetration into the depths. God is the source of this self-orientation; we must yield our souls before him...Autonomy is thus conceived as interwoven (durchwebt) by God. Thus autonomy and theonomy are the same.³³

In an article on predestination,³⁴ Troeltsch discusses further the relationship between the contradictory ideas that, firstly, good stems from humanity and, secondly, that good can only come from devotion of the self to the eternal will of God, which alone can be wholly good. His solution rests on the affirmation of the Christian tradition of the absolute worth of the personality which is seen as only conceivable in terms of the absoluteness of God.³⁵ The

32 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.7. Cf. p.13: "The unity between theonomy and autonomy contains the basis for the unity between freedom and grace". Troeltsch first recognises the importance of the reconciliation of theonomy and autonomy in "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1896/2) p.210. Cf. Benckert, op. cit., p.31f.; p.96.

33 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.20. Cf. p.29.

34 "Prädestination III: Dogmatisch" (A1907/20a).

35 Cf. "Prädestination III" (A1907/20a) col.1708. Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.194: "The more religion combines the human with God against the world, so much more will the soul become a personality sharing the immutability of God".

grounds for the possibility of the absolute ethical value of the personality, and thus the human power to do what is good, rest in the divine will. Here the human is confronted with the notion of love:³⁶

The groundless will which creates creatures and raises them up to union with himself is love, and effects love as it converts the human will into the divine will.³⁷

There are threats to such a view from the modern world. For instance, determinism leaves no room for the possibility of the groundless will: everything is related to everything else. Darwinism explains the problem of the dissimilarity of humans, not religiously, by viewing the apparent inequality of chances for redemption, but as the natural course of things whereby all physical laws work to promote these differences. The notion of love disappears altogether with the idea of the survival of the fittest.³⁸ Modern pantheism, however, recognises the groundless will, but such a will is impersonal, and everything is seen as conditioned. Troeltsch thus arrives at the question, again expressive of the problem of freedom and determinism: how can there be a role for the individual human personality to participate in the divine sovereign will which does not deny this individuality?

36 Cf. *Politische Ethik und Christentum* (A1904/6) p.23.

37 "Prädestination III" (A1907/20a) col.1708.

38 Cf. "Prädestination III" (A1907/20a) col.1709f.

Troeltsch's reconstruction of the doctrine of predestination recognises the need to affirm, on the one hand, the absolutely valid, and, on the other hand, to recognise the inequality of participation in this reality as something essential to the constitution of the world. Troeltsch recognises that the concept of predestination had been profoundly altered by the recognition of determinism, so much so that the survival of freedom had become the "most burning problem of the present":³⁹

As the concept of predestination slides over to psychological determinism, so freedom appears as the distinctively Christian concept.⁴⁰

In order to reconcile this conflict there could not be a return to the logical contradictions of the past by reckoning absolute causality along with finite causality. Rather, it was necessary to recognise

the unknowable nature of the ground of our being, in which we are united with the groundless seat of pure will which abides in reality in universal laws and values.⁴¹

Troeltsch's conception of predestination allows for the finite will to participate in creativity by sharing in groundless freedom. At the same time, he recognises that it was natural physical laws, which in themselves had no ethical

39 Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.28.

40 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.12.

41 "Prädestination III" (A1907/20a) col.1711.

content, which were responsible for the inequalities in human chances to share this freedom.⁴² This led Troeltsch to the speculative assertion based on a religious hope and affirmation of the love of God, of a realm where all would be brought to equality.

In this inconceivable groundless creative will, Troeltsch is re-affirming the doctrine of creation, where values are seen, not as flowing from some arbitrary source (*Willkür*) but from something which in itself is absolute, rational and necessary. The ethical worth of the personality derives from that which is revealed as divine in all values:

Thereby the creature's will is brought into that which is alone of absolute worth - the divine will. This is the actual meaning of the concept of divine love.⁴³

Love is something realised in the unity and community of the spirit:⁴⁴

The living will of love pours itself into the creature's will that it may come into union with him.⁴⁵

Faith is in that which provides an absolute, unconditioned foundation for human values. The human personality thus develops as it gains access to this absolute domain through a

42 Cf. "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.326.

43 "Prädestination III" (A1907/20a) col.1712.

44 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect.14.3.

45 *ibid.* p.225.

union of wills: "the last ground of grounds is the complete groundlessness of the divine will".⁴⁶

That which is absolute must be beyond human grasp: there can be no predicates of God which do not in some way restrict his absoluteness.⁴⁷ At the same time, however, there must be a connection between the human will and this unconditional absolute will. That which is finite must be able to "cross over into the eternal".⁴⁸ For Troeltsch, what is distinctively Christian in the notion of God is this *connection*, the "taking up of the analogy with ethical freedom and from this point of view illuminating the concept of God".⁴⁹ The affirmation of the realm of ethical freedom requires the affirmation of groundlessness which permits no rationalisation. Reality "in its innermost sense, is irrational, and thus any theism without irrationality is without life (platt)".⁵⁰ The human becomes capable of effecting action in the finite world for absolute ends. In the union of wills, the human will, which acts in accord with

46 *ibid* p.150.

47 Cf. *ibid.* p.167.

48 *ibid.* p.167.

49 *ibid.* p.169.

50 *ibid.* p.162.

this groundless divine will, is itself "groundless", in that there is no external cause or reason acting on the individual. Freedom, the sharing in divine creativity, is affirmed as the central concept for the Christian view of life, a freedom which allows for a conception of meaningful action in the natural world in conformity with an absolute end. Troeltsch sums this up in his lectures on ethics:

The human is as a creature of nature not a personality, but merely an individual (Individuum)...What is decisive is the act (Tat) which is the creation of a unified being out of the natural being...The personality is distinguished from the individual as it obeys this command: Make yourself into a personality through obedience to the law you have formed for yourself, and treat others likewise as developing personalities. Self-legislation is self-creation (Selbstgesetzgebung heisst Selbsterzeugung).⁵¹

8.3 Redemption as the personal experience of the union of wills.

Troeltsch differentiates Christianity from Islam and Judaism which, on his analysis, remain essentially moralistic religions with no real concept of redemption. In these religions, there is an equation between the actual world and absolute ethical law.⁵² Absolute laws can be fully known and acted out in the present; salvation results from the individual following heteronomous laws. Thus the notion "that love can break forth from the inner essence of God and

51 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.1f.

52 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect.7.

connect with the soul, remains strange".⁵³ Troeltsch presents a different view of the human which requires another form of redemption, if "the divine initiative" is once again to be taken up.⁵⁴ This leads to the idea of redemption as a developmental concept.

The extra-Christian expressions of the concept of redemption which could have relevance for the modern world are those of Buddhism and pantheism. What separated them from Christianity was "the religious problem of the personality".⁵⁵ Personalism was what Troeltsch saw as "distinctive in Christianity", as that "which recognises the raising up and deification of the finite creature".⁵⁶ The problem highlighted by the different concepts of redemption in Christianity and the religions of the East, was

whether the divine life is recognised as the original ground of all freedom and consequently the goal of mankind is found in freedom and personality, or whether the domain of the divine is in the impersonal, and personal life is only to be seen as an error which is to be overcome.⁵⁷

53 *ibid.* p.156.

54 *ibid.* p.204. Cf. *ibid.* Sect.19.

55 "Erlösung II: dogmatisch" (A1907/21a), col.482.

56 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.177.

57 "Erlösung II: dogmatisch" (A1907/21a) col.483.

In affirming the importance of Christian personalism, Troeltsch affirms certain important idealist metaphysical presuppositions about the nature of human being. What Troeltsch presents is "the appearance of the concept of redemption under the mutual interaction of Protestantism and modern idealism".⁵⁸ The world is not ethically indifferent, but rather it is possible to distinguish between right and wrong, and between levels of spiritual development.⁵⁹ The artistic and ethical achievement of humanity is seen as sharing in the creativity of God.⁶⁰ The possibility of this metaphysics of personal creativity is indeed "the most pressing problem of the present".⁶¹ Religiously, this metaphysics is expressed in the doctrine of the soul, whereby the personality can be affirmed as distinct from all natural relations.⁶² The soul is thus not something susceptible to scientific analysis, be it psychological or anthropological, but rather it stands as something distinct, as the "unified

58 *ibid.* col.485.

59 Otherwise, Troeltsch asked, "how are we to distinguish between a Helmholtz and a beloved idiot?" (*Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.174, p.293. Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.196f., p.200).

60 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.293.

61 *ibid.* p.293.

62 Cf. *ibid.* Sect.19.3, p.287.

centre of personality".⁶³

After discussing the historical concept of redemption, Troeltsch goes on to point out the modifications necessary to the traditional concept, if it is to survive in the modern world. This is the real task of dogmatics. Redemption is to be considered as the "goal of raising up the creature" from the given, with a consequent breach with natural life.⁶⁴ This indeed is the sense of rebirth or of a higher birth,⁶⁵ which leads ultimately to the return (Rückkehr) to God.

63 *ibid.* p.283.

64 "Erlösung II" (A1907/21a) col.484.

65 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.178. Cf. *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.39f.

8.4 Redemption and Christ.⁶⁶

Such a definition of redemption is far more loosely related to the activity of the redeemer than in the traditional concept. Faith is less in a particular set of facts than in the recognition of the eternal worth of life, a recognition which in Christianity stems from the personality and teaching of Christ as this is mediated by the tradition. Troeltsch thus allows a significant role for Christ, the "name identified with all salvation",⁶⁷ and the bible remains "the decisive criterion for all Christian Faith":⁶⁸

The impression of the personality of Jesus as it continues to live, illuminated by the faith of numerous generations, is that which in the end...makes us certain of the knowledge of God.⁶⁹

The relation of the historical Jesus to the Christian Faith proved a problem for Troeltsch. If God was always in the process of self-revelation, then to locate everything in one point was no longer possible: finality and absoluteness were reserved for a higher world which the individual can

66 On the subject of Troeltsch's Christology, see. esp. Coakley, *Christ without Absolutes*, Chapters 4-6; Gerrish, "Jesus, Myth and History: Troeltsch's Stand in the 'Christ-Myth' Debate", in *The Old Reformation and the New*, and Robert Morgan, introduction in *Ernst Troeltsch: writings*, esp. pp.38ff.

67 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.26.

68 *ibid.* Sect.2.2.

69 "Erlösung II" (A1907/21a) col.487.

merely glimpse in the current experience of redemption. Christ's role and significance were thus centred upon his meaning for faith:

It appears from the whole of its effects and in the personality of its master without doubt to be ethically and religiously the most alive, the richest revelation; this is all that can be proved by science of the revelation in Christianity.⁷⁰

For us 'God in Christ' can only mean that in Jesus we reverence the highest revelation of God accessible to us and that we make the picture of Jesus the rallying-point of all God's testimonies to himself found in our sphere of life.⁷¹

It is this faith which *empowers* the philosophical theology of the Christian religion:

The relationship of faith to history is therefore to be understood as merely psychological.⁷²

Experience is not something that happens in a vacuum but is something mediated by tradition and symbols, as well as by the current ways of interpreting the world with their metaphysical and philosophical presuppositions. Thus in *Glaubenslehre* the object is to describe the present as a description of the "ever new self-completing redemptive event in its individual moments".⁷³ Such moments are given life through the powers of the tradition, which in Christianity

70 "Offenbarung III: dogmatisch" (A1907/1b) col.920.

71 "Die Bedeutung" (A1911/5) ET p.206.

72 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) sect.6.4.

73 "Erlösung II" (A1907/21a) col.485.

are most firmly located in the personality of Christ himself:

Every experience shows us that all powers and warmth of the certainty of redemption stand in connection (Anschluss) to Jesus and the living community which derives from him.⁷⁴

Christ becomes the "rallying-point", the force for social cohesion, which possesses "a vividness and plasticity never found in theory and understanding but only in imagination and feeling".⁷⁵ The symbol is thus anchored in the Christian community.⁷⁶ Christianity is "Christocentric" but beyond this, little more can be said.⁷⁷

74 *ibid.* col.487.

75 "Die Bedeutung" (A1911/5) ET p.195. Cf. Coakley, *op. cit.*, Chapter Six for a discussion of the possibility of developing such a Christology (esp. pp.192ff). "We have in this strand of Troeltsch's christological work...the seeds of something much more constructive than Troeltsch probably even realised for himself" (p.197).

76 Wyman, (*op. cit.*, p.93) bases his interpretation of Troeltsch's Christology on the anchoring of the Christian symbol in the community, and regards this as adequate. Cf. Gerrish, "Jesus, Myth and History", p.243: "Plainly, while [Troeltsch] could not set aside the question of origins, as though it were of no significance for faith, he did judge its role to be strictly relative and limited. It is the germ of the total growth, which Troeltsch names 'tradition'." Troeltsch had succeeded in showing that there was a need for faith in "history in general". The problem was how this history in general was linked with the historical Jesus. Cf. Coakley, *op. cit.*, pp.150ff., who asks whether a fictional figure would not have equally adequately fulfilled this role. She accurately points out that "there is an important realist strand [in Troeltsch] which Gerrish has overlooked" and which allows for some factual distinction to be made between Jesus "and a fantasy hero like Batman" (p.160 n.65).

77 Cf. "Die Bedeutung" (A1911/5) ET p.189.

Personally for us we hold to what can be affirmed (das Erreichbare). We place ourselves under the capitulation (Bann) to his personality and recognise in him our mystical head.⁷⁸

However, Troeltsch moves beyond this purely social-psychological interpretation of Christ to point to the relevance of "certain decisive chief facts" about the career of the historical Jesus:

Not all the minor details of historical research in theology are at issue here, but the basic facts - the decisive significance of Jesus' teaching for the origin and formation of faith in Christ, the basic religious and ethical character of Jesus' teaching and the transformation of his teaching in the earliest Christian congregations with their Christ cult...One needs only a basic overall picture.⁷⁹

The reason for this is clear: Drews had sensationally denied the existence of Jesus. To be sure of the continued existence of the Christian religion, it

must not feel or worry that it is composing a myth without object or basis in reality...Granted this presupposition it can interpret the picture of Christ in practical proclamation very freely and flexibly...The Christian character and so the definiteness of the principle is preserved by everything being constantly related to the rallying-point, the personality of Jesus...Sensational denials will disappear when the matter is studied objectively.⁸⁰

78 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.117. Cf. Coakley, op. cit., p.162, who sees this reference to the personality of Jesus as the decisive weakness in Troeltsch's Christology, (and perhaps a remnant of Ritschlanism (p.154); Cf. "Die Bedeutung" (A1911/5) ET p.201). However, although Troeltsch sees Christ as central (Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) sect.8), he never rules out the possibility that other personalities can provide focus and sustain the community: "Other historical personalities too can receive their due and be seen in some sense as visible symbols and guarantees of faith that sustain our strength" ("Die Bedeutung" (A1911/5) ET p.201). It was merely that Christ was the first and most important of these.

