

## Hermann Grassmann's theory of religion and faith

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### I

Whoever comes to Potsdam will inevitably find traces of the Orientalist movement, of which Hermann Grassmann was a part. Frederick the Great furnished Potsdam with different *chinoiseries*, his nephew Frederick William II built some seemingly Turkish buildings, and his grandson and king during the time of Grassmann, Frederick William IV, was driven by an admiration for India, which even led him to learn Sanskrit [Strohmeier, Knauer and Stás 2007, 5870]. At the age of 21, he wrote the novel *Die Königin von Borneo* [Kroll 1997].<sup>1</sup> It is a story about a prince (according to letters of his, this was the king himself) who travels to a far-away kingdom in Asia with the help of *rocs* (the eagles from *Thousand and One Nights*). His romantic longing was the peak of a European Wanderlust which was interested in cultures beyond the Christian Occident. Grassmann lived in the aftermath of this movement. According to Andrea Polaschegg, we can call this turning point a linguistic turn in German Orientalism [Polaschegg 2005].<sup>2</sup> It was triggered by three factors: first, by the establishment of historical and comparative philology, second, by the all-encompassing historization of cultures and

<sup>1</sup> For his architectural activities cf. [Johansen 2007].

<sup>2</sup> I thank Dr. Catherina Wenzel for this valuable suggestion.

religions, and third, by the rediscovery of mythical texts as material for the humanities (Creuzer, Schelling). At this time, the Protestant theologians who dealt with Semitic literature because of their knowledge of Hebrew practiced a kind of division of labour with scholars of Antiquity, who did research on Sanskrit and Persian texts.<sup>3</sup> Hermann Grassmann was the first to write a Sanskrit dictionary for the Rig-Veda, while being a staunch Protestant Christian at the same time. Therefore, he stood for a kind of bridge between those two approaches. His commitment to the Protestant Church on the one hand, and his interest in the ancient Indian religion on the other, are like two pylons on two riversides, so as to support a bridge which was still in the making.

## II

This paper will present and analyze the text *Über den Abfall vom Glauben*,<sup>4</sup> which has a unique and isolated position in Grassmann's opus. It was published only after his death and picks up a thread dating back to the beginning of Grassmann's intellectual life. In 1827, he began his studies in Protestant theology at what is today the Humboldt University in Berlin ("Friedrich Wilhelm University" at the time), where he was impressed and influenced especially by Neander and Schleiermacher. In 1834, he passed his first theological exam and five years later, the second. Only one year later, in 1840, he received permission to teach (*facultas*) mathematics, since he had pursued intense philosophical and mathematical studies during his studies of theology. After forty years of research in mathematics (except for a small review of two books for religious instruction in schools [H. Grassmann 1851]), he returned to theology in the last year of his life, 1877. In this little text, which he – with some degree of understatement – used to call *leaflet (Schriftchen)*, he pronounced a general sentence against superstitious Catholics, materialistic scientists, unorganized Pietists, but especially against his own Church, while also showing signs of very conservative Protestantism. *Über den Abfall vom Glauben* [H. Grassmann 1878] is a polemical text written with a certain amount of aggression. The subtitle *Mahnungen an die wissenschaftlich Gebildeten der Neuzeit*<sup>5</sup> alludes to Schleiermacher's *Über die Religion: An die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* from 1799 [Schleiermacher 1913].

His starting point was the observation that educated people were leaving Christianity after making a short stop in Christian ethics, and that the uneducated were

<sup>3</sup> *Indogermanistik* was established only in the nineteenth century as a consequence of this new enthusiasm for India and Sanskrit.

<sup>4</sup> *On the loss of faith* [H. Grassmann 1878].

