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The Anti-Christian Background of German Literary Naturalism

R. MAX ROGERS*

During the last twenty years of the nineteenth century (the age of German naturalism), Christianity, assailed many times since its foundation, was once again the subject of attack. The basis of the anti-Christian attitude was, on the one hand, the contention that the historical substructure of religious beliefs had been shaken; on the other hand, it was claimed that Biblical criticism called for a revelation of the genuineness of the documentary accounts which deal with the early church, its history, and the nature and validity of its dogmas. Often, the battleground shifted to metaphysics. The existence of God, of supernatural powers, or of any supersensuous reality was denied or declared unknowable. Historians, materialistic philosophers, and scientists pressed their attack against the church and sought to destroy all Christian influence on the course of human affairs. Strong and insistent objections of a sociological nature were also advanced to prove the impotence and inefficacy of the social program of the church. Marxian doctrinaires vehemently insisted that religion was the "opiate of the people," that the church was indifferent to man's lot on earth, and that it was therefore in league with the rich and the mighty. But it was not just the history, the metaphysics, and the social doctrines and social program of the church which were being censured; it was the Christian conception of life and Christian spirituality that were assailed; it was, in short, the "whole" of Christianity that its critics hoped to destroy.

As a "Weltanschauung," naturalism is based, in great part, on positivism and materialism. As first expounded by Auguste Comte in France in 1830, positivism maintains that the only valid knowledge is "scientific" knowledge, i.e., the knowledge of what is given in sense perception and verifiable by the experimental method. The basis of Comte's whole system of philoso-

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phy is his so-called "loi de *les trois états*"¹ through which every branch of human knowledge successively passes. In the first state, "l'état théologique," the human mind was still explaining all phenomena by the wills of the deities. In the second state, "l'état métaphysique," abstract causes are substituted for gods, or for God, as an ultimate explanation of the world. The third state is then "l'état positif," which looks upon the metaphysical state as just a necessary interlude during which positive science gradually reaches complete maturity. The positive spirit is essentially the spirit of positive science, which feels no interest in gods, or in causes, because it is never concerned with the "why," but only with the "what" and the "how." Laws, not causes, are the only valid explanation for all knowable facts. All human concepts and, therefore, all human societies, have to arrive necessarily at this third and last stage in the course of their development. Comte, in view of the breakdown of the "ancien régime" in state and society, was attempting to build a new type of social order according to new principles, and by extending the spirit of positive science to social facts, he created the new science, sociology.² We can act upon matter, Comte argues, because we know its laws, and once we know fundamental social laws, we can easily act upon societies.

Being anti-metaphysical, positivism denies the value of genuinely philosophical or rational speculation and substitutes for it the methods of the mathematical and physical sciences. By its very nature, it eliminates religion interpreted as the service, adoration, and worship of God and substitutes for it a "religion de l'humanité." This positivist point of view was rather widely accepted by many German thinkers, and eventually it formed the philosophical basis of the naturalistic movement in German literature.

In regard to morality, the positivist insistence on "scientific impartiality" implies a complete indifference to qualitative distinctions of an intellectual and moral kind and consequently demands the wholesale rejection of all the traditional forms and values of thought and morals. However, in spite of Comte's positivist disavowal of the traditional forms of religion, he himself developed his "religion de l'humanité," which was inspired by his love of mankind and by the desire to achieve a new cul-

¹M. Auguste Comte, *Cours de Philosophie positive* (Paris: Imprimerie de Bachelier, 1842), VI. "law of the three states (stages)."

²*Ibid.*

tural and social unity on a scientific basis. Comte was of the opinion that our instincts cause us to work for humanity and the happiness of all mankind. His religion was then basically altruistic, its principal objective being the promotion of the general welfare and happiness of every individual.³

John Stuart Mill, a somewhat independent, yet in some respects rather close follower of Comte, objected to the latter's "religion of humanity." Mill decided finally that he would be obligated either to break with Comte or allow himself to be dragged from positive philosophy to a new "theology." Herbert Spencer, empiricist and evolutionist, likewise criticized Comte and the "anthropocentric" character of his new approach to philosophy. In his own defense, Comte argued that the strict maintenance of a complete objectivity of scientific knowledge would entail the loss of philosophy. Thus, Mill could not reject all subjectivity and still have a philosophy. Nevertheless, as Gilson points out, "men naturally chose to lose philosophy, thus opening the age of intellectual disorder and social anarchy in which we ourselves are now groping our way."⁴