79 "Die Bedeutung" (A1911/5) ET p.200.

80 "Die Bedeutung" (A1911/5) ET p.201. In his *Dogmatics*, Diem,

8.5 Nature and sin.

Redemption is viewed by Troeltsch as twofold: firstly, as redemption from the necessary conditions of nature,⁸¹ and secondly, from the consciousness of guilt (Schuldbewusstsein). The first of these recognises that in faith the human acquires a new possibility for spiritual development despite what the natural world in all its unpredictability might present. Suffering is not seen as the

concentrating on the essay on the significance of the historical Jesus, points to Troeltsch's failure, which he believed was highlighted by Schweitzer: "When we read [Troeltsch] today we ask ourselves, with astonishment, whence Troeltsch derived the optimism or the desperate courage to build absolutely everything on the possibility of recovering the knowable reality of Jesus by historical critical methods" (p.8). Cf. Gerrish, op. cit., p.247: "Whatever may be said about it, there surely cannot be any need for faith to await the latest results with anxiety". That Jesus was *real* is crucial for Troeltsch, but he does not attempt to build much upon the results of historical scholarship. What he aims to show is that pure symbols, which lacked basis in historical reality, could never be sufficient for a coherent Christian piety or cult (Cf. letter to Bousset (G1976/1) p.46, *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.932, n.504, ET p.795, n.504, and Coakley, op. cit., pp.154ff.). Troeltsch, as has been shown above (Chapter 2.2), *deepens* the Kantian dictum that in history there are only illustrations, never demonstrations. That something is merely an illustration, however, does not mean that it is not *necessary*, and that it is not the highest illustration possible. Cf. *Das Historische* (A1904/4a) p.140, p.143. Cf. Coakley, op. cit., p.158 n.60: "We should note that whereas Troeltsch, in his 'mature' theological period often cites the Kantian view that history can only illustrate, not reveal, truth...he is always careful to go on to distinguish his own position from this".

81 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.208f. Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Chapter II.

consequence of original sin, but rather is an inexplicable brute fact deriving from natural laws. Redemption conveys the power to overcome these conditions: nature "is augmented" with an ethical and spiritual domain, where humans might become "citizens of a higher world order".⁸² Thus the struggle for existence was not the consequence of sin but rather was given with existence itself:

Without chemical laws our bodies would be unthinkable. But these same laws in numerous ways also render us nothing...It belongs to the laws of being, that our suffering and joys stem from one and the same source.⁸³

The second form of redemption is from that which contradicts devotion to God.⁸⁴ The feeling of guilt stems from a failure to live up to the demands of the absolute. Such a condition does not result from the fall, but rather is part of the constitution of the human being, necessary for the development of the ethical personality:

Sin is much more a part of human life conceived alongside the principle of good, as part of the development of the human spirit.⁸⁵

82 "Erlösung II" (A1907/21a) col.485.

83 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.235.

84 Cf. *ibid.* Sect.22.4.

85 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.15. Cf. Vorlesung, p.33. Cf. "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.322: "The conflict is no longer seen as a consequence of Adam's sin and thereby patiently borne, but is seen as part of God's natural order...The mood of original sin and humility is replaced with that of conflict and progress, which will not suffer its lot (Beruf) patiently, but strive on in ceaseless labour to overcome the conditions of nature".

Beyond this, however, Troeltsch recognises the arena of genuine sin in the will which enacts "radical evil", which, in refusing to give God the honour due, sets itself up as something of absolute worth.⁸⁶ Troeltsch gave an early formulation of this concept of sin in a lecture recorded by Benckert:

Evil is the persistence of the natural situation in opposition to the drives felt from the higher form of life. These replace our sharing in objective purposes in the world with natural drives and selfishness. Evil is the conscious affirmation of lower purely subjective purposes.⁸⁷

Sin is "the denial of the claims of God on the soul; it is egoism against the fellow human in obedience to mere interest and inclination,"⁸⁸ a "deification of the self (Selbstvergötterung)".⁸⁹ For Troeltsch, the concept of evil is a fundamentally negative concept: it is the "reverse of Christian good":⁹⁰

86 Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.202.

87 *Ethik*, 1899, sect. 11; cited in Benckert, *Ernst Troeltsch und das ethische Problem*, p.41. Cf. p.101. Cf. "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.322. Cf. *MS allg. Ethik*, pp.32ff.

88 *MS pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.14. Cf. Vorlesung, p.32: "In humans egoism is the negation of the super-human principle of humanity. Christianity does not have an ascetic ideal; it does not deny human love, but rather elevates it to the concept of the super-human community in devotion to God."

89 *MS pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.31.

90 *MS pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.14. Cf. Vorlesung, p.30f.

Evil or sin is the emancipation of the finite Ego from God...a reliance on the self alone (das Sich-auf-sich-selbst-stellen).⁹¹

History can thus be seen as the continual battle between good and evil. In the modern world, this

contradiction has been just as relativised as the concepts of sin and grace. The battle between the good and evil principles means two radical principles, but which nevertheless are present in conflict everywhere.⁹²

There is no fundamental distinction between Christians and non-Christians with regard to the doctrine of sin: all we can say is that "the omnipresent battle between good and evil is perhaps clearest in Christianity".⁹³

The notion of freedom is essential for the concept of sin: only as consciously acting contrary to God's will can the human be said to be guilty of an offence. For Troeltsch, a feeling of guilt is the only punishment and this is overcome in the feeling of redemption, as the finite and absolute wills are united.⁹⁴ The idea of reward and punishment stems

91 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.32.

92 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.15.

93 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.34.

94 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.317; Cf. *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.14. Cf. Vorlesung, p.38: "Being certain is purely inward, God speaks in the soul and no other hears...we reproduce in ourselves that which was most alive in the great personalities. Jesus' spirit is adopted as our own."

from the human longing for union with the divine will. Troeltsch sees the idea of reward as vitally connected with the idea of autonomy: it concerns the final harmonisation of the spiritual and the natural aspects of the human personality. "We have a basic longing after the deepest, ultimate happiness which human life affirms".⁹⁵ Only an ethics which fails to acknowledge this fundamental dualism can avoid the idea of reward.⁹⁶ Ultimately this leads to the interdetermination (Füreinanderbestimmtheit) of the spiritual and the natural world.

For Troeltsch, the traditional understanding of the doctrine of original sin is problematic, and leads to a denial of the possibility of the attainment of human perfection: the truth embodied in the doctrine had to be "freed from the terminology of the past, whereby it might achieve fresh life and immediacy, and lose its bitter after-taste".⁹⁷ Troeltsch points to an "original" sinfulness but allows this to be overcome in a trust in God's grace, a certainty of the forgiveness of sins, a certainty which is completed in the experience of redemption.⁹⁸ "The

95 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.7.

96 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.7.

97 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.36.

98 Cf. MS, *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.15: "The concept of punishment has been internalised".

overcoming of evil is nothing other than being certain (Gewissmachung)".⁹⁹ It is this which is the highest meaning of the doctrine of justification by faith: "What I know is that I have the power to act ethically when I possess that power which forgives sins".¹⁰⁰

The concept of redemption can be seen as the attainment of a new power, as a participation in the divine power itself, where the finite self is united with the divine and consequently receives the power to overcome its natural confines.¹⁰¹ Thus from our position in the world "we grow finally above the world".¹⁰²

The human response to the experience of the forgiveness of sins leads to the idea of repentance. Better perhaps are the expressions "rebirth" or "new life". A new life contains new possibilities for ethical action: consequently one of the greatest tasks of the Christian life is that of purification (Läuterung). The "new life" does not mean a radical and final break with the world: it is not a matter of black and white.¹⁰³ The break with natural life is achieved only

99 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.37f.

100 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.38.

101 Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.15.

102 "Erlösung II" (A1907/21a) col.486.

103 For Troeltsch, such a radical break leads inevitably to a sectarian Christianity which is usually characterised by a spiritual and ethical arrogance: "they have the feeling of being better than everybody else" (MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.40). With strong vitriol, Troeltsch regards the separation from the world and the affection for everything childlike as a total denial of Christianity which must involve itself in the real world with its sin and suffering.

in that moment when humans have become mature (reif), when they have separated themselves from sensibility (Sinnlichkeit) and from the world.¹⁰⁴

The state of perfection is not seen as something lost in the Fall, but as something resting in the unknown, in the future, to be worked for as the goal of life. *Within* this world, however, the human is called to begin the task of the formation of the "higher being":

We have to form the golden kernel of our higher being only in the difficult experience that our sufferings and joys are not ultimate.¹⁰⁵

Redemption in this unknown sphere becomes (as it did for Kant) the "fundamental secret of metaphysics. We have to postulate it, since we cannot know it".¹⁰⁶ Thus Troeltsch speculates that after the death of the physical body there is an element of continuity. However, it is quite possible to believe in a dissolution of the unspiritual material body into sheer energy until such time as there might be a breaking in (Durchbruch) of the spheres of spirit and personality.¹⁰⁷ Troeltsch envisages unknown stages and spheres of reality where the soul will completely overcome

104 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.39.

105 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.38.

106 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.299.

107 Cf. "Eschatologie IV" (A1908/5a) col.628.

nature, finally returning to the divine life. This vision allows the human to understand the incompleteness of the present experience of redemption.¹⁰⁸

8.6 The last things.

Science could never gain clarity about the ultimate purpose of life since "the nature of science is the relativisation of all things".¹⁰⁹ It was only in the sphere of religion that there could be a discussion of eschatology.¹¹⁰ The "last thing" of science could only be a unifying principle. There could therefore be no discussion of the value of something in itself: everything was relative to something else.

Psychology also recognised no ultimates; indeed even the "form of judgment" itself was seen as merely a product of some deeper psychological root.

Troeltsch recognised two coherent religious approaches to the problem of the "last things". Firstly, there was the eschatology of pantheism and Buddhism, which did not perceive the goal as that of raising up the individual to a new

108 Cf. "Erlösung II" (A1907/21a) col.487.

109 "Eschatologie IV" (A1908/5a) col.622.

110 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.36. Even religion could no longer say much in this sphere: "the eschatological bureau is mostly closed nowadays. It is closed because the thought in which it is grounded has lost its roots". Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.194.

ethical status, but rather saw the goal of life as the attainment of a unity, harmony, and peace above the naturally given chaos. Secondly, there was the distinctive Judaeo-Christian eschatology with its perception of the absolute as the goal to be striven for through the continual ethicisation of the world.

In the first case there is a very real notion of redemption: from that which is divided and relative to the "whole", from the changing flux which is the natural world to the unchanging unity of the eternal world. The second involves the redemption from confinement or restriction (Gebundenheit) in nature to spiritual freedom. The Christian claim asserted the reality of the individual as something standing apart from all relations.¹¹¹ There had to be the possibility for something to be extracted from its causal nexus, for something new; yet such a claim moved beyond the canons of science which saw things only in terms of connections:

The "new" just cannot be conceived as something scientific. In what sense can there be something, which used not to be? Those who represent the position of determinism (Notwendigkeit) say: it rests in its antecedents, in its earlier stages; even in the atoms. It is always pushed back further...Yet each of us is an Other (Anderes), something unique (Einziges), a new self!¹¹²

¹¹¹ In this context Troeltsch quotes Loisy: "All discussions, all worries about the inspiration of the bible, and that sort of thing, amount to practically nothing against the question: is there a genuine existence for the individual being (Einzelwesen), or is everything only the dead All-life (All-leben), where there is no individuality? That is the real problem!" (*Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.239).

¹¹² *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.182. See above, Chapter 2.3.

The Christian view of the personality which extracted a unified centre of being from the flux of reality, thus allowed for a concept of redemption which could begin in this world.

The decision between these two coherent views of redemption can only be made from the "practical, ethical and religious" standpoint.¹¹³ Pantheism leaves everything as it is: life can be seen only in terms of the all-embracing unity and there can be no possibility of a higher life except by escaping this individualised life altogether and returning to the whole. Troeltsch considers, however, that if relativism is really to be overcome, this can only occur through a religiosity which allows for the possibility of the absolute "creative, living will" to be united with the human.¹¹⁴ An impersonal view of God could never allow such a union.¹¹⁵

Troeltsch emphasises again and again that movement towards the completion of redemption is quite independent of sequential development. Indeed much that was happening appeared to contradict spiritual development.¹¹⁶ All could

113 "Eschatologie IV" (A1908/5b) col.627.

114 "Eschatologie IV" (A1908/5b) col.627.

115 Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.196: "The world either becomes the means for the realisation of these goods, or it becomes set against them as appearance and matter, or it is left to itself as a matter of indifference".

116 Thus Troeltsch asks: "In America there is such a virulent racial hatred between blacks and whites that each race has to have its own electric railway; how can we then speak of a unity of humankind?" (*Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.292).

change - what was seen as the culmination of cultural and ethical development might be nothing more than folly:

Every generation fights the battle between egoism and the love of God anew...The Kingdom of God on earth is not something which exists (Sein), but something which is in process (Werden).¹¹⁷

The faith in progress [against pessimism] was the courage to recognise the incompleteness of what is new, and to dare to create a better world (Weltgestalt). That is certainly correct, and in the main, I feel compelled to affirm this on the basis of my religious faith. But beyond this I cannot forget that also in these new future stages of humanity, malice (Bosheit), selfishness, shortsightedness and the pettiness of millions will create the same evil under which we suffer today and under which our ancestors suffered in the past. It must not be forgotten that between the goals (Lebenszielen) of spiritual humanity, and the natural conditions of the world, between the bodily constitution and natural drives, there is a contradiction which has continually to be overcome. There is a whole complex of frictions and constrictions which never allows the essential ethical goal to be fully realised...In the place of optimism enters not a reactionary pessimism, but a cool realism, which certainly recognises the goal, but finds that it can only ever be partially realised.¹¹⁸

The idea of spiritual development can only find expression in terms of religious language: the goals of humanity, the end of history cannot find a place in empirical history. "The goal of life can never find its place in earthly life".¹¹⁹ It is only in religion that history can be viewed as the battle of the ethical powers against the natural and the finite. The Christian affirmation is that in the

117 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.41.

118 "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.325f.