<sup>5</sup> *Appeals to the scientifically educated in modern times.*

prone to social-democratic ideas. Grassmann diagnosed two forms of apostasy: first, the deconstruction of revelation as a historical and man-made text (among the educated), second, the massive overestimation of mankind and its needs as the central fulcrum of the world (mostly among the uneducated).<sup>6</sup> A symptom of this apostasy could also be found in libertinism within the Church, where each community aimed to define its own creed instead of holding onto the fixed doctrines of the Gospel. Grassmann criticized Catholicism and its practices (pilgrimages, works of goodwill, veneration of saints, indulgence) and Pietism, which places the subjective experience of faith over the acceptance of the Gospel. Grassmann situated true faith in between three negative poles: the materialism of science, the externalized belief of Catholics and orthodox Lutherans, and the internalization by Pietism and liberal Protestants. Grassmann's arguments can be reconstructed around five questions.

### *Why have people stopped believing in miracles?*

Ever since empirical science explained the world according to Newtonian laws, God's intervention in history was no longer considered to be possible [H. Grassmann 1878, 15]. Unfortunately, this denial of miracles also intruded into theology, which now was attempting to demythologize the reports on miracles in the Gospels. As a consequence, the Gospel as a whole lost much of its authority. Grassmann saw this as a hypocritical way out for theologians who opted to deny the reality of miracles by making the theological argument that God could not override laws which He Himself had instituted. But – Grassmann asked rhetorically – do we really know the laws of nature? Can we explain the history of mankind, the sensitive life of animals, the growth of plants, gravitation, or electricity? Does not all progress in the natural sciences entail a revision of the laws which we assumed to be true? And do we not have to concede that we *refer to the whole by taking one of its tiny aspects as a point of departure*?<sup>7</sup> Does not every newly discovered law appear to us like a miracle, in comparison to earlier laws? Especially the rise of Christianity in late Antiquity seems like a historical miracle, if one takes into account how unlikely it actually was. Judging by Christian texts, rituals and historical figures from the year 200 A.D., nobody would have been able to conclude that this small group of people would develop into a world religion which would provide the basis for the Prussian state in the nineteenth century.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. [H. Grassmann 1878, 9].

<sup>7</sup> "von diesem Bruchteile [, den wir wissen,] auf das Ganze schließen" [H. Grassmann 1878, 16].

### Where does the knowledge of mankind come from?

In the main chapter of his book, Grassmann resorts to a Kantian distinction. First, our knowledge arises from experience, *thanks to which we are able to perceive external events*.<sup>8</sup> Second, it comes from analytical conclusions, which combine our experiences in logical ways. But if conclusions already require that something is known to us and if experiences are determined by human needs, these operations will not guarantee true knowledge. Grassmann takes mathematics as an example for a science which does not produce anything new, but only unfolds something knowable in an analytic way. But unlike animals, man does not only have a perceptive and logical capacity, but also something for which he uses the German term *Geist*. *Geist* is where our experiences and conclusions meet in unity. Usually we do this by stating hypotheses, which we try to verify or falsify with new experiences. In the latter case, we replace a false hypothesis with a better one. Moreover, *Geist* has the ability to reflect on itself. It does not only produce relative, hypothetical certainty, but it achieves complete certainty [H. Grassmann 1878, 23, 24].<sup>9</sup> Our *Geist* only stands on safe ground if it focuses its thinking on itself, and not on objects. This is obviously a new formulation of the Cartesian *fundamentum inconcussum*. Grassmann enriches this thought about self-certainty with some arguments from German Idealism: self-consciousness is not only a solipsistic self-experience in thinking but needs stimuli from and to the outside. The more one divests (*entäußert*) oneself and becomes aware of one's own weaknesses, the more one expands one's "personal consciousness to an objective consciousness".<sup>10</sup> In the first place, this is a kind of inter-subjective consciousness of mankind, but only if we recognize our dependency on the exterior world can it expand to a divine consciousness or a consciousness of the divine (*Gottesbewusstsein*). Self-consciousness can become aware of the fact that it is not reflecting on its own, but that it is a reflection, the mirror of a higher personal being. This knowledge is rather a kind of acknowledgment (*Anerkenntnis*), than some kind of conclusion.