In 1841 Ludwig Feuerbach published his *Das Wesen des Christentums*, which, to quote Oskar Walzel, "entgötterte die Welt durch den Versuch, allen Glauben an eine Gottheit zum Ergebnis eines blossen seelischen Bedürfnisses des Menschen zu machen."⁵ According to the argument presented by Feuerbach, "der Wunsch ist der Ursprung, ist das Wesen selbst der Religion—das Wesen der Götter nichts andres, als das Wesen des Wunsches."⁶ Therefore, God, or the gods, are considered superhuman and supernatural only because man wishes them so. Once man becomes convinced that he himself is the supreme reality, he will no longer look for happiness above himself, but

within himself. Considering himself the Absolute, man will lose all supernatural wishes; and, as Feuerbach says, "wer keine übernatürlichen Wünsche mehr hat, der hat auch keine überna-

³Auguste Comte, *The Catechism of Positivism*, trans. R. Congreve (London: J. Chapman, 1858).

⁴Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 270.

⁵Oskar F. Walzel, *Die deutsche Literatur von Goethes Tod bis zur Gegenwart* (5. Auflage; Berlin: Askanischer Verlag, Carl Albert Kindle, 1929), p. 28. "deprived the world of divine influence through the attempt to make all belief in a divinity the result of a mere emotional or psychic need of man."

⁶Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen der Religion* (2. Auflage; Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1849), p. 36. "wish is the origin and the real essence of religion; the nature of the gods is nothing more than the nature of wish."

türlichen Wesen mehr."⁷ It is only natural that this doctrine of Feuerbach, which aimed at the destruction of all supernaturalism, should have exerted a tremendous influence on the literary world in an age which was exposed to positivism, materialism, Darwinism, and the natural sciences.

Materialism, a doctrine which regards matter, or material force, or the corporeal world, as the one and only reality, became very popular in the nineteenth century, especially through the contributions made by Karl Marx and the co-founder of communism, Friedrich Engels, in the works: *Das kommunistische Manifest* (1848) and *Das Kapital* (Vol. I: 1867; II: 1885; III: 1894). Both Marx and Engels rejected the "shallow and vulgarized" form of materialism advanced by Jacob Moleschott (*Kreislauf des Lebens*, 1852), Karl Vogt (*Köhlerglaube und Wissenschaft*, 1855), and Ludwig Büchner (*Kraft und Stoff*, 1855); they preferred to develop the limited materialism of Feuerbach, as expressed in *Das Wesen der Religion*. According to the general arguments advanced by Feuerbach in this highly influential work, all that which is, is either material by itself, or it is rooted in and strictly determined by something which is itself material.⁸ Marx was firmly convinced that Feuerbach's materialism could be extended from the mechanical interactions of matter to biological problems and even to social life, including philosophy. The material order of nature, as Marx understood it, was conceived as having a history—that is to say, as following Darwinian evolution, whose law was essentially the same as that of Hegel's dialectical idealism.⁹ The result was then a historical or dialectical materialism which presents the history of society as the history of the class struggle, a survival of the fittest, so to speak, and thus as a kind of "Darwinism" of the social and economic order. In this class struggle for survival, Marx saw the two principal opponents in the forces of capital and those of the proletariat, and he thought he could foresee the eventual "expropriation" of the capitalists by a class-conscious proletariat. With the emphasis on the importance of classes and the class struggle, the individual assumed a position of little importance; the "Gefühl für Massenhaftigkeit" grew stronger, with the result that no longer the individual, but

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 78. "whoever no longer has any supernatural wishes, also has no longer supernatural beings."

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Gilson, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

the social group, the class, became the hero of the world drama—an idea which proved to be very popular in naturalistic literature.