119 *ibid.* col.325.

struggle between good and evil, there is present a power which allows a breakthrough into eternity.¹²⁰ Such a power is realised as in each present the human attempts to overcome its situation and bring about a victory for the ethical personality. The culmination of development must thus stand beyond the world, since what is present in the world can only be seen as beginnings.¹²¹ In short the great magic word of the day, "development" (Entwicklung), is not to be confused with progress: it is impossible that our little corner of the world, despite all its great achievements, can be seen as the necessary culmination of development.

In one of his most speculative moments, Troeltsch conjectures about the actual end itself. This is expressed in terms of the measure of participation in the eternal divine life; the completion must be the final return of all things to the divine life. According to Troeltsch, this will be different from the end of the physical world which will presumably be marked by the waning of the energy of the sun until "finally the last person bakes the last potato on the last coal".¹²² The ends of humanity will be marked by a "flowing into one another" (Ineinanderfliessen) in love of the individual and the divine will:

The most complete salvation would be that final moment when the

120 Cf. "Die Selbständigkeit" (A1896/2) p.202.

121 Cf. *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.324f.

122 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.292.

finite nature (Wesen) died and it would be raised above itself and thereby annihilated.¹²³

The overcoming of natural finite life is,

at one and the same time, an overcoming of distinct existence and the completion of the union of wills, that is, the end is the return into the divine spirit.¹²⁴

Troeltsch considers that there must be a sense that when creation begins its return to God, that God himself is increased (*vermehrt*), as what is against him is decreased. Here Troeltsch emphasises the idea of Angelus Silesius: "Without me you are nothing"; so "God is fully God only through his being believed in and loved by finite spirits".¹²⁵ Thus the completion of creation is when it has fully returned to God; at the same time this marks the

123 "Eschatologie IV" (A1908/5a) col.630.

124 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) Sect.14.3c.

125 *Glaubenslehre* (F1925/2) p.238. Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.29: "What is God without the human? What is the human without God?" Cf. Gertrud von le Fort, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p.89. Cf. Bodenstein, op. cit., p.55: "The dialectic of the self-transformation of God into creature dissolves into the dialectic of the return transformation (*Rückverwandlung*) of the creature to God." Bodenstein sees this as "the clearest formulation of the gnostic-neoplatonic-idealistic Idea of origin, of transformation (*Verwandlung*) and of the return of the spirit to God". This bears an astonishing similarity to Origen (p.55 n.121). Bodenstein does not consider Troeltsch's concept of grace as stemming from "biblical-Reformation piety" but from "idealistic metaphysics". His greatest failure was his lack of appreciation for Luther (p.59). Bodenstein sees the Christian body of thought as a *completed* revelation, accepted in the value-judgement (*Wertentscheidung*) which merely requires re-interpreting for the modern world. Troeltsch, however, considers this act of re-interpreting as itself re-shaping the body of thought (p.60).

completion of God. Such thoughts are closely bound up with Christianity as the religion of redemption, but at the same time they borrow heavily from pantheistic piety:

At this point the truths of the religious speculations of theism and pantheism stand together.¹²⁶

However, there remains one fundamental difference between Christianity and pantheism: the means by which the union with God is accomplished. Christianity retains the notion of spiritual development and of an interaction between the two spheres of spirit and nature. It is thus not world-denying in the sense that the world is viewed as wholly other than the divine. Whatever its point of contact with pantheism, Christianity continues to affirm theism and the possibility of spiritual development; pantheism is of interest only at the end of creation.¹²⁷ The individual develops in the world not by overcoming it but by ethicising it. The completion of this process must remain in some unknowable sphere, but there are genuine beginnings in history. In short, the eternal and absolute can make itself known in time, and does not require a complete destruction of the temporal world, as it must in pantheism.¹²⁸ The completion of the re-unification of everything with God is not something "merely spiritual", but is vitally involved with the

¹²⁶ *Glaubenslehre* Sect.14.3c.

¹²⁷ Cf. *ibid.* p.239.

¹²⁸ Cf. *ibid.* p.150.

historical world, as God's justice is established everywhere.¹²⁹ The "divine world is not only spirit".¹³⁰ The choice is thus between either the optimistic with the recognition of the possibility of spiritual values in history, admittedly only as beginnings, but with the hope of the goal of a completion in some place and at some stage quite unknown to us,¹³¹ or the pessimism of pantheism and Buddhism, where there can be no notion of human creativity.

Christianity displays the hope of an "ascent in freedom from the finite self, with all its arrogance, to the final unification with the divine will". According to Troeltsch, it was Dante, in the *Divine Comedy*, who created "the greatest eschatological text-book up until today".¹³² Today's eschatological myths must evidently take account of the modern perception of the vastness of the universe, and can no

129 Cf. *ibid* p.194.

130 *ibid.* p.206.

131 Cf. *ibid.* Sect. 14.3c. Cf. MS *allg. Ethik*, p.32: "The overcoming of the body goes as far as life in the purity of the Ideas. This is no mere philosophical dream, but has been experienced by hundreds".

132 "Eschatologie IV" (A1908/5a) col.632. Cf. *Der Berg der Läuterung* (A1921/11) p.7: "The heavenly wandering is not a preconceived decision about things after death, but a symbol of battles and purgings (Läuterungen), of hindrances and goals of life in *this* world". Dante, along with Cervantes, Shakespeare and Goethe, was the "spiritual leader and symbol for the modern world" (*ibid.* p.4). Cf. p.17: Dante's "return" (Rückkehr) was a symbol of life against all rationalisation of the world. Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.43f. Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.235f., ET p.245. Cf. Bodenstein, *op. cit.*, p.55. See below, Chapter 3.15.

longer rest solely with the biblical or church tradition.¹³³ They must explain things in the most refined manner, even in a manner as refined as Kant's or Hegel's, but they will always remain myths, the power of which rests in the possibilities they open up for the mastery of the ethical life.

Religion provides the power for the adoption of absolute ends, for the adoption of the highest good by the human will in conformity with the divine will. Such a union does not take place merely in some mystic realm, but has its beginnings in the historical world. Consequently the progress to a full union with the divine will involves the ethicisation of the world. It is thus on the basis of the Christian experience of redemption that Troeltsch develops his system of Christian Ethics, which marks the culmination of his philosophy and theology.

133 According to Gertrud von le Fort (MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.22): "Troeltsch's personal *Credo* accepts a step by step purification (Läuterung), a *charakterologische* eschatology of the finite destruction (Untergang) into God."

Chapter Nine: Troeltsch's conception of Christian ethics.¹9.1 The highest good.²

Troeltsch saw Christian ethics as divided into three distinctive areas:³ first, that of obligation (Sollen, Sittengesetz);⁴ second, that of evil (Widersittlichen, Böse);⁵ and third, ethical goals (sittliche Zwecke) or objective values (objektive Werte).⁶ Troeltsch saw that

1 On this subject, see esp. Benckert, *Ernst Troeltsch und das ethische Problem*, which contains a number of references to Troeltsch's lectures on ethics at Heidelberg. These are *Ethik*, of S-S, 1899, and *praktische christliche Ethik*, of W-S, 1907-8, and 1911-12. See also Pannenberg, "Die Begründung der Ethik bei Ernst Troeltsch" in *Ethik und Ekklesiologie* (ET "The Basis of Ethics in Ernst Troeltsch" in *Ethics*).

2 Cf. Pannenberg, op. cit., p.78; ET p.95, who sees this concept as the pivotal point of Troeltsch's ethics. Cf. Benckert, op. cit., p.33.

3 Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, sect.1, and MS *allg. Ethik*, sect.5. Cf. Benckert, op. cit., pp.24ff.

4 This is the "tendency towards the necessary (Notwendige) and the obligatory (seinsollende)" analogous to the logically necessary, and leads to a "practical validity" (MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.1). Cf. MS *chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.1. Ethics is not a matter of obeying laws for advantage or for feelings of happiness: "the command of truth is not dictated by advantage". It is a matter of tempering the drives of the individual by a move towards universality. Cf. MS *allg. Ethik*, p.5; Cf. p.8. If the human is elevated to the highest purpose this leads naturally to a Darwinism and a "racial ethic".

5 This rests upon the fact that the ethical consciousness is not "something complete, but something in the process of creation and in continual conflict" (MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.2).

6 Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) Sect. VII, pp.653ff.

ethics rested upon the acceptance of the highest good, which could only be in religion. The conceptuality of *Glaubenslehre* and Christian ethics was thus vitally related.

The third aspect of ethics, that of "objectively necessary cultural values (objektiven notwendigen Kulturgüter)",⁷ occupies a vital role in Troeltsch's system, since it is only here that the formal can gain contact with the material: "Culture is the ennobling of that which is merely given in nature with spirit":⁸

Only in the realisation of these values does the formal ethical law achieve concrete content and the ethical personality attain a distinctive sphere for activity. These objective values consist of the family, the state, the technical-ethical mastery of nature, science (Wissenschaft), art (Kunst) and religion.⁹

Troeltsch thus moves beyond Kant who had identified ethics purely with the "Good Will". For Troeltsch, the "Good Will" as the *form* of the ethical judgement could be of no use unless there was contact with culture as the sphere of ethical activity: "Not the universal (Allgemeingültige) but the example is what is decisive".¹⁰ What was also lacking in Kant was the possibility that the human will might be united with the divine will. The "Good Will" was only

7 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.1. Cf. Benckert, op. cit., Chapter IV.

8 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.1.

9 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.1. Cf. *ibid.* Vorlesung, p.2f.

10 MS *allg. Ethik*, p.14f. See above, Chapter 2.23.

possible given an absolute foundation. Ethics could not be located purely in the rational human intention (Gesinnung), but required rooting in the divine will:

The good will stems from communion with God; it alone is of value before God; it alone inherits the Kingdom of God: these are the most simple truths of Christian ethics.¹¹

Troeltsch looks at each of the cultural values in turn.¹² He is particularly repelled at the elevation of the concept of the state into the highest good, which is something he sees as deriving ultimately from the Athenian constitution and culminating in the concept of the *Vaterland*:¹³

The good citizen shouts "Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles" and thinks very little about it. The state must have power which becomes deified and with it the jackboots of the stormtroopers (Kürassierstiefel).¹⁴

11 Lecture of March 6th. 1900, cited in Benckert, op. cit., p.14. Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.564. For a comparison between Troeltsch and Kant, see esp. Benckert, op. cit., pp.55-61. Cf. Pannenberg, op. cit., p.74, ET p.91: "Troeltsch underestimates the difficulty of establishing a new basis of this sort [i.e. between the highest good and the goods of culture], because he thought it involved merely a 'supplementing' of the 'subjective' ethics of Kant by Schleiermacher's objective ethics of value". Troeltsch, however, is critical of Schleiermacher's ethics as lacking contact with the real world. Where Troeltsch moves beyond Kant is in filling the human good will with the divine will, and thereby making possible action in accord with absolute ends.

12 Cf. MS *chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.4f.

13 Cf. *Politische Ethik und Christentum* (A1904/6) pp.10ff.

14 MS *chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.5.

Out of these various forms of life, Troeltsch sees religion as *alone* capable of providing the unconditional conception of the higher life necessary for the ethical development of the personality:

The highest and unconditional goal can only be thought of as something religious; that is, as the devotion of the self and a community of humanity in the absolute or in God.¹⁵

The ultimate unconditional goal is only given in communion with the unconditional ground of all reality.¹⁶

The difference between the religious good and all others is that it proceeds from the unconditional and ultimate...Of all the attitudes towards life, this is the only one which proceeds from the absolute. Religion searches for an eternal value which alone can bestow unity upon all the others. Ethics without religion will never achieve an ordering of values because a central purpose (Zweck) is absent. The religious good is the only one which allows for a *harmonisation* of the other goods.¹⁷

The perception of the vital importance of religion for the survival of ethics was Nietzsche's most profound insight:

The problems of ethics are not the same as those of religion. What is important is merely whether religion can still be united (verknüpft) with it or not. Nietzsche's great service has been to show that with the collapse of the concept of God, ethics becomes quite different and with the total victory of atheism, *all* ethical demands, not merely those of Christianity, but also those of Buddhism and Spinoza and the like, collapse.¹⁸

15 Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.2.

16 "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.320.

17 MS ^{*pr.*}*chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.6. Cf. Benckert, op. cit., pp.33ff.

18 MS *allg. Ethik*, p.4. Cf. "Atheistische Ethik" (A1895/3a) p.530. Cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Chapter 9.

He showed the full consequences of the removal of God and super-empirical and super-individual order from the world and thereby also from ethics.¹⁹

For Troeltsch, Christianity *empowers* ethics by providing that highest good under which ethical action becomes meaningful. Thus it is

not a belief in supernatural obligatory (verpflichtende) customs or dogmas, but a devotion to God, to the inner ethical necessity...The Christian ethos is thus the single complete interpenetration (gegenseitige Durchdringen) between the religious and the ethical spirits. The religious is ethicised (versittlicht) to complete inwardness (Innerlichkeit) and pure duty (Pflichtmässigkeit); and the ethical (Sittliche) on the other hand is completely saturated (hineingezogen) with the religious purpose...This is the highest elevation and at the same time a reconciliation of the most universal fundamental contradiction (Grundgegensatz) of human life. The Christian ethos is the completion of the religious as well as the ethical idea...It is the principle which ever pushes forwards for the mastery of life, which brings forth new solutions in ever changing relationships.²⁰

According to Troeltsch, other religions, and other interpretations of the Christian ethos, lack this possibility for reconciliation between the highest purpose and cultural values. Only Christianity

anchors its values in God. It believes in the divinity (Göttlichkeit) of the world, of work, in divine purposes and goals (Ziele). It affirms the personality, and sees the denial of a world ruled by God as a product of the imagination.²¹

19 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.552.

20 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.3f. Cf. Vorlesung, p.10: "What is decisive in Christianity is the complete interpenetration of the ethical and religious consciousness." Troeltsch considers this best expressed in his form of protestantism which has moved beyond catholicism with its priestcraft and sacramentalism (ibid. p.12).

21 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.9.