Now Grassmann suddenly jumps into ethics. This higher being is not merely the role model and starting point for finite subjectivity. Rather, it demands that its imperfect avatar accepts the claim: "Ye shall be holy for I am holy." (cf. *Lev. 11, 44 par*) It is easy to detect the influence of Schleiermacher, who defined religion as *Gefühl*, a feeling of absolute dependence in the subject's self-consciousness. In Schleiermacher as well, two results arise from the basic act of reasoning: first, the acknowledgment of the infinite, and second, the acceptance of one's own finiteness. In Christian language: God

<sup>8</sup> "durch welche wir äußere Vorgänge wahrnehmen" [H. Grassmann 1878, 20].

<sup>9</sup> "Der Geist des einzelnen Menschen tritt seinem denkenden Geiste zugleich als Gegenstand der Beobachtung gegenüber, es entsteht das Selbstbewußtsein." [H. Grassmann 1878, 23].

<sup>10</sup> "persönliches Bewußtsein zu einem objectiven Bewußtsein" [ibid., 25].

is true and unique in His holiness, while I am a sinner. This is the formal principle of Schleiermacher's main work *Glaubenslehre* [Schleiermacher 1984], and it separates this book into theology and anthropology: the split within objective consciousness that humans are the representation of the absolute *and* the negative "shadow" of the absolute. This thought is grounded in a dialectic of its own necessity, in Christian language one might say that human reason turns towards itself and can only break through its limitations by reaching divine consciousness, which enables human reason to observe itself.

### Where do we find absolute knowledge?

Grassmann reads the history of Christian revelation as an action of God who wants to help mankind to resolve its contradictions. Man may achieve a level of thought in which he realizes that there is a God, but man cannot find a path which reconciles the two consciousnesses. Therefore, the God of the Bible spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to Moses, David and the prophets. He revealed to Abraham and Isaac that their houses were chosen ones; He promised Jacob to make his house the foundation of a great people; He gave Moses the law; He bestowed an inner experience of God upon David, the alleged author of the Psalms, and He commanded the prophets to proclaim the fear of God [H. Grassmann 1878, 28]. According to Grassmann, all this was said in dark allusions. It was only in Christ that the Revelation came to "bright clarity"<sup>11</sup> This is – and we hear the faithful Protestant speaking – written down in the Bible, with highest authority. To accept the Bible, it is not enough to believe that it provides important information, but one must have faith in the one who authored the Bible. We do obey the sayings of Christ because Christ spoke *as* God, not *about* God, and we do not merely accept them as the opinion of somebody with powerful philosophical wisdom. To hear the word of the Bible is to encounter Christ, the word, the *logos* itself. This is not just one experience among others, nor is it a conclusion of reason, because the latter would only lead to subjective certainty. Christ awakens in the listener – this is the language of Lutheran theology – the *verbum internum*, the inner word. According to Grassmann Christ reveals himself to each faithful person from within. The New Testament reached the disciples and the Church directly and was handed down to the present generation without any alteration. God gave this document to the disciples and then to the Church, whose duty it was to keep it alive and interpret it in a way that people could understand

<sup>11</sup> "lichte Klarheit" [ibid., 29].

its meaning, not only its textual content. Had it been a verbal decree of God, it would only foster human submissiveness.

Grassmann avoids addressing the tricky question concerning the authority of the books of the Bible. Are they all written with the same degree of authority? Since the deists of the eighteenth century, there were several proposals on how to distinguish between the important sayings of Jesus and the less important stories of miracles. And how does he answer the question arising from the fact that the canon of the scriptures of the New Testament was fixed by decisions made by members of the early Church, which is why the Apocalypse of John is canonical and the Apocalypse of Peter considered apocryphal. The Protestant counterargument to these questions usually was that the scripture establishes