The tremendous influence of Charles Darwin—his theory of the origin of man and man's biological evolution, his doctrines of natural selection and the survival of the fittest—was felt not only throughout the world of the natural sciences, but in the philosophical, religious, and literary realm as well. It was Darwin who indirectly aided in raising the natural sciences to a position of respect and influence such as they had never experienced before. Natural science and the "scientific method" began to dominate the spirit of the century and the modern "Weltanschauung." But sometimes excessive enthusiasm for a thing brings about an unwholesome result, for as Johannes Volkelt suggests, "Die Begeisterung für die Naturwissenschaft ist vielleicht zum naturwissenschaftlichen Dogmatismus . . . ausgeartet."¹⁰ The danger lay in the fact that natural science considered itself qualified and justified to encroach upon non-scientific fields and modes of life and to pass judgment on moral and religious questions. Made bold by its discoveries and exploits in the realm of matter, and deeply steeped in its materialistic presuppositions and prejudices, it often expressed its opposition to all religious dogma and even to religion as such. The natural scientist felt inclined to attribute responsibility for human action to the influence of heredity and environment and to deny the possibility of moral self-determination. Man was regarded as an irresolute "Massenwesen" that reacted to general stimuli and allowed itself to "develop" quite passively. And even today, as Oskar Walzel points out, it is often customary "jedes Verbrechen durch den Hinweis auf unwiderstehliche Naturwirkungen zu bemänteln."¹¹ This approach to life and human conduct meant, of course, an utter disregard and contempt for such principles as free will and moral absolutes. Because of this materialistic way of thinking, "Diesseitigkeit" was emphasized exclusively, and all transcendent elements of former "Weltanschauungen" were rejected. Quite naturally, the spirit of science penetrated into the realm of art, and so

¹⁰Johannes I. Volkelt, *Ästhetische Zeitfragen* (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Oskar Beck, 1895), p. 157. "The enthusiasm for natural science has degenerated, perhaps, into a natural science dogmatism. . ."

¹¹Oskar F. Walzel, *Die Geistesströmungen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Quelle und Meyer, 1924), p. 49. "to cloak every crime by referring to irresistible, natural forces."

arose the notion that art needed but to adhere to the methods of the natural sciences in order to make its greatest contributions to artistic creation. Wilhelm Scherer, professor of German at the University of Berlin, was one of the first to proclaim the coming domination of science, in literature as well as in other fields, and he attempted to apply the methods of science to literary history and literary criticism. Wilhelm Bölsche made an earnest attempt to link and unite poetry and science, and in his *Die naturwissenschaftlichen Grundlagen der Poesie*, his general argument is that what mythology was for ancient poetry, the Darwinian theory should be for the literature of German naturalism.¹² Darwin's laws of heredity and environmental influences soon provided such catchwords for literature as "Vererbung," "Umgebung," and "Umwelt." The French historian and literary critic Hippolyte Taine, like Darwin, stressed the great importance of heredity and environment in the growth and development of man. To Taine, it was apparent that man lives in a universe of natural scientific law; he is not an independent spectator viewing this vast mechanism from the outside, but an integral part of the intricate network of cause and effect. Since every human act is absolutely determined by invariable primordial forces, namely, "la race," "le milieu," and "le moment," free will cannot exist and moral responsibility has no meaning. History and human life become subject to and determined by these forces. Consequently, the formative and creative powers of the human mind and heart were not recognized by Taine; concepts of talent, genius, and inspiration were discarded.¹³ This was indeed, as Walter Linden says, "die Weltanschauung der Unfreiheit, die den Willen des Menschen nicht anerkennt, da dieser Wille durch Anlage, Vererbung und Umwelt 'determiniert' . . . ist."¹⁴

In general, the determinism preached by the natural sciences ended in a rather depressing pessimism. Literature likewise respected the spirit of the time. Faith in the moral betterment of man was shattered. Fantasy found no opportunity for expres-

¹²Wilhelm Bölsche, *Die naturwissenschaftlichen Grundlagen der Poesie* (Leipzig: Reissner Verlag, 1887), pp. 67-68.

¹³Hippolyte Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (Paris: Libraire Hachette, 1890), Introduction.

¹⁴Walter Linden, Naturalismus, in: *Literatur in Entwicklungsreihen*, Reihe 27, 1. Band (Leipzig: Verlag von Philipp Reclam jun., 1936), p. 7. "the philosophy of bondage, the refusal to acknowledge the will of man, since this will is 'determined' by natural tendencies, heredity, and environment. . ."

sion, and art was subjected to the methods of science. Literature borrowed from empiricism the tools of analytical and descriptive methods. Characters in the literary works of the naturalists were depicted as being almost entirely the result of hereditary and "milieu"; as individuals they were quite passive. Stammler tells of the great popularity of the pessimistic philosopher Schopenhauer, whose influence on literature was profound.