Christianity, conceived as this blend of the religious and the ethical, should

on the one side, lead to a great deepening of religion, and on the other, to the demand to be active...It is this tension (*Spannung*) which differentiates Christianity from Buddhism...and also from rationalism.²²

This "endless disquiet" which results from the tension in the union of the ethical and religious is at the same time the "deepest fruit".²³ The central problem is the relationship between absolute unconditional values and those of culture:

The chief problem is thus...the working out and the reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) of the immanent and the transcendent value of the Christian ethos.²⁴

It is for this reason that Troeltsch regards the discipline of ethics and cultural philosophy as identical.²⁵ This problem remained virtually unchanged throughout Troeltsch's

22 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.9. Troeltsch differentiates this conception of ethics from those where "power and deed are absent" (*ibid.* p.11). He asks, "What else is there? The *Ueberschensch*? That usually leads to ethical hangover! Kant? Absolute duty out of the depths of our spirit which we obey. This is the first step towards heroism". Cf. esp. "Atheistische Ethik" (A1895/3a) for a discussion of the various competing forms of ethics. Cf. Pannenberg, *op. cit.*, p.91, ET p.107.

23 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.11.

24 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.3. Cf. p.4; Vorlesung, p.7. Cf. Review of Häring (A1904/2) col.151.

25 Cf. MS *allg. Ethik*, p.11. For Troeltsch this meant to work out the ethical content of capitalism: "The great problem is this...Does capitalism really lead the way to ethical values and do ethical values lead to capitalism?" ("Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.324).

career. In *Christian Thought*, he asks:

What are the concrete and substantial creations which the virtues of purity of character, of justice and of solidarity must serve?

26

The morality of conscience is something essentially outside of time and history and purely formal; cultural values, on the other hand, are entirely historical creations. Yet there has to be a connection between these two sides of ethics which is something carried out in the "stimulus and obligation to create a system of culture".²⁷ Cultural values are dependent on their cultural or natural context, yet provide the only available values in real life around which humans can orientate themselves. What has to be ensured is that these values are not arbitrary, but rather that they maintain a close contact with the formal moral values of the conscience. This is what is meant by compromise or synthesis.

The task of ethics thus closely parallels the task of *Glaubenslehre*. It is

no longer the historical reproduction of the leading basic ideas [of history], but, in the same way as these continually developed and changed in conflict and interaction with the changing situation (Lebensstoff), so this work also takes place in the present. It is the task of the present attitude towards the distinctive features of contemporary life, so that from the basic idea, new and living alterations might emerge. Just as this is valid for *Glaubenslehre* with its connection to the modern scientific picture of the world, so this is also true of ethics in its relations to the life-conditions of modern culture.²⁸

26 *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.78.

27 *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.83.

28 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.5. Cf. Benckert, op. cit., p.10: "The *praktische christliche Ethik* lectures expand upon Troeltsch's ethical writings just as his lectures on *Glaubenslehre* expand his

The Christian ethos was different in every different epoch; it is not like that of the Koran, imprisoned in the words of the prophet, but it is life. Our contemporary problems are not deeper or more profound, but are simply different. Where once only twelve million lived, now over sixty million want to live. All problems have to depart from the fact, not of progress, but of the increase of the masses which complicates all questions of existence and along with this, of the ethos.²⁹

Consequently Troeltsch sees the vital need for an immersion in the analysis of culture for the contemporary understanding of ethics:

Only an exact knowledge of the literature of sociology, the history of economics, micro- and macro-economics can provide the basis of the undertaking. Our humanistically and theologically educated clergy and intellectuals normally understand nothing of these things.³⁰

9.2 Individual and social ethics.

In the ethical sections of the *Glaubenslehre*, and the first two chapters of his lectures on Christian ethics, Troeltsch discussed the *form* of Christian ethics: the chief problem arises as to their content.³¹ Divine interpenetration

religionsphilosophische output."

29 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.16.

30 "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.323.

31 Cf. Benckert, *op. cit.*, p.26.

reveals itself in the love of God, which calls for a ^sre_hponse in human actions. The fight for survival in the natural world has to be brought into union with a higher law. "The normal ethical demands are not challenged, but rather are re-ordered under this highest command".³² From the individual sense of union with the highest purpose (the love of God - Gottesliebe) emerges the Christian ethical ideal of neighbourly love (Bruderliebe). Neighbourly love is not merely

the ideal of a social humanity, but at the same time the religious conception of the union of all humans, called to be children of God.³³

Modern philosophy had separated the religious from the ethical, and consequently introduced great unclarity into the conception of the highest good.³⁴ The Enlightenment had tended to identify the highest good either with the purely immanent values of happiness, or with Kantian formalism. On the other hand, Christian ethics was dominated by a resurgence of confessionalism or "an undefined eclecticism".³⁵ In short

the ethics of our world is completely fragⁿmetary. Next to one
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32 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.9.

33 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.9.

34 Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.561; p.565. See above, Chapter 4.32.

35 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.9.

another we have a remnant of catholic ethics [i.e. asceticism], development of protestant ethics, purely utilitarian ethics resting on universal philanthropy, world-affirming neo-humanism, purely subjective ethics which lack all content (Kant and Fichte), philistine doctrines of social hygiene (spiessbürgerliche Wohlfahrtslehren) and an extremely unclear theological ethics which is difficult to find.³⁶

Over and against this was Schleiermacher's *Ethik* which was a "real new start in the conception of the Christian ethical law":³⁷

Schleiermacher constructed his ethos in the two-fold direction of the individual self, and the community, and from here correctly understood Christian ethics in the same sense. The Christian ethos was thus conceived as the highest elevation of the individual Self in virtue of the experience of its fundamental divine nature (Grundgehaltes), and as a universal community of love in virtue of the communal rootedness (Gebundenheit) in God.³⁸

Schleiermacher's *Ethik* succeeded in a genuine renewal of the individual and the communal sides of Christian ethics.³⁹

However, according to Troeltsch, Schleiermacher's *Ethik* was highly intellectualised with little connection to the everyday world:

Schleiermacher's theological ethics has nothing to do any longer with the living problems of the present, just as little as the majority of theological ethics.⁴⁰

36 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.26.

37 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.566. Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.9. Cf. Vorlesung, p.26. Cf. Pannenberg, *op. cit.*, p.71, ET p.88.

38 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.10. Cf. Vorlesung, p.26.

39 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.26. Pannenberg views Troeltsch's interpretation of the "Highest Good" as purpose or goal (Zweck), as the chief difference between Troeltsch and Schleiermacher.

40 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.569. Cf. *Die Soziallallehren* (A1912/2) p.932 n.504, ET p.795 n.504, where Troeltsch criticises Schleiermacher's loss of the historical element in religion. Cf. n.504a for a criticism

It could thus never succeed

in answering the problems of the masses...It knew nothing of shabbiness (Billigkeit), deference (Achtung) and the like...It was only of use for people who shared his own standpoint.⁴¹

Alongside Schleiermacher's intellectualised ethics, there was always

coarse everyday ethics, which did not stand under the ultimate and highest viewpoint, but was rather a preliminary and a lower stage...Therefore the Christian law of ethics (Sittengesetz) has to be thought of along with its earlier stages and supplements (Ergänzungen).⁴²

This attempt at the interconnection between the values of culture and the highest good bears a marked similarity to Richard Rothe's attempts to create a *Verschmelzung* between modern humanity and the Christian faith in God. Although Troeltsch's speech to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Rothe's birth is critical of certain aspects of his system, he admires in particular those aspects which called for freedom from clerical domination and led to "unlimited tolerance".⁴³ He sums up Rothe's contribution to his own

of his loss of a *Volkskirche*. See below, Chapter 7.12.

41 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.26.

42 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.11. Cf. Benckert, *op. cit.*, p.21.

43 *Richard Rothe* (A1899/4), p.39f. Cf. Review of Kaftan, (A1912/8) p.727f.

understanding of Christian ethics:

[Rothe's] ethics, or the system of cultural values is the basis upon which the understanding of the essence of Christianity is founded, and the framework in which it can be portrayed, since religion is no longer revealed doctrine, but the final goal of life in the most inward personal religion.⁴⁴

In *Christian Thought*, Troeltsch makes the distinction between two spheres of morality, between the formal realm, the "morality of conscience", and the material realm, or the "ethics of cultural values". He does not see the problem as the actual diffusion or non-diffusion of this universal morality of conscience but rather "it is the question of its real practicability".⁴⁵ How the morality of conscience is to be realised in practice becomes the leading question.

Troeltsch sees the relationship between the individual's morality of conscience, and social ethics as best summarised in the concept of the Kingdom of God.⁴⁶ Only in the modern world had this concept been re-invigorated as a reflection of a reconciliation between the material and the formal aspects of ethics:

Kant with his idea of the ethical Kingdom of God; Schleiermacher with his teleological conception of Christianity; Hegel with his idea of the God-filled rational state; Richard Rothe with his even stronger affirmation of the religious character of the rational kingdom (Vernunftreiches); Ritschl with his emphasis on the active Kingdom of God and the dominion of the world effective within it:

44 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a), pp.568ff. Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.935 n.504a, ET p.797 n.504a.

45 *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.62.

46 Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) pp.630ff; MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.16. Pannenberg emphasises the future dimension of the concept of the Kingdom of God as again differentiating Troeltsch from Schleiermacher (op. cit., p.99f., ET p.84).

all these were moving in the same direction.⁴⁷

Although the religious purpose had often been underemphasised, all these thinkers showed the vital interconnection between the highest goal and the purposes of this world:

The decisive fact is that ethics is unfolded everywhere only in historically conditioned values.⁴⁸

In contrast to more traditional conceptions of the Kingdom of God which separated it from contact with the world, Troeltsch affirms the possibility for contact with the world:

The Kingdom of God is certainly a thing of the future; but it is at the same time something present in every act of love...It is the ethos of eternity, but present in every moment.⁴⁹

Thus Troeltsch can assert that the principle of asceticism, at least as this implied the denial of worldly pleasure, was "just not Christian, but an import from the pessimistic religions".⁵⁰

The problem of Christian ethics is thus the combination of the *vita activa* with the *vita contemplativa*.⁵¹ Community is

47 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.17. Cf. Vorlesung, p.45.

48 *Ethik*, 1899, Sect.12, cited in Benckert, *op. cit.*, p.30.

49 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.43. See above, Chapter 4.32.

50 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.18. Cf. Vorlesung, p.46.

51 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.43.

essential for the fulfilment of ethical ends; Troeltsch suggests that what is at fault with the *vita contemplativa*, and "which all mystics are inclined to make" is its lack of contact with the *vita activa*.⁵² A contemplative mysticism can never achieve reconciliation with the world:

The act is the realisation of the community of love with God. Straightforward ethical obedience and thoroughgoing purification are the means. The way does not derive from contemplation, but alone through the act.⁵³

The Church is only loosely related to this community of love. It is concerned with the further propagation of the Christian ethos, with protecting the tradition, but is never to be equated with the realised Kingdom of God on earth:

[The Church] is merely the technical organisation which propagates religious life and its ethos; the stove on which the flame is nourished, and which ignites the soul.⁵⁴

Despite all its failings, some form of Church is "indispensable for the organisation of religion...We must be thankful to our heavenly father that the Church is not the Kingdom of God."⁵⁵

52 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.9.

53 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.45. Cf. *allg. Ethik*, p.14, Sect.6. Cf. V.A. Demant, *Christian Polity*, p.31: "The question of the supremacy of the spirit has no meaning unless it is tested on the rough and tumble world where spiritual and secular intermix".

54 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.47.

55 *ibid.* p.47f.

9.3 The ethics of compromise.⁵⁶

Alongside the highest goal or purpose affirmed in Christian ethics were those goals of culture which were purely innerworldly. The relations between the two were what constituted the most profound ethical problem confronting contemporary Christianity. Troeltsch asked:

Is Christianity a fundamentally radical denial of inner-worldly goods, or is the relationship of quite another sort?⁵⁷

Christianity was not a religion indifferent to everything in the world:

⁵⁶ Schrey (in "Ernst Troeltsch und sein Werk", p.147f.) focuses on the idea of the compromise. Reist's notion of the "theology of involvement" (Eingehen) developed in *Towards a theology of involvement* (esp. p.15) has been particularly influential in the English-speaking world. The "involvement" was between a static body of knowledge in the form of protestant dogma and the modern world, and thus the compromise was between the old protestantism and the modern world. According to Reist, Troeltsch found such a fusion impossible, which led him to the idea that Troeltsch's theology had collapsed. However, in the act of compromise the very nature of protestantism is changed, since truth is in the *process* of being revealed rather than having been completely revealed in the past. Becker (op. cit., p.3) also argues that Troeltsch was concerned with revitalising the Christian tradition: his fundamental question was "whether and how Christianity can maintain its identity under the radically altered conditions of modernity". Troeltsch was concerned far more with the future than with the attempt to maintain a complete identity with the past. Pannenberg (op. cit., p.87, ET p.102) emphasises this future aspect as central for Troeltsch's conception of ethics. On the concept of compromise, see also, Clayton, *The Concept of Correlation*, pp.50ff., and K.T. Henderson "Ethics and the control of history" (pp.132-137) where the idea of "compromise with responsibility" (p.133) is stressed. Cf. Benckert, op. cit., p.59.

⁵⁷ MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.49.

It is neither pessimistic nor dualistic, ascetic world-denial nor merely contemplative mysticism...but rather it is a world-affirming religion, and despite all inclinations towards asceticism resulting from the doctrine of original sin, it is in principle anti-ascetic.⁵⁸

The relation of the highest good with the world is thus not fundamentally ascetic, but "is deeper than this".⁵⁹ In any system of Christian ethics there had to be a continual antagonism between the approach to life determined by the innerworldly values of culture and the higher values of Christianity.⁶⁰ Every era had to attempt a reconciliation between the two, yet, because the

innerworldly values have their own distinctive developmental logic, any synthesis had to be a mere approximation.⁶¹

Therefore there is never a universal dominion of Christian ethics on earth, but always a continual antagonism between self-love and the love of God, which develops with every individual anew and is only overcome in the process of purification.⁶²

58 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.19.

59 *ibid.*

60 Cf. *ibid.* p.22.

61 *ibid.* p.23.

62 *pr. chr. Ethik*, (1907/8) cited in Benckert, *op. cit.*, p.102. Cf. p.103: "There can only be a Christian society in an approximate sense". Cf. pp.89ff. Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.656. In this, Pannenberg sees Troeltsch as adopting Weiss's eschatological view of Jesus into Christian ethics: "In as much as Troeltsch's theological metaphysics made the contact between the absolute and the future of history and all historical, relative representations of it, he was able to give clear expression to the eschatological meaning of Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God" (*op. cit.*, p.90, ET p.105). Cf. p.91, ET p.106: "This thesis of Troeltsch's...may be regarded as one of his most significant contributions to theology".

For Troeltsch, a world in which there was a full knowledge of the absolute would be the end-time - the eschatological hope would have been fulfilled. The absolute could thus only be in a process of realisation.⁶³ Indeed, even in those eras of ecclesiastical domination there was always a necessary element of compromise between the ideal and its embodiment in the world.

The concept of compromise (Kompromiss) first appears in the substantial essay, "Die christliche Weltanschauung und ihre wissenschaftlichen Gegenströmungen",⁶⁴ and characterises Troeltsch's work from the outset of his career.⁶⁵ In this essay he sees the modern world as characterised chiefly by a relativity which recognised only inner-worldly ends. This was particularly true of the

63 Pannenberg sees this as both Troeltsch's greatest success and greatest failure. What was lacking was a Christology which allowed a complete union between the absolute and history. "It is here that we see the one-sided nature of his interpretation of the Kingdom of God as the absolute future which as such is in contrast to the world of history. In Troeltsch's writings the confrontation between this world and the future world of the absolute in the eschatological message of early Christianity is forcefully expressed, but that is not true in the same way of the presence of this future in the coming of Jesus and in his person...The category of goal unites present and future only in keeping them separate from each other. When the future that has been our goal becomes present, it ceases to be a goal" (op. cit., p.94, ET p.109). See above, Chapter 5.22.

64 (A1894/1).

65 Cf. Benckert, op. cit., p.16: "Troeltsch's basic conception of the two sides of the ethics of the personality, and the ethics of cultural values, appeared as early as 1893-4".

world-view of "aesthetic monism". It was in a discussion of this world-view that the concept of compromise was introduced:

Without a recourse to an absolute goal, the ethical task presented here is directed to various inner-worldly purposes...these purposes are relative and manifold.⁶⁶

Christianity is concerned with something beyond this: that is, with the "eternal and the infinite":⁶⁷

In religious terms, [this is] the connection to a holy God, the source and sense (Sinn) of the spiritual-personal life containing the highest norms in itself.⁶⁸

The "compromise" is formed by uniting these two spheres of reality.⁶⁹

This attempt to realise the absolute embodied in Christianity thrusts the individual back to the world with "joyful energy"⁷⁰. Although some individuals might experiment in communities living under the absolute law of love which lies at the heart of the Christian message, and as a consequence cut themselves off from the world, thereby

66 "Die christliche Weltanschauung und ihre Gegenströmungen" (A1894/1a) p.284.

67 ibid.

68 ibid. p.285.

69 ibid. p.286.

70 ibid. p.289.

becoming the "salt of the earth", Troeltsch held that the whole world could not become this salt. Indeed, "one would not wish this, and one cannot demand this".⁷¹ Troeltsch sees the vocation of the majority to form ever new compromises with the natural world with its desires and drives in the gradual realisation of absolute values.

The concept of the compromise is developed in the essay "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" published in 1895 and 1896.⁷² Here the notion of "compromise" develops out of a discussion of the relationships between the religion of the educated classes (Bildungsreligion) and the religion of the masses (Volksreligion).⁷³ Troeltsch sees his task as the attempt to form a compromise between these two tendencies. The religion of the educated is marked by its wholehearted adoption of the universal canons of rationality as embodied in the scientific method, and it "purifies" the religion of the masses, but what is essential, is that in such a process of purification, scientific knowledge should not be allowed to rob religion of its distinctive powers or forces (Triebe).⁷⁴ The scientific method could never fully explain

71 *ibid.* p.291. Cf. *MS pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.52.

72 "Die Selbständigkeit der Religion" (A1895/2 and A1896/1 & 2).

73 (A1896/1) p.107. On this point, see above, Chapter 7.12.

74 *ibid.*

religion as a practice. A science which robs religion of its powers destroys religion itself. According to Troeltsch, religion is a great "mixture" (Mischung).⁷⁵

Troeltsch sees the relationships between the various cultural forms (i.e. family, state, science and art) and the highest good, as characterised by a "tension (Spannung)":⁷⁶

In the place of the human ideal of totality (Totalitätsideal) is the recognition of tensions and contradictions (Gegensätze) with the prospect of the transcendent. This is the way of Plato and the Stoics, and of Christianity. Here is pursued the enormous undertaking of drawing the innerworldly into the superworldly (Ueberweltliche) - There is an attempt at reconciliation (Vermittlung) between the two ideals. Added to this we should say that we can never fully return to the ancient ideal. The innerworldly-superworldly unity in tension (Spannungseinheit) of the Middle Ages is just as distant. Actually we are still on Goethe's level, and his attempt at reconciliation. We can create no new ideals; an abandonment of them altogether would be deadly; a pietistic attitude only comes into question for a few. So we must attempt some kind of balancing act (Ausgleich).⁷⁷

This tension stemmed ultimately from human nature:

This conflict belongs to the nature of the human spirit, and derives from the fact that the human stands between the sensible (sinnlichen) and the supersensible (übersinnlichen) worlds. [This fact] conditions the polarisation of human ethics which hovers between two poles which leads to its riches and agility

75 *ibid.* p.190.

76 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.637, p.658. Cf. *Augustin* (A1915/6a) p.157. Cf. Benckert (op. cit., p.103; Cf. pp.67ff.) saw this as grounded in the duality of human nature as spirit and nature. Cf. Kasch who sees (in *Die Sozialphilosophie von Ernst Troeltsch*) Troeltsch's problem as fundamentally that of the "tension between religious purpose" and "worldly purposes" (p.28).

77 *MS allg. Ethik*, p.37.

(Beweglichkeit). It cannot be dissolved dialectically, but only in practice, in that real life, with all its particularities can never avoid either side, and as one grows up one inclines now to the one side and now to the other.⁷⁸

There is continual tension and contradiction (Gegensatz) here which derives from the dualism of the human position in the world. This is admittedly a necessary and fruitful contradiction.⁷⁹

For Troeltsch, there could never be an identity between culture and the highest good:⁸⁰

To make the values of culture into norms would be a heavy burden for the gospel.⁸¹

An identification would create a *societas leonina* where the values of a particular culture would forever dominate.⁸²

Troeltsch thus avoids the excesses of world indifference and the deification of the contemporary world.⁸³

78 *Ethik*, (1899), Sect. 19, cited in Benckert, op. cit., p.104. Cf. Becker, op. cit., p.130: "Beyond every question of theoretical justification and explanation stands the immediate acceptance of reality as the measure of all theory".

79 Review of Wendland (A1917/12) col.297

80 Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.48.

81 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.50.

82 "Die Kirche im Leben der Gegenwart" (A1911/8a) p.100.

83 Cf. H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York, 1951, esp. p.181f.) where a typology of the different possible attitudes of the Christian to culture is given. One important point, noted by Rupp, (op. cit., p.57 n.3) is that Troeltsch is not included amongst those identified with the "Christ of culture". According to Ogletree, however (in *Christian Faith and History: A Critical Comparison of Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Barth*, pp.54ff.), Troeltsch used the past to enrich the present by maintaining a "unity". "This means that his concern for cultural synthesis pushes him toward the role of being something of an apologist for the established order" (p.55). Cf. Clayton, op. cit., p.60: "Troeltsch was above all a proponent of what we ordinarily call culture-protestantism". However, for Troeltsch, the Gospel was not and could never be German; rather he

9.4 The analogy with politics.

Troeltsch recognised a serious problem with the concept of "compromise" at the end of the lecture on "Politics, Patriotism and Religion":

Many of us in Germany regard "compromise" as the lowest and most despicable means to which a thinker can resort. We are asked to recognise a radical disjunction here, and to choose either *for* or *against*.....But twist and turn the matter as you will, the fact remains that all intransigence breaks down in practice, and can only end in disaster.⁸⁴

Troeltsch suggested that in England the word was not as negative as in Germany, since "the principle of compromise is less undervalued" because of "political experience and the influence of empirical systems".⁸⁵ Consequently he thought that his pleas for the principle of compromise may have been more effective in England than in Germany.⁸⁶

was a theologian for the present, which meant in his case, fulfilling a specific task in Germany at a particular time with a particular set of cultural and ethical resources. When it came to the declaration of war, Troeltsch could not bring himself to sign the notorious document of assent to Germany's war aims along with many of his colleagues. For a detailed history of the relationship between theology, society and politics see esp. Ward, *Theology, Sociology and Politics: the German Protestant Social Conscience, 1890-1933*.

84 *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.164. Cf. Clayton, op. cit., p.55: "Troeltsch's election to favour that metaphor was not an altogether happy choice, for its primary associations have to do largely with the mutual concessions of *Realpolitik*."

85 *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.166. Cf. Pannenberg, op. cit., p.94, ET p.109: "Troeltsch used the term 'compromise' in a wider sense for every encounter of Christianity with worldly culture".

86 The background to Troeltsch's lectures published posthumously in

The need to compromise was *forced* upon the human:⁸⁷

It is enough that we recognise the task of combining the two worlds in our own way...This is deeply founded in the constitution of the human. It derives from the double position of the human - the problem of standing between the finite-sensible and the eternal-supersensible.⁸⁸

The Christian maintains a progress^r_h towards the final realisation of these goals, a continual renewal of the relationship between immanence and transcendence, until finally the transcendent might be fully realised in the immanent.⁸⁹ The synthesis is the art of balancing out these two poles which leads ultimately to the complete unification of life in the godhead.⁹⁰ This is essentially a

Christian Thought reflect both this English virtue of compromise as well as well as the vice of patriotic pride. On this point, see Hans Rollmann, "Ernst Troeltsch, Friedrich von Hügel and the S.C.M.", in *Downside Review*, 1983, pp.216-226, and "Die Beziehung Ernst Troeltschs zu England und Schottland", in T.S. III, pp.319-331.

87 Cf. Clayton, op. cit., p.55: "More often than not...he employed the term in a double sided way. Compromise is necessary, but in each particular compromise something is lost as well as gained. Needless to say, Troeltsch himself thought that the gains outweighed the losses".

88 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.664f.

89 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.671.

90 "Historiography" (A1913/35) p.722.

restatement of the doctrine of the interpenetration of the human creative will in the objective determining ground of this creativity:

In all this there will always be a duality (Doppelheit) of motive, but this duality will never be theoretically and practically overcome on earth. As it has a metaphysical cause, so it can only ever have a metaphysical solution; and the ultimate solution rests in the concept of a life after death.⁹¹

There is, however, another term which Troeltsch uses which helps explain what he meant by "compromise". This is the idea of "attempting to form a coalition (Koalitionsversuch)". In the essay "Das Historische in Kants Religionsphilosophie", Troeltsch recognised that, in order for the rational *a priori* to influence historical reality, there had to be certain concessions from both sides: the object was to create a rationalisation of the concrete institution without robbing that institution of its power.⁹²

Theology and philosophy should be concerned with *praxis*, with the realisation of the ideal or the rational in the world.⁹³ Indeed, without a connection with the world, the

91 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.666. Cf. p.670.

92 "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.60. See above, Chapter 2.22.

93 Troeltsch was actively engaged throughout his life in important practical and political offices. His political involvement especially in the *Kultusministerium* after the war tends to counter Sykes' conclusion ("Ernst Troeltsch and Christianity's Essence", p.171): "Had he been less immersed in the elitist mentality of his immediate circle, he might have responded in a more practical manner to the very naivité of which he theoretically approved". For Troeltsch's involvement in politics see esp. Rubanowice, *Crisis in Consciousness*, Chapter Five, and Ringer *The Decline of the German Mandarins*, and T.S.III.

ideal of humanity would be isolated.⁹⁴ In order for the formal to find expression it would have to "form a coalition"⁹⁵ with the empirical world. A coalition, it is true, may well be an undesirable form of government but if it is the only possible form then such a state of affairs is unavoidable.⁹⁶ By analogy, a religious compromise might be

94 Cf. "Das Historische" (A1904/4a) p.76.

95 *ibid* p.60.

96 It is interesting to note that these ideas of a necessary compromise found concrete political expression after the First World War, as the formative principle behind the liberal *Deutsche Demokratische Partei*, in which Troeltsch was a leading figure. A poster for the Troeltsch-Cavel list in the Prussian parliamentary (*Landtag*) election in 1919 (now on display in the Museum of West Berlin) talks about avoiding the excesses of both extremes of dictatorship, first that of the class domination of the proletariat and second, rule by *Junker* militarism. The middle path was a "step-back from the right and from the excessive demands of the left". Although Troeltsch did not regard political philosophy as one of his competences (*Politische Ethik und Christentum* (A1904/6) p.3) this essay is nevertheless an extremely interesting account of the relationship between Christian and political ethics. Troeltsch regarded neither of the two coherent ethical systems of modern politics (democracy and conservatism) as implied by the nature of Christianity itself (*ibid.* p.22). Christian ethics is split between the absolute value of the personality (democracy) and the capitulation to the natural world order of God (conservatism). "Christianity is thus democratic and conservative at the same time. It is democratic in that it always demands a wider scope for ethicisation (*Versittlichung*), the independence and the spiritual content of the personality...It is conservative in that it recognises authority in its foundation in ethical superiority (*Ueberlegenheit*) and in political power relations...How the two are related depends on the current situation. The formation (*Gestaltung*) of this arrangement is a political-technical problem, whose solution cannot begin (as is true of all human affairs) without compromises" (*ibid.* p.37f.). For this reason it was perhaps best to vote for a party committed to the principle of compromising between extremes: "In the current situation it is probably the *duty* to vote liberal, even if one is not liberal" (*ibid.* p.43).

thought of as highly undesirable, but, if it is necessary then perhaps the quest for absolute knowledge should take second place in theology behind the task of forging new compromises so as to make life coherent and meaningful.

Rather than identifying Christianity with this world or with the next, Troeltsch sees Christian ethics as centred around the purification and refinement of this world. "The world should be reworked until it begins to resemble the holiness of God":⁹⁷

The Christian view of the world is this: an absolute divine value stands against the world, which does not understand that it was created by God and for God. In the place of negative acosmism, as in the Indian religions, there is present a contradiction which is the product of sin. It is obviously a contradiction between God and the world, but this world is to be connected with the highest purpose...Christianity fluctuates between these two poles of identification with culture and acosmism throughout its entire history.⁹⁸

The concluding words of *Die Soziallehren* similarly illustrate the necessary character of the compromise and its relations with the needs of the situation:

There is no absolute ethical transformation (Ethisierung) of material nature or of human nature; So current and future Christian ethics will be adapted (Anpassung) to the situation and will pursue only what is possible...This is the cause of that ceaseless tension which drives the human onwards yet it also gives the sense that ethical work will never be completed...The final ends of all humanity are hidden within [our heavenly Father's] hands.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.49. See above, Chapter 7.23.