Seinen Schopenhauer trug damals jeder Jüngling in der Tasche und sog aus ihm die Überzeugung von der Sinnlosigkeit und Blindheit des Weltgrundes.¹⁵

According to Jethro Bithell, pessimism as a philosophic system was not definitely displaced in literature until Nietzsche's doctrine of the "superman" passed into the neo-romanticism of the impressionists.¹⁶ Eduard von Hartmann, a disciple of Schopenhauer, was likewise convinced that the world was metaphysically evil and that all efforts to improve it and its many undesirable conditions would be futile; therefore, the best one could do was to surrender stoically to the pain and suffering of life. However, some literary historians, such as Hans Naumann¹⁷ and Eduard Engel,¹⁸ fail to recognize this kind of pessimism in the writings of the young German naturalists. They argue that many of these young writers were definitely optimists, for had they been otherwise, they would not have striven so zealously and incessantly to disseminate their revolutionary ideas. There is no doubt that in most instances naturalistic writers presented in their literary works a rather dismal and pessimistic picture of contemporary social and economic conditions, but frequently this procedure was ingeniously designed to rouse society from its lethargy and torpor, to incite within each individual the desire and the firm resolve to fight for the amelioration of these inhuman social and economic conditions. Bismarck had proved the power of a strong will when possessed by a man of talent and the ability of leadership. Nietzsche too was begin-

¹⁵Wolfgang Stammler, *Deutsche Literatur vom Naturalismus bis zur Gegenwart* (2. durchgesehene Auflage; Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1927), p. 15. "At that time every young man carried his Schopenhauer in his pocket and sucked from it the conviction of the senselessness and blindness of the world."

¹⁶Jethro Bithell, *Modern German Literature (1880-1938)*, (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1939), p. 3.

¹⁷Hans Naumann, *Die deutsche Dichtung der Gegenwart (1885-1924)* (2. Auflage; Stuttgart: J. S. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1924), p. 144.

¹⁸Eduard Engel, *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung. 2. Band, Das 19. Jahrhundert und die Gegenwart* (Wien: F. Tempsky; Leipzig: G. Freytag, 1912), p. 310.

ning to make his voice heard with his doctrine of the perfectibility of man through joyous self-assertion, a self-assertion which was to lead eventually to the glorification of the "Übermensch." Certainly such optimistic views were far removed from the fundamental doctrines taught by natural science and were diametrically opposed to the pessimism of Hartmann and Schopenhauer. It is quite obvious then that both the optimism and pessimism of the "Zeitgeist" is reflected in the works of the German naturalists.

The political, economic, and social conditions of Germany after 1870 determined to a large extent the German mind. In 1871, after the Franco-Prussian War, Germany at last achieved political unity and became again an empire. The war itself exercised little influence on the literature of the day, except indirectly through the social conditions which developed as a result of it. Germany's political perspectives were broadened; a new spirit developed in industry, new enterprises sprang up everywhere, new inventions were introduced—the progress in all of the sciences was tremendous, and all phases of German life experienced a speedy modernization. One consequence of the Franco-Prussian War was the sudden affluence particularly in Berlin, where a prodigious building program was undertaken and where large-scale speculation led to a short-lived boom. It was not long until Berlin was counted as one of the most important and progressive cities of Europe. These were the so-called "Gründerjahre"; Germany was becoming a leading industrial nation. With this unparalleled expansion of German commerce and industry and the general economic and social revolution came a feeling of tension and unrest. The development of big industry and trade resulted in the rapid growth of large cities, which partially depopulated the rural areas. This depopulation, in turn, brought about the loss of some of the most precious and most substantial elements of the German past. A whole new German world was beginning to take form, politically, economically, and socially. However, the problems which frequently follow the rise of capitalism now made themselves manifest. With the great influx of workers, the labor supply on the market became greater than the demand; capital was able to dictate its terms, and the result was hardship and misery for the workers and at times impoverishment and ruin for the small business man. The growth of an industrial prole-

tariat meant the rise of city slums and the growth of destitution in urban centers. The wealth of the upper and trading classes contrasted harshly with the groveling poverty of the working population. Quite naturally this resulted in conflicts between labor and capital. Marxism and social democracy attempted to ameliorate the many social ills, which rushed in with the new order, by demanding social legislation, but even when this was enacted during the chancellorship of Bismarck, it could not check the spread of those malignant social diseases which had elsewhere characterized the growth of capitalism. Under the banner of Marxian socialism the proletarians banded together, hoping and working for social revolution.