⁹⁸ MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.49f.

⁹⁹ *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.986, ET p.1013 (amended). Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.698.

9.5 Compromises in history.

As Troeltsch became more and more involved in the study of *Religionsgeschichte*, so he became more aware that throughout history there had always been an element of compromise. He makes this clear in the essay "Grundprobleme der Ethik". Throughout the history of Christianity, the current values of the world came into contact with the highest good and resulted in some kind of mediation (Vermittelung) or synthesis between the two.¹ In *Die Soziallehren*, the concept of "compromise" was elevated by Troeltsch into a leading methodological principle. The history of the Christian ethos is the history of the confrontation between the ideal often embodied in the most naive forces of religion, and the "intellectual culture of the day; apart from this fusion faith would be broken by the impact of the cultural environment (Reflexionskultur)".² Troeltsch assesses the different epochs of Christianity in terms of their compromises between the absolute ethical demands of the gospel and the demands placed upon the Christian by the natural world. He expresses the different attitudes to the world in the well-known typologies of Church, Sect and mysticism.

As the original eschatological expectation of the early

1 Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) esp. pp.554ff. However, Troeltsch does not consider that there have been many great ethical theorists in Christian history. In *Augustin* (A1915/6a) p.173, he mentions only six great solutions: St. Augustine, St. Thomas, Luther-Calivin, Schleiermacher-Kant, Kierkegaard and Meister Eckhardt.

2 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.27, ET p.45.

Church declined,³ so the Church was forced into a relationship with the values of culture: "The tension [between the highest value and those of culture] first arose out of eschatological expectation".⁴ In early Catholicism these two strands were characterised by, on the one hand, the ideal of the common life with its world-denying asceticism, and, on the other hand, the view which saw the whole of the world as a divine creation, as part of the natural law, which could serve the religious ideal:⁵

Indeed, the fiction of a Christian Natural Law, which makes it possible to regard state and society as though both were ordered by one Christian Law, will be the means through which it will become possible to speak of a Christian unity of civilisation at all, and it is this alone which makes it possible to believe in such. The Christian Law also provides the daughter Churches of Western Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism, with the means for regarding themselves as a Christian unity of civilisation (Einheitskultur).⁶

Troeltsch saw the pinnacle of the old church as embodied in Augustine.⁷ He produced the first great culture-ethic of

3 Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.34ff., ET p.51ff.

4 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.50.

5 Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) pp.152-157, esp. p.155, ET pp.145-150, esp. p.149. Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) pp.554ff.

6 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.173, ET p.160.

7 Troeltsch devoted a work specifically to St. Augustine to compensate for his failure to deal with him adequately in *Die Soziallehren*. Cf. *Augustin, die christliche Antike und das Mittelalter. Im Anschluss an die Schrift >De Civitate Dei<* (A1915/6a).

Christianity.⁸ Troeltsch summarises Augustine's compromise in the pamphlet on the social philosophy of Christianity,⁹ published shortly after *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*:

Just as theology found a connection between the natural wisdom of the world and the Christ-God with the path of the *logos*, so too social ethics and practical demeanour in the world (*Weltverständigung*) found it in natural law and a natural law of ethics. It is a compromise. There is always the expectation of the *Civitas Dei*, of the heavenly Jerusalem, and the world remains a kingdom of sin and darkness. Yet within this world, Reason, which is seen as both natural and at the same time as stemming from God is present as a remnant of the heavenly paradise.¹⁰

Augustine's ethics reflects

the tensions between irrationalism and the transcendence of the Christian Spirit in metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics, and the rationalistic-universalistic, immanent spirit of stoicism and neo-Platonism which unfolds itself in stages.¹¹

Augustine's compromise remained the "point of orientation for modern ethics" since

the actual soul (*Seele*) of Augustinianism was in his ethics of the highest good, and thus he laid the foundations for all formulations of religious ethics, even for the present.¹²

8 *ibid.* pp.47ff., p.77.

9 *Die Sozialphilosophie des Christentums* (A1922/27). Cf. *Augustin* (A1915/6a) p.81.

10 *Die Sozialphilosophie* (A1922/27) p.9.

11 *Augustin* (A1915/6a) p.157.

12 *Augustin* (A1915/6a) p.173.

In medieval catholicism the compromise between the two spheres was almost complete since there was a virtual conflation between the natural and supernatural.¹³ Augustine's dualism was distant.¹⁴ Nevertheless, despite this all-embracing unity between the two, there were always strands which endeavoured to represent the ideal in its purity:

To those who could not accept this compromise, monasticism offered a safety-valve (Ventil).¹⁵

The ideal of pure monasticism stood in marked contrast to the values of the everyday world, which derived in part from the natural law concept of Aristotle.¹⁶ Monasticism attempted the pure ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, yet failed to achieve a relationship with the world.¹⁷

Later the protestant ethic demanded a similar kind of compromise:¹⁸

13 Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) Chapter II.

14 Cf. *Augustin* (A1915/6a) p.158.

15 *Die Soziallehren* p.179, ET p.201.

16 Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) pp.252ff., ET pp.257ff. Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.654; Cf. "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.321; Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.20, Vorlesung, p.51.

17 Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) pp.226ff., ET pp.237ff., esp. p.238, ET p.245. The various individualistic movements of the Middle Ages are seen as analogous to the protestant sects (Cf. pp.383ff., ET pp.349ff.).

18 Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) pp.556ff., p.654; Cf. "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.321. See above, Chapter 4.22 for Troeltsch's view of the relation of Luther to the modern world.

It is the compromise required by practical life, inevitable in the universality of Christian life, made possible by the transfer of holiness from the authority of the subject to the objective ecclesiastical possession of grace, between a purely religious ethic and the claims of life in the world.¹⁹

This compromise took the form of the doctrine of the calling (Beruf) which required a conscientious duty to one's vocation in the world, or the orthodox Lutheran doctrine of the separation of the domain of religion from the domain of the corrupt world, which nevertheless still required an interim ethic applicable in this world.²⁰ This was, in effect, a continuation of the *lex naturae* organisation of the middle ages. The outcome of this was far-reaching:

The hangman, whose profession (Beruf) would be quite superfluous for pure Christianity, has an obligation to his calling (Beruf).²¹

At the same time, there were still some groupings, the "sects", who attempted to retain loyalty to the absolute ethical demands of the Sermon on the Mount,²² and which in turn affected the main confessions.²³

19 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.506f., ET p.510f.

20 Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.512, ET p.515ff.

21 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.53.

22 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.794ff, ET pp.691ff.

23 *ibid.* p.827, ET p.714.

9.6 The compromise for the present: overcoming the impasse of the Enlightenment.

With the collapse of Aristotelianism there was no longer any widely shared conception of what a natural worldly ethics would include.²⁴ According to Troeltsch, the rise of individualism led to the collapse of any kind of overall unifying purpose guiding life in the world:²⁵ each separate sector seemed to be guided by its own purpose and goals, and religion, which had previously been that aspect of life under which everything else was ordered, had become a separate sphere like all the others. "The question is now, how far can a unified culture be established?"²⁶

The institutions which had previously ordered society, and which were seen as part of a natural law ordained by God became nothing more than expedient organisations for the future development of the race.²⁷ The whole idea of tension

24 Cf. "Grundprobleme der Ethik" (A1902/4a) pp.561-565, esp. p.564. Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.20f. Cf. A. MacIntyre (in *After Virtue*, Chapter 1) shares a similar view of the modern world as characterised by a collapse of a natural (Aristotelian) law. He sees ethics as requiring an objectivity which can only be provided by the acceptance of a higher good.

25 Cf. "Ethik und Kapitalismus" (A1905/6) col.322. See above, Chapter 1.3.

26 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.54.

27 Cf. "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.656. Cf. MS *allg. Ethik*, p.6ff.

between the highest good and the goods of culture disappeared as cultural organisations became ethically indifferent, as they set themselves up in competition to the highest good.²⁸ The search for a compromise is a search for something equivalent to a former epochal consensus (as, say, in the Middle Ages). The modern situation was fundamentally different. The old professions organised around the guilds, where the son merely continued the profession of the father, had collapsed as everybody was given an equal chance to follow any profession. The mechanisation of work meant that "where there had previously been professions ordained by God, there was now merely work in order to exist".²⁹

The modern world thus requires a new synthesis:³⁰

Just as the old Christian ethic was a compromise, a synthesis, so today every order of our ethical concepts and valuations (Schätzungen) is also seen under the dominant viewpoint (Gesichtspunkt) of the highest value of the personality united in God and the neighbourly love existing in God...The old problem confronts us again, and we have to create a new synthesis, the best that is possible; it is the synthesis that is valid for the present.³¹

In the contemporary world alternative goals could not be ignored: next to Christian goals there were the modern

28 Cf. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Diktat, p.21; Vorlesung, p.54.

29 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.54.

30 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.660.

31 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.663.

power-political goals of a Bismarck, or the goals of a mechanical domination of nature given with the rise of technology. Bringing about some form of compromise between these worldly was the task of an "inner new synthesis":³²

Today one knows or senses all too clearly how complicated problems of our common life and culture converge in these great questions [of the relationship to the world]. With the arrival of the modern giant states which pervade even the smallest details of life, and the exposure (Enthüllung) of the nature of the capitalist system of social order, the ideal has actually become different. The ideal of the Christian revolution has become internalised and more developed...A genuine Christian love and a sense of the worth of the personality seems to demand expression along the following lines: a fundamental break (Bruch) with the individualistic social-order which has developed over the last two centuries; the devotion, not merely of individuals, but of everyone to the whole (Ganze); the creation of a just and efficient (zweckmässig) means for an adequate natural existence as the basis for the development of spiritual values.³³

Troeltsch sees the three types of religious organisation developed in *Die Soziallehren* as integral to the task of establishing a new compromise for the present:³⁴

In the modern world Christian social teachings are in an infinitely difficult situation. On the one hand, Christianity is no longer ecclesiastically undivided, and yet seeks the free spirituality and adaptability (Anpassungsfähigkeit) without the

32 "Grundprobleme" (A1902/4a) p.660.

33 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.843f, ET p.726 (Amended).

34 Cf. "Die Kirche im Leben der Gegenwart" (A1911/8a), esp. p.105f. The Church is seen as a "comprehensive union" which allows sects to have their say as expressions of the purity of the ideal, but which forms compromises with the "universal culture". Cf. *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.937f., ET p.798f.; p.972, ET p.997.

compelling guarantees of ecclesiasticism; while, on the other hand, in spite of its position towards subjective conviction and freedom, and ethical-living proof (*Bewährung*), the church cannot bear a radical lack of culture (*Kulturlosigkeit*), the confines of the conventicle and the social reform of the sects which is bound up with a literal understanding of the Gospel. It is neither Church nor sect, it has neither the concrete sanctity of the institution, nor the radical connection (*Anschluss*) with the Bible...but is a free union (*freie Vereinigung*) between like-minded people which is equally remote from both Church and sect.³⁵

The task of forming a new compromise for the present dominates the concluding sections of *Die Soziallehren*. The history of the Christian ethos is

on the one hand...the sanctification of the self for God by the practice of detachment from everything which disturbs inward communion with God, and by the exercise of everything which inwardly binds the soul with God's will, and on the other hand, the demand for neighbourly love, which overcomes in God all the tension and harshness of the struggle for existence...*This is an ideal which requires a new world if it is to be fully realised; it was this new world-order that Jesus proclaimed in His message of the Kingdom of God. But it is an ideal which cannot be realised within this world apart from compromise.* Therefore the history of the Christian ethos becomes the story of a constantly renewed search for this compromise, and of fresh opposition to this spirit of compromise (*Kompromissgesinnung*).³⁶

Hence, the demand for today is for a "new Christian ethic",³⁷ that is, for "a spiritual-ethical mastery of this present situation".³⁸

35 *Die Soziallehren* (A1912/2) p.424f., ET p.381.

36 *ibid.* p.973, ET p.999f. My emphasis.

37 *ibid.* p.975, ET p.1002.

38 *ibid.* p.977, p.1003.

9.7 From ethics to the material philosophy of history.

By the time of *Der Historismus*, Troeltsch goes as far as suggesting that a synthesis may well no longer be possible - modern society was perhaps too distant from the religious ideal to allow for any compromise.³⁹ However, whatever the threats of the modern world, a compromise was still needed. If the dangers of European self-aggrandisement and arrogance were to be overcome, this required an

ethical renewal and deepening, together with a sense for the good and the just, with a preparedness for sacrifice and solidarity under the life and world-view (Leben- und Weltanschauung) of the faithful.⁴⁰

The alternative solution was a "reckless self-deification", which paid no regard to human finitude and consequently absolutised the products of culture. This led to a

merciless drive for self-aggrandisement embodied as aggressive supremacy (Herrentum) or exploitation by employers (Unternehmerkühnheit) or nationalism.⁴¹

What was at risk in this situation were the Christian ideals of

39 Cf. *ibid.* p.984f., ET p.1011f.

40 *Die Sozialphilosophie des Christentums* (A1922/27) p.33.

41 *ibid.* p.33f.

self-limitation, respect, solidarity between races, and human rights, and the spirit of duty towards a super-human truth and justice.⁴²

Despite these threats, however, Troeltsch continued to maintain that "a new and perhaps unexpected synthesis was possible":⁴³

Out of a destroyed and unrestrained (haltlos) society (Gesellschaft), we aim to form a substantial community (Gemeinschaft).⁴⁴

It is the human situation which forces the compromise. The human being is bound by nature: even the mightiest and most impressive of human creations is transient and relative, a point hammered home in the catastrophe of the aftermath of the First World War. No absolute truth is ever fully realised in these creations, rather any cultural creation must of necessity be a compromise forced on the individual who attempts to realise the ideal and impose its form in the historical world.⁴⁵

The best possible solution must be a

compromise between naturalism and idealism, between the practical necessities of human life upon earth and the purposes and ideals of

42 *ibid.* p.34.

43 *ibid.*

44 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.761.

45 Cf. *Der Historismus* (A922/22) p.698.

the life of the spirit....The history of Christianity itself is the most instructive in this connection. It is, in the long run, a tremendous, continuous compromise between the utopian demands of the Kingdom of God and the permanent conditions of our actual human life.⁴⁶

This quotation comes from the end of Troeltsch's final work. Here, he is all too aware of the the tragedy of the modern world which recognised no utopia beyond the conditions of the natural life. Yet there was a moment of hope even at the end of his career: the ideal can perhaps find a place in the new situation. Human nature remains unchanged: there was still that profound and unalterable dualism of nature and spirit. The task was to achieve a balance and a synthesis between the two:

It is from out of this dual human life and out of its compromise that the highest heights of religious personality and religious-interdependence arise and grow.⁴⁷

Human life is

primarily a struggle between the life of nature and the life of the spirit that rises above nature and yet remains bound to nature.⁴⁸

For Troeltsch, no thinker can escape the compromise between the two worlds, and the task is to form a compromise without abandoning the ideal:

Indeed, it is only by keeping this ideal ever before our eyes that we can continue to hope for a better future in the midst of a cold

46 *Christian Thought: its history and applications* (E1923/7) p.164f.

47 *ibid.* p.165.

48 *ibid.*

and sinister world.⁴⁹

Far from ending in despair, Troeltsch's life ends with a moment of hope.⁵⁰

Troeltsch recognised that in practice there would always be a struggle between the ideal and natural instincts. It could not be realised apart from this struggle. The completed victory of the good is "something we cannot picture to ourselves".⁵¹ This completion is the religious hope: but beyond this hope is the demand to strike a "new compromise" since one cannot transcend the perplexities of historical, natural life in this historical life itself.⁵²

9.8 The cultural synthesis.⁵³

This task of compromise led ultimately back to

Geschichtsphilosophie, to the idea of a cultural synthesis:

We are still striving after a social and political reconstruction of the world of nations (*Völkerwelt*), together with a new concentration and deepening of its world of ideas. Both of these

49 *ibid.* p.167.

50 Cf. Gertrud von le Fort, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p.88: "Despite all the scepticism of his time, his deepest confession was that of a believer, even if this was strongly relativised in comparison with the orthodox".

51 *Christian Thought* (1923/7) p.62

52 Cf. *ibid.* p.67.

53 For accounts of the "cultural synthesis", see esp. Ogletree, *op. cit.*, pp.45-57, Bodenstein, *op. cit.*, pp.156-67, and more recently Graf and Rendtorff, *op. cit.*, p.323f and Welch, *op. cit.*, pp.297-301.

require a deep historical self-awareness...This requires research into history and *Geschichtsphilosophie*.⁵⁴

Troeltsch aimed to produce a synthesis based on the European tradition:

Our history and that of the people outside our distinctive sphere is not to be included on the same level and unified. For thousands of reasons we are directed and restricted to our own historical development. It is big enough to give us more than enough powers. In truth, we know only ourselves and understand only our own being, and therefore only our own development.⁵⁵

It was impossible to move beyond this context to the idea of a universal humanity:

For us there is only a world-history of Europeanism. The old idea of world-history must accept new and decisive forms.⁵⁶

One has to be clear that there are several possibilities for humanity, which perhaps are ultimately different expressions of a shared humanity; but this shared humanity only exists in many different ways (*grossen Geschichten*).⁵⁷

"Only in such forms is it possible to create a unified

54 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.725. Cf. *MS allg. Ethik*, p.36: "Ohne Tradition, keine Zukunft". Cf. MacIntyre, op. cit., p.58.

55 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.709. Cf. p.710: "Du bleibst am Ende, was du bist." Cf. Frei, op. cit., p.60: "To be sure, each action is that of the universal God, but for us its universality is grasped only in the intellectually opaque side of the Western civilisation of which we are part" (p.60). For developments of Troeltsch's idea of a European theology, see esp. Rendtorff "Europäismus als geschichtlicher Kontext der Theologie. Bemerkungen zur heutigen Kritik an >europäische Theologie< im Lichte von Ernst Troeltsch" in *Europäische Theologie*, ed. T. Rendtorff.

56 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.708.

57 p.710.

culture".⁵⁸ Thus even though "no goal common to all mankind can be indicated",

a task that cannot be avoided, however, is the welding together of these cultural values into a homogeneous whole for the present and future within a large given area of culture.⁵⁹

We only know this historical world...But for this life on earth there is continually the task to form the coming history from past history.⁶⁰

The great significance of the European tradition was that it alone recognised the vital importance of shaping the future:

Out of the [four great powers of the European past - Hebrew prophets, classical Greece, ancient Imperialism, and the Western Middle Ages] which are the props and continuing powers which support the modern world and which unseen mix and cross with our own; out of all these together and out of the inclusion of new powers, the spiritual powers of the future must be formed (herausgearbeitet). This is the picture of the construction which we were looking for. Only with such a picture in mind can one begin the cultural work of the present, as one unloads the superfluous and the obsolete, drawing things together to form a new unity and productive power (Zeugungskraft), perhaps sacrificing much that is dear and great, in order to bring together those elements which still flourish and create new space.⁶¹

58 *ibid.* p.708.

59 *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.93. Cf. "Naturrecht und Humanität in der Weltpolitik" (A1922/23) p.24f., ET p.219f. What must not be denied in all approaches to ethics is the "ideal itself, in its own essence, in its ethical significance, in its connection with the philosophy of history". A denial would lead to a loss of all genuine values resulting in something like Spenglerism or "barren economic materialism".

60 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.698.

61 p.767f.

This task is a "living deed and an historical achievement" which leads to the "courage to refashion".⁶² This creative act is sufficient to form a synthesis for the present:

The idea of personality, which in the form of freedom, determines everything in the morality of conscience, and in the form of object, everything in the ethic of values - this idea is, after all, a western belief, unknown in our sense, to the Far East, and pre-eminently and peculiarly the destiny of Europeans. But in view of the whole of our history we cannot but believe that it is for us the truth.⁶³

As became clear in the First World War, it was also obvious that the fate of European and American culture profoundly affected the future of the whole world:

The whole modern history of the world is now only possible in relation to Europeanism and its destiny.⁶⁴

According to Troeltsch, the solution to the problem of the relationship between culture and the highest good could only be in the idea of a progression (Stufenverhältnis), conceived of as reflecting, albeit only partially, the unity of God and the world:

The human being who enters the world preoccupied with physical concerns soon receives a powerful impression of the values of culture. Gradually he experiences that, although these are certainly ethical values, which help to raise him out of a purely natural existence, they are not the *ultimate purpose*. The family needs a final union with the highest good. Likewise, the state

62 *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.98. Cf. *MS allg. Ethik* p.28f. for the idea of ethics as a creative act (Schöpfungsakt).

63 *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.99. Cf. *MS allg. Ethik* p.36. Cf. "Die Trennung" (A1907/2) p.62.

64 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.713.

with its gruesome struggle for power and the dominion over nature do not carry the ultimate meaning (Sinn). We always arrive at this question: What do I do with my hard-earned (erworben) freedom? No art and no science can decipher this ultimate problem, but rather merely let us glimpse a higher harmony now and then. If humans gradually recognise all this, so their disappointments drive them on to the ultimate (Letzten), the highest (Höchsten). They are looking for the pure-eternal (Rein-Ewige), the stop in God and in him the ultimate deepest union with humans. Only then do they find the ultimate value of the personality, and the union of souls with one another. And now they order (beugt) the other goods under the highest good and retrospectively (rückwirkend) construct a system of ethical goods, where everything is placed under this highest point of view.⁶⁵

The individual is thus integrated into God and society.

According to Troeltsch, the contemporary task of synthesis was, on the one hand, the

clear picture of the contemporary order of life with its forward-driving powers, and, on the other hand, the concentration, simplification and the deepening of the spiritual-cultural content which western history has brought to us: to form a new unity (Geschlossenheit) from the melting-pot of *Historismus*. This double task unifies itself in the efforts of science, education (Bildung), philosophy, school and literature, to connect the two complexes in ways which correspond to the present and the future, to create a new sociological body for the ideological content, and to enliven (beseelen) the sociological body with a new and fresh spirituality, a new combination (Zusammenfassung), adaptation (Anpassung) and reconstruction (Umbildung) of the great historical powers. There is admittedly no way of proving how this can or should be done. It is rather the creative act (schöpferische Tat) and dare (Wagnis) of those who believe in the future, of those who refuse to allow themselves to be lulled to sleep or to be destroyed, but who maintain in each present at least the task of such a combination according to the measure of their strengths and capacities. This is the task of thoughtful and courageous persons, not of sceptics and mystics, nor of rationalistic fanatics, or historical omniscients. This cannot be the work of an individual alone. It is naturally the work of many, first in the quiet of the

65 MS *pr. chr. Ethik*, Vorlesung, p.54. Cf. MS *allg. Ethik*, p.12: the third task of ethics is the harmonisation of the goods of culture.

personality and then in a wider circle. The new life will emerge only out of such circles, and from different points will come to a common life. The most effective would be a great artistic symbol as once the *Divine Comedy* or *Faust* were...This task, which is either consciously or unconsciously present in every epoch, is especially pressing in our moment. The idea of the construction means overcoming history through history and leveling the foundations for the new creation. The goal of the philosophy of history, which is the contemporary cultural synthesis must be founded upon this basis.⁶⁶

In this way Troeltsch succeeded in damming the historical movement,⁶⁷ and in relocating the individual in society. It was only in the dare of faith that this integration was possible.

9.9 Conclusion: Polytheism and personality - "The vocation of the theologian".

Max Weber had likewise recognised this urgent need for higher values to make contact with history, but his tragedy was that there was no place for higher values in his system: all values were logically on the same level. His "icy cold, pure theoretical" use of the Ideal Concept led to an "irreconcilable polytheism of values".⁶⁸ The only "higher" value Weber could achieve was the arbitrary imposition of the values of the nation state: "the one God is national power

66 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.771f.

67 *Christian Thought* (E1923/7) p.43.

68 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.161.

and greatness".⁶⁹ For Weber, there was no other solution to the impasse created by the collapse of absoluteness than the glorification of the nation state.⁷⁰

For Troeltsch, there was a fundamental difference in outlook between his view of what he saw the task as philosopher and theologian, and that of Weber's view of the vocation of the scientist. The difference stemmed from Troeltsch's fundamentally religious response to the relativism of the human condition: this was his quest for unity, for synthesis, his attempt to overcome the relativism of competing claims to truth, by placing them under the highest good.⁷¹

Sociology is conceived as of *explanatory* importance: it does not see its task as concerned with finding solutions to the problems which arise from the historical relativity of all values. According to Troeltsch, theology moves further than sociology in that it can provide the basis for overcoming this "polytheism of values" by providing a unity, a

69 *ibid.*

70 Cf. Mommsen, *The Age of Bureaucracy*, Chapter Two; Turner and Factor, *Max Weber and the dispute over Reason and Value*, pp.59-69.

71 Comparative studies of Weber and Troeltsch have recently been made by Graf ("Friendship between Experts", and "Max Weber und die protestantische Theologie seiner Zeit", pp.122-147). These studies emphasise the *mutual* influence of the two thinkers, particularly in their work on protestantism, as well as their common interest in "presenting a positive delineation of freedom". The two earlier comparative studies of Weber and Troeltsch were hostile to the latter. Cf. Schaaf, *Geschichte und Begriff*, and Bosse, *Marx-Weber-Troeltsch*. Bosse is particularly interested in pointing to Troeltsch as a culture-protestant.

set of higher values amidst the diversity and relativity of the modern world. Sociology is not concerned with *prescribing* courses of action, but can merely point out the consequences of such actions. To choose between a competing set of values requires something more than sociology, namely, a decision as to what constitutes the higher ends. For Troeltsch, this is the "dare" of faith.⁷²

Much of the first two chapters of *Der Historismus* is concerned with analyses of the relationship between historical conditionedness and individuality and the attempt to arrive at a balance between the relativism of an over-emphasis on individuality, and the mechanisation of life implied by the total conditionedness of all human structures:

[In history there are eras where] individualism and substantial community (*gemeinsame Substantialität*) are united afresh, and the human-universal (*Human-Allgemeine*) and the concrete-communal (*Konkret-Gemeinschaftlichen*) are forged together (*verschmelzt*).⁷³

Troeltsch's discussions mirror those which have occupied social scientists throughout this century. The tension is that between, on the one hand, those phenomenological programmes which take as their starting point the experience of the ego, but which find problematic the relationship between this ego and the inter-subjective world. Against such a view of social action, on the other hand, are positivism (e.g. Parsonian structural-functionalism) and materialism which see all reality as ensnared in the "web of

72 Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.157. Cf. p.715 where Troeltsch describes sociology as merely an underdeveloped supplementary science (*Hilfswissenschaft*) for *Geschichtsphilosophie*. Cf. *MS allg. Ethik*, p.27ff.

73 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.761f.; Cf. p.747, pp.160-164. Cf. Graf, "Friendship between Experts", pp.225-228, who emphasises the contrasting

causal connections".⁷⁴ These are those programmes which begin with the social whole, but which find problematic the concept of individuality and of social change. Both strands of sociological thought have their evident merits, yet neither completely exhausts the possibilities for explanation.⁷⁵ An exhaustive account of the individual in society must take account of both social structure and individuality.

Troeltsch's anthropology, which attempts a mediation between these two strands, views the individual as both structured or determined by history where uncontrollable structures limit the scope for action, and at the same time, able to structure and change these very structuring forces as it adds or subtracts from them in *action* in accord with meaningful ends.⁷⁶

roles of "individuality" and "integration", both of which need balancing.

74 "Historiography" (A1913/35) p.719. Cf. *MS allg. Ethik*, p.26.

75 Cf. *MS allg. Ethik*, p.27: "Both laws are active in one another (greifen ineinander)".

76 Anthony Giddens (in *New Rules of Sociological Method*) has recently called such a theory of the production and reproduction of social life "structuration". The individual is seen as both "structured" and "structuring" (able to form new structures) and thus stands in an interactive role with the environment - on the one hand changing it and on the other, being changed by it. Sociological explanation thus recognises both an active and a passive side to human nature. Neither the environment nor the human is fully determined by the other, but rather both stand in the process of structuring or determining the other. Cf. Dilthey, (in *Selected Writings*, p.136) who sees this as constituting the "enigma of life": "If, from our varied experiences we try to understand life as a whole, it appears to contain contradictory elements; creative, though controlled by natural laws; rational yet arbitrary, it continually reveals new aspects, so it is clear in detail, but enigmatic as a whole. The mind tries to unify life's relationships and experiences

According to Troeltsch, in every action there are elements beyond the control of the individual which condition the action, yet nevertheless there are also elements of the "new", a "peculiar irrational quality":

In the historical process, moreover there emerges the fact of the *new*, which is no mere transformation of existent forces, but an element of essentially fresh content.⁷⁷

Indeed, it is in the idea of "the new", the idea of contingency that "the historical and scientific modes of thought are discriminated with special clearness".⁷⁸

Without a recognition of this creativity,

the result is that something essential drops out of history, namely the individual and unique...What is individual and unique is, in a word, a new creation.⁷⁹

Pointing out the distinctively "new" is a theme which runs right through Troeltsch's work.⁸⁰ By adding the element of the new to the historical structures, the individual is identifying its

based on them, and fails".