Although the concern of the masses was the promotion of better working and living conditions and the acquisition of a decent wage standard, the "Sozialproblem" of the day was in reality much broader, for as Eugen Wolff points out, "keineswegs schliesst es nur Arbeiterfragen in sich—der Handelsstand, das Gelehrtenproletariat, Militär und Adel, Frauenfrage, Ehezustände, die öffentliche Sittlichkeit, Erziehungswesen, das Schriftstellerleben, die Judenfrage, die deutsch-böhmische Frage"¹⁹—all of these social problems weighed heavily upon the German mind and, as a result, found their way into German naturalistic literature, a literary movement that was vitally interested in all contemporaneous problems. The "soziale Frage," however, pushed all other interests into the background, with the result that art and literature were placed in the service of social reform. "Armeleutemalerei" and "Proletarierromane" became very popular among the German people. Writers now took little interest in the "Selbstzweck der Kunst"; art and literature became revolutionary, "tendenziös," and didactic.

With numerous changes taking place in the social order and with people cultivating a materialistic and deterministic outlook on life, it is not surprising that their attitudes toward Church and religion should change likewise.

Der Mensch verliert seinen metaphysischen Eigenwert,
er wird zu einem blossen Rad an diesem ungeheuren Mechanismus,
der nicht mehr der Erfüllung eines religiösen Ideals,

¹⁹Eugen Wolff, *Deutsche Literatur in der Gegenwart* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1896), pp. 31-32. "it did not, by any means, include only questions having to do with the working classes—the business classes, the scholars of the proletariat, the military and the nobility, the question of woman's rights, marriage conditions, public morality, the educational system, the life of literary people, the question of the Jews, the German-Bohemian problem."

eines ewigen Menschheitsideales dient, der aus sich selber läuft und sich selber als Ziel setzt.²⁰

There were attempts to make both the Protestant and Catholic Churches more aware of the social problems and evils of the day in the hope that they would help better social conditions and manifest the love for the poor and downtrodden that Christ himself had shown. A great work of Christian charity arose out of a deepened insight into the social needs of the time—a work in which social and Christian workers cooperated to some extent in an effort to relieve the suffering and the distress of the impoverished and destitute masses. Johann H. Wichherern began the work of the “Innere Mission” with the establishment of “das rauhe Haus” in Hamburg; Pastor Theodor Fliedner laid the foundations of the “Diakonissen” Institutes; and others, such as Pastor Oberlin, Freiherr von Kottwitz, Gustav Werner, and leaders of several pietistic organizations, helped to found Christian institutions and societies whose purpose and objective was the social and spiritual welfare of man. Catholic social leaders such as Domvikar Kolping of Cologne and Bischof Emanuel von Ketteler of Mainz were well aware of the great social problems of the day. Both worked long and arduously to help organize Catholic workers into social working men’s clubs, the precursors of the Christian trade unions. Ketteler, a very influential member of the “Zentrumspartei,” was successful in furthering legislation designed to improve social conditions for the proletariat.²¹ Heinrich Weinel mentions the fact that several clergymen became Social Democrats in this time of social unrest, with the explanation that “der soziale Geist des Christentums zu sozialistischen Forderungen führe.”²² This fact was, without doubt, of great significance in influencing public opinion. However, as Weinel further points out, “je mehr man in die Tiefe steigt, desto krasser wird die sozialdemokratische

²⁰Philipp Witkop, *Deutsche Dichtung der Gegenwart* (Leipzig: H. Haessel Verlag, 1924), pp. 11-12. “The human being loses his metaphysical values, he becomes a mere wheel on this monstrous mechanism that no longer serves to bring about the fulfillment of a religious ideal, of an eternal ideal of the human race, but runs by its own power and sets itself as its goal.”

²¹Theobald Ziegler, *Die geistigen und sozialen Strömungen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (3 umgearbeitete Auflage; Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1910), pp. 205 sqq.; pp. 278 sqq.; pp. 505 sqq.

²²Heinrich Weinel, *Jesus im 19. Jahrhundert* (3. Neubearbeitung; Tübingen: Verlag von J. D. B. Mohr, 1914), p. 159. “the social spirit of Christianity would lead to socialistic challenges.”

Kritik des Christentums und meist auch Jesu."²³ It was "ein schwärmerischer Kommunismus auf der Grundlage der christlichen Liebe" that the masses were fervently seeking and demanding, something to raise them above the misery and wretchedness of the new capitalistic world.²⁴ Most endeavors to prevent the alienation from Church dogma, which was spreading among both cultured classes and the masses, were in vain. A growing disrespect for established authorities, a hostility toward dogmatism, orthodoxy, intolerance, and hypocrisy, especially within the Protestant Church, led to a new liberalism in religious views. Ziegler suggests that one can hardly blame the Protestant laymen for losing faith in their pastors, who, in the pulpit, were not permitted to follow their own convictions or respect scientific knowledge; but who, on the contrary, "predigen sollen, was sie selbst nicht glauben." This, he says, is certainly no longer "der Geist protestantischer Gewissensfreiheit, sondern ist ein Geist der Unwahrhaftigkeit und der Lüge, wozu die Kirchenbehörde ihre Geistlichen geradezu zwingt."²⁵ Many Protestant clergymen and laymen were highly critical of the dependency of their Church on the State, for this meant, to a great extent, State control and supervision, and a subsequent loss of the autonomy previously enjoyed by the Protestant Church; soon, they felt, the Church would be little more than a political "tool" of the State, and, as such, it would be exploited to the utmost. In the Catholic world all was not well either; the Catholic Church was being criticized by clergy and layman alike for its extreme centralization and excessive emphasis on the importance of uniformity, which, it was thought, had led to an intolerable orthodoxy and dogmatism and the abrogation of free individual thought and action. The symbolism of the "Sakramentszauber" and "dingliche Gnadeneinflössungen," the propagation of new devotions and cults, "die nur der Wundersucht und Phantastik Vorschub leisten"—these and other elements of the established churches were subjected to intense criticism, but it was the religious intolerance of the day which

²³*Ibid.*, p. 154. "the more one descends into the depths, the crasser the social democratic criticisms of Christianity become, mostly of Jesus."

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 144. "an enthusiastic communism on the basis of Christian love."

²⁵Ziegler, *op. cit.*, p. 440. "are expected to preach what they themselves do not believe." "the spirit of Protestant freedom of conscience, but a spirit of insincerity and mendacity which the Church authorities actually force their clergymen into."

was most vehemently and savagely attacked.²⁶ Rudolf Eucken finds the whole nineteenth century "eine fortlaufende Gegenbewegung gegen die überkommene Form der Religion selbst."²⁷ The revolutionary developments in the field of the natural sciences, Darwin's doctrine of evolution, historical observation with its relativization of values and value judgments, and positivistic philosophy became the irreconcilable enemies of all traditional religion and static religious truth. Political, economic, and social tasks and problems increased immeasurably the interest in "Diesseitigkeit." The safety of sacred tradition and the entire realm of the supernatural were challenged by historical criticism; "überall wird das Wunder aus dem Leben vertrieben und eine natürliche Ansicht der Dinge durchgeführt."²⁸ A contribution of historical criticism was the so-called "Bibelkritik," according to which every single book in the Bible and its contents was to be studied and interpreted in the light of the time in which it was written. Therefore, the Bible was conceived of as "etwas allmählich Gewachsenes und ihr Inhalt in Einzelheiten als zeitlich Gebundenes."²⁹ Another result of this "Bibelkritik" was the opinion that dogmas are likewise conditioned by the time in which they are formulated. For this reason, all religious instruction was to be approached from the historical point of view. There were those who, like Ludwig Feuerbach and David Friedrich Strauss, had read the spirit of the time into their negative interpretation of Christianity and its central figure, Christ. Strauss, in his book *Der alte und der neue Glaube*, questions whether we actually are still Christians, for he says, "Wenn wir als ehrliche aufrichtige Menschen sprechen wollen, so müssen wir bekennen: wir sind keine Christen mehr."³⁰ However, as he suggests, this does not necessarily make us nonreligious; "wir könnten immerhin noch religiös

²⁶Ernst Troeltsch. "Aus der religiösen Bewegung der Gegenwart," *Neue Deutsche Rundschau*, 21. Jahrgang (1910), III, pp. 1170 sqq. "the magic of the sacrament and conditional infusion of grace." "which only promote the search for miracles and the fantastic."