77 "Historiography" (A1913/35) p.719.

78 *ibid.* Cf. "Contingency" (A1910/20a).

79 *The Absoluteness*, (A1901/23) ET p.88.

80 See above, Chapter 2.3, 6.24, and 8.6.

inner freedom, and independence from the merely conditioned, from surroundings, antecedents and influences.⁸¹

At the same time as adding the distinctively new, the individual also stands in connection with the historical situation. This bridge between the new and the conditioned is the "synthesis of natural conditions with value, meaning and freedom".⁸²

The bridge between the determined and the unconditioned is formed in the act of interpretation by the personality as it shapes past and present in terms of meaningful ends. In every act of interpretation there is a dynamic relationship between individuality and universality:

The universal is related to the individual and everything individual is related to the universal.⁸³

The "universal" which represents the value under which history is meaningfully judged is continually reformed and reproduced in the very act of judging history. For Troeltsch, history is the original phenomenon (Urphänomen) of sociology,⁸⁴ and the structures of society are analogous to those of history: they are shaped and reproduced as the

81 *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.39.

82 *ibid.* p.40.

83 *ibid.* p.44.

84 Cf. *ibid.* p.44n.

individual restructures them according to meaningful ends.⁸⁵

For the sociologist this anthropology aims to do nothing more than explain the fact that human beings are capable of structuring their future around certain meaningful ends. What sociology cannot do, if it is to remain "scientific", is to prescribe ultimate or absolute ends.⁸⁶

Troeltsch shares Weber's view that science is meaningless, in that it is not concerned with questions of ultimate meaning.⁸⁷ Science is concerned with the explanation of everything in terms of its own immanent goals: its concern is not with higher goods, but with explanation and knowledge. In Weber's graphic terms, it can never answer the question "Which of the warring gods should we serve?"⁸⁸ The acceptance of ultimate ends for both Weber and Troeltsch was based on a decision. For Weber, however, all values were

85 Cf. Giddens, *New Rules*, p.160: "Sociology is not concerned with a 'pre-given' universe of objects, but with one which is constituted or produced by the active doings of subjects....The realm of human agency is bounded. Men produce society but they do so as historically located actors, and not under conditions of their own choosings."

86 The classic view of the vocation of the intellectual (Wissenschaft) is given by Max Weber in the lecture "Science as a Vocation" (reprinted in *From Max Weber*, ed. and tr. by H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, pp.129-156). Weber's contention (taken from Tolstoy) is that "Science is meaningless". It provides no answer to the question "What shall we do?" (p.153).

87 This is best summarised in the essay "Voraussetzungslose Wissenschaft" (A1901/21a). See above, Chapter 1.

88 Weber op.cit. p.153.

created by human decisions and characterised by a subjectivism, since each person's conscience was irrefutable.⁸⁹ The individual had to decide which is "the god for him and which is the devil".⁹⁰ Science could explain the effectiveness of certain actions in so far as they accorded with the goals of rational bureaucratic efficiency,⁹¹ but it could never provide a substitute for the real demands of the day which were "to find a demon and obey".⁹²

For Weber there was a host of competing values, "gods", each of which had the same claim on the human: there was no basis for a rational choice between the plurality. Rather the utter relativity of the modern world left nothing other than a completely irrational decision, "an intellectual sacrifice", to accept a certain value as ultimate.⁹³

89 See Raymond Aron "Max Weber" in *Main Currents of Sociological Thought*, pp.206-210.

90 Weber, op.cit., p.153.

91 Cf. *Der Historismus* p.161. On this point, see W. Mommsen *The Age of Bureaucracy*, esp. Chapter One and A. MacIntyre *After Virtue*, pp.24-25.

92 Weber, op.cit., p.155.

93 For Weber, this seems to have been the values of nationalist power politics. Cf. *Der Historismus* (A1922/22) p.161, where Weber is seen as the modern Machiavelli. Cf. Mommsen, op. cit. pp.38-39. Troeltsch himself recognises the inadequacies of any such "intellectual sacrifice" in his criticism of his own previous over-reliance on what he later saw as the deception of inner-experience ("Die christliche Weltanschauung" (A1894/1a) p.324n.). Cf. Review of Mezger, (A1913/24), col.502.

For Troeltsch there was a decision involved in the acceptance of the absolute. However such a decision did not require such an intellectual sacrifice but was rather a decision to accept that the world need not be constituted so as to result necessarily in the polytheism of competing values but could instead be characterised by a unity.⁹⁴ The western tradition, shaped as it was by Christianity, allowed for and indeed called for, the establishment of a value unity. The world of relativism was not the totality of reality, but rather reality also allowed for the possibility that the individual should be able to *create* and to *change* its world in accord with a higher purpose and so in a sense step outside of the world in the act of creation. What Weber failed to explain was that the very possibility of making a decision was itself founded on an ultimate value choice, the choice to accept the human as capable of standing apart from the deterministic world as an autonomous individual, and it was this that Troeltsch saw as standing at the basis of Christianity. The human being was *responsible* for shaping its actions and consequently shared in the creative activity of the divine life.

That each personality should be able to decide for itself and consequently reshape and reproduce the structures of history and society requires that it can at least in part stand outside of these structures and not succumb to their utter domination. The personality becomes of absolute value,

94 Cf. Weber op.cit. p.147-149.

as this alone is what preserves human individuality as it makes its stand against the depersonalising forces of the modern world, in not succumbing to any of its finite demons. The real threat comes not from having to decide among the "polytheism of values" but in the loss of personality under the dehumanisation of capitalism and bureaucracy which leads to a loss of the very possibility of any decision or creativity, as history and society exert total power and dominion and so annihilate the individual.⁹⁵ Only in religion can the creative power of the personality become of absolute worth, as the person adopts the highest unconditional ends. Thus autonomy and theonomy become one in the religious solution to the impasse of the Enlightenment.

95 Cf. "Politische Ethik" (A1904/6) p.39.

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- C.W. *Die christliche Welt. Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gemeindeblatt für Gebildete aller Stände*, Leipzig, from 1886, Marburg, from 1900.
- D.G.W. *Deutscher Geist und Westeuropa*. See under H1925/3.
- D.L.Z. *Deutsche Lit[t]eraturzeitung*, Berlin, from 1879, Leipzig, from 1900.
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- K.S. *Kant-Studien*, Berlin, from 1896.
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The bracketed words indicate the short title used in the text. The bracketed numbers, e.g. (A1900/1) refer to the entry in Graf and Ruddies, *Ernst Troeltsch Bibliographie*. See esp. pp.1-26.

1 Table of prefix letters:

1. Works published during Troeltsch's lifetime:

- A: Texts which Troeltsch prepared for publication himself.
- C: Reports and transcripts of lectures and conferences.

2. Posthumous publications and reprints.

- E: Posthumously published works.
- F: Lectures.
- G: Letters.
- H. Posthumous reprints.

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- vol.IV: (H1925/1a) *Aufsätze zur Geistesgeschichte und Religionssoziologie*, (ed.) Hans Baron, Tübingen, 1925.
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- H1925/3 *Deutscher Geist und Westeuropa [D.G.W.]*. Collected essays and lectures on cultural philosophy, (ed.) Hans Baron, Tübingen, 1925.

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- A1899/1 "Rotheliteratur", C.W., vol.13, cols.18-19.
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Bibliographical Appendix: Troeltsch's Lectures.1 References

Copies of the lecture notes cited in the text are lodged in the Ernst-Troeltsch-Archiv, which is currently under the care of Dr. Horst Renz in Obergünzburg, Bavaria.

1. MS *allg. Ethik*: "Allgemeine Ethik" (W-S, 1911-12), prepared by K-E. Apfelbacher (typescript).

2. MS *Einführung*: "Einführung in die Philosophie" (in the Vorlesungsverzeichnis as "Einleitung"), W-S, 1911-12. Vorlesung nachgeschrieben von Gertrud von le Fort (typescript).

3. MS *pr. chr. Ethik*: "Praktische christliche Ethik", W-S, 1911-12. Kollegmitschrift von Gertrud von le Fort, Nachgearbeitung. Prepared by Eleonore von la Chevallerie (typescript). Large portions of these lectures were dictated, and consequently provide a reliable source. Benckert (in *Ernst Troeltsch und das ethische Problem*, pp.110ff.) quotes from the lectures, "Ethik" of S-S, 1899, and "Praktische christliche Ethik" of W-S, 1907-8 and W-S, 1911-12. His table of contents helps clarify discrepancies between the paragraph numbers of the dictated sections and those^{of} the lecture notes in the von la Chevallerie typescript. 4

4. MS *Religionsphilosophie*: Religionsphilosophie, S-S, 1912. Kollegmitschrift von Gertrud von le Fort, Nachgearbeitung. Prepared with an introduction by Eleonore von la Chevallerie, 1986, (typescript).

2 List of Lectures. (Sources: Heidelberg and Berlin Vorlesungsverzeichnisse)

a) Heidelberg

- S-S, 1894: Christliche Dogmatik (5x per week)
- W-S, 1894-5: Schleiermachers Leben und Lehre (1x); Dogmatik (1x)
- S-S, 1895: Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts (2x); Ethik (5x)
- W-S, 1895-6: Dogmengeschichte (5x)
- S-S, 1896: Glaubenslehre (5x)
- W-S, 1896-7: Glaubenslehre II (5x); Symbolik
- S-S, 1897: Geschichte der Theologie in der 19. Jahrhundert (2x); Christliche Ethik (5x)
- W-S, 1897-8: Dogmengeschichte (5x); Theologische Encyclopädie (2x)
- S-S, 1898: Glaubenslehre I (5x)
- W-S, 1898-9: Symbolik (4x); Dogmatik II (5x)
- S-S, 1899: Ethik (5x); Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts (2x)

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- W-S, 1899-1900: Dogmengeschichte (5x); Theologische Encyclopädie (2x)
S-S, 1900: Glaubenslehre I (5x)
W-S, 1900-01: Symbolik (4x); Dogmatik II (5x)
S-S, 1901: Christliche Ethik (5x); Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts (2x)
W-S, 1901-2: Dogmengeschichte (5x); Theologische Encyclopädie (2x)
S-S, 1902: Glaubenslehre II (5x); Religionsphilosophie (4x)
W-S, 1903-4: Glaubenslehre II (5x); Symbolik (4x)
S-S, 1903: Ethik (5x); Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts (2x)
W-S, 1903-4: Dogmengeschichte (5x); Theologische Encyclopädie (2x)
S-S, 1904: Glaubenslehre I (5x); Religionsphilosophie (4x)
W-S, 1904-5: Symbolik (4x); Glaubenslehre II (5x)
S-S, 1905: Ethik (5x); Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert (2x)
W-S, 1905-6: Dogmengeschichte (5x); Theologische Encyclopädie (2x); Grundzüge der praktischen christlichen Ethik (4x)
S-S, 1906: Glaubenslehre I (5x); Religionsphilosophie (4x)
W-S, 1906-7: Symbolik, Konfessionskunde (4x); Glaubenslehre II (5x)
S-S, 1907: Ethik (5x); Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert (2x)
W-S, 1907-8: Theologische Encyclopädie (2x); Praktische christliche Ethik (3x)
S-S, 1908: Religionsphilosophie (4x); Dogmatik I (5x)
W-S, 1908-9: Symbolik (4x); Glaubenslehre II (5x)
S-S, 1909: Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert (2x); Ethik (5x)
W-S, 1909-10: Encyclopädie (2x); Praktische christliche Ethik (3x); Geschichte der christlichen Soziallehren (1x)
S-S, 1910: Glaubenslehre I (5x); Religionsphilosophie (4x)
W-S, 1910-11: Glaubenslehre II (5x); Geschichte der neueren Philosophie (4x)
S-S, 1911: Symbolik oder vergleichende Darstellung der christlichen Kirchen (4x); Ethik (4x)
W-S, 1911-12: Praktische christliche Ethik (4x); Einführung in die Theologie (1x); Einleitung in die Philosophie (4x).
S-S, 1912: Glaubenslehre I (5x); Religionsphilosophie (4x)
W-S, 1912-13: Glaubenslehre II (5x); Geschichte der neueren Philosophie bis Kant und Comte (4x)
S-S, 1913: Symbolik oder vergleichende Konfessionskunde (4x); Einführung in das theologische Studium (1x); Allgemeine Ethik (4x)
W-S, 1913-14: Christliche Ethik (4x); Einleitung in die Philosophie (4x)
S-S, 1914: Glaubenslehre I (4x); Religionsphilosophie (4x)
W-S, 1914-15: Glaubenslehre II (5x); Geschichte der neueren Philosophie (4x)

b) Berlin

- S-S, 1915: Allgemeine Ethik und Kulturphilosophie (2x)
W-S, 1915-16: Religionsphilosophie (2x)
S-S, 1916: Einleitung in die Philosophie (2x)
W-S, 1916-17: Geschichte der neueren Philosophie (2x)
S-S, 1917: Ethik und Kulturphilosophie (2x); Seminar: Ueber den Begriff einer historischen Dialektik.
W-S, 1917-18: Religionsphilosophie (2x); Seminar: Ueber die Geschichtsphilosophie des Marxismus
S-S, 1918: Einleitung in die Philosophie (2x); Seminar: Ueber die Geschichtstheorie W. Wundts
W-S, 1918-19: Geschichte der neueren Philosophie (2x); Seminar: Ueber die Geschichtstheorie W. Wundts
S-S, 1919: Ethik und Kulturphilosophie (2x); Seminar: Diltheys Geschichtstheorie
W-S, 1919-20: Religionsphilosophie (2x); Uebung: Diltheys Geschichtstheorie
S-S, 1920: Einleitung in die Philosophie (2x); Uebung: Simmels Geschichtstheorie
W-S, 1920-21: Geschichte der neueren Philosophie (2x); Uebung: Simmels Geschichtstheorie
S-S, 1921: Ethik und Kulturphilosophie (2x); Geschichtstheoretische Uebungen
W-S, 1921-22: Philosophie der Geschichte (2x); Geschichtstheoretische Uebungen
S-S, 1922: Religionsphilosophie (2x)
W-S, 1922-23: Geschichte der neueren Philosophie (2x)