²⁷Rudolf C. Eucken, "Der moderne Mensch und die Religion," *Neue Deutsche Rundschau*, 13. Jahrgang (1902), II, p. 681. "a continuous reaction against the traditional form of religion itself."

²⁸*Ibid.* "everywhere the miracle is being banished and a natural view of things is receiving recognition."

²⁹E. Lemke, *Die Hauptrichtungen im deutschen Geistesleben der letzten Jahrzehnte und ihr Spiegelbild in der Dichtung* (Leipzig: Quelle und Meyer, 1914), p. 50. "something that has developed gradually and its content limited to the time in which it was written."

³⁰David Friedrich Strauss, *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (10. Auflage; Bonn, Verlag von Emil Strauss, 1879), p. 94. "we are no longer Christians."

sein, wenn wir es auch nicht mehr in der Form des Christenthums wären."³¹ Friedrich Nietzsche decried the "virtues of Christianity" and exerted with his destructive criticism a tremendous influence on the intellectual and cultural life of the late nineteenth century. Because of this influence, it is, perhaps, not surprising that some of the features of the Nietzschean "Übermensch" were incorporated into the Christian "Lebensideal" of the last decade of the nineteenth century.³² Literature too felt the weight of Nietzsche's keen mind and forceful personality. Herbert Cysarz points to this influence in naturalistic works: "Der Naturalismus hält sich zunächst an Nietzsches revolutionäres Ethos, an den Willen zur Macht, und die Umwertung aller moralischen und religiösen Werte. . . ."³³ Anything that would destroy this "Will to Power," Nietzsche considered a negative, even immoral, factor; thus, he condemned Christianity as the greatest negative factor of all, for, as he alleges, it puts a ban on all man's fundamental instincts and impulses. He saw the salvation of society, not in Christian altruism, but in the domination of the "Wille zur Macht" and the brutal self-assertion of individual instincts. He felt that it was the social duty of the race, not to subordinate the individual to the group, but to create a new type of personality, the "Übermensch," who was to rise above what he regarded as the meek and self-effacing virtues of Christianity. "Nicht 'Menschheit,' sondern Übermensch ist das Ziel!"³⁴

Feuerbach, Marx, Comte, and Nietzsche were convinced that faith in God was disappearing, never to rise again, and their atheism both believed and rejoiced in its own finality. Transcendent God, the friend of man, as revealed through Jesus, was rejected by these philosophers and their adherents, while, at the same time, the Christian idea of man and his relation to God, which had been welcomed at one time as a deliverance from the bondage of matter with which fate had burdened man, was now beginning to be felt as a yoke. The afore-

³¹*Ibid.* "we could still be religious in spite of everything, even if our religion did not take the form of Christianity."

³²Wendland, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

³³Herbert Cysarz, *Von Schiller zu Nietzsche* (Halle an der Saale: M. Niemeyer, 1928), p. 302. "Naturalism clings, first of all, to Nietzsche's revolutionary ethos, the will to power, and the revaluation of all moral and religious values. . . ."

³⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke*. 15. und 16. Bände, *Der Wille zur Macht* (Leipzig: Alfred Kroner Verlag, 1911), XV, pp. 302 sqq.; XVI, pp. 341 sqq. "Not 'humanity,' but superman is the goal!"

said thinkers argued that man would forfeit his self-esteem and be unable to develop in freedom unless he broke first with the Church and then with the Transcendent Being upon whom, according to Christian tradition, he was dependent. This urge to break with God and Church increased in scope and momentum until, after several phases and vicissitudes, it came to a head in "the most daring and destructive form of atheism: absolute humanism, which claims to be the only genuine kind, and inevitably regards a Christian humanism as absurd."³⁵

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, when naturalism was beginning to fall into disrepute, there developed, in spite of the previously mentioned and still largely prevalent anti-Christian and anti-religious sentiments and trends, "ein Anschwellen der religiösen Welle"—not in the sense of a positive Christianity, which was still undergoing attack, but in the form of "Wiederkehr zur Metaphysik und Drang nach dem Ewigen."³⁶ Gradually some of the intellectual leaders were becoming aware of what seemed to them to be an important social truth: man cannot organize the world for himself without God, because an exclusive naturalistic humanism is self-defeating. Consequently, many advocated a "return to God," but some insisted that it be done on a personal basis and not through the mediation of Church or priesthood. "Modernism" in the Roman Catholic Church and the growing liberalism in the Protestant churches did not signify a dislike for religious values as such; for, as a matter of fact, both clergyman and layman "erstrebten im Gegenteil eine grössere Verinnerlichung."³⁷ They felt a need for a new expression of religious truth that would conform to the religious mood of the time, for traditional dogma and institutional religion were looked upon with disdain.

In an age in which man's primary interest centers in the cultural developments and problems of the day and hour, one can expect to find a reflection of this interest in literature. In this regard, German literary naturalism was certainly no exception. The time was ripe for a literary revolution, not only in Germany, but throughout Europe. Writers were no longer

³⁵Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Edith M. Riley (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1950) pp. 5 sqq.

³⁶Johannes Mumbauer, *Die deutsche Dichtung der neuesten Zeit* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder und Co., 1931), I, p. 115. "return to metaphysics and a longing for the eternal."

³⁷Lemke, *op. cit.*, p. 46. "were striving, on the contrary, for a greater intensification (of religious values)."

interested in the world of the past; they focussed their attention on the social problems of the present. There was no room for timidity and moral cowardice. In the opinion of Carl Bleibtreu, an influential German writer of this period, the first and most important task of literature is "sich der grossen Zeitfragen zu bemächtigen."³⁸ Adherence to the principle of "l'art pour l'art" was considered a capital offense against the naturalistic creed; true literature was no longer thought to be the product of an abstract love for art and aesthetic beauty as ends in themselves, but on the contrary, it had to be born of a "leidenschaftliche Theilnahme an den Schmerzen und Freuden der Mitwelt."³⁹ This new literature and art was to be naturalistic in every detail. To quote Wilhelm Dilthey:

Sie (die Literatur) will das Wirkliche sehen lassen, wie es ist, und analysieren. Sie will die Anatomie und Physiologie eines gegebenen Teils der Wirklichkeit sein. Was heute um uns menschlich, gesellschaftlich lebt, atmet und pulsiert, was jeder an seinem eigenen Leben und an seiner eigenen Seele erfährt, das will sie, solange es dem Messer der Wissenschaft noch nicht verfallen ist, unter ihr eigenes Seziermesser nehmen.⁴⁰

This was the spirit of a new age, the spirit of science making itself felt in the world of literature and art; it was what Wilhelm Bölsche had demanded in his *Die naturwissenschaftlichen Grundlagen der Poesie*.⁴¹

One can readily understand why the German people, when confronted with social and philosophical forces of the magnitude of those just mentioned, began seriously and critically to analyze their own religious beliefs. In summary, because Christianity had been attacked, some individuals attempted to bring about social and religious reforms within the Christian church; others sought to re-establish their religious faith apart from the

³⁸Carl Bleibtreu, *Revolution der Literatur* (Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Friedrich, 1886), p. 13. "make oneself master of the great problems of the time."

³⁹*Ibid.* "enthusiastic interest in the sorrows and joys of that generation."

⁴⁰Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 6. Band, "Die geistige Welt" (Leipzig und Berlin: Verlag von B. G. Teubner, 1914-36), p. 243. "It (literature) wants to let reality be seen, as it is, and analyze it. It wants to be the anatomy and the physiology of a given part of reality. Whatever is humanly or socially alive around us, whatever breathes and pulsates, whatever each person experiences in his own life and in his own soul, that, it (literature) wants to bring under its own dissection knife, as long as it has not yet been forfeited to the knife of science."

⁴¹Bölsche, *op. cit.*

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church and on a personal, mystical basis. Although there were people who became, or remained, indifferent to institutional religion and ecclesiastical dogmas, a great many, principally those whose faith had already ebbed or had been completely shattered by the new social and philosophical ideas, became hostile to religion as such, and particularly to Christianity. All of these attitudes are well depicted in the creative literature of German naturalism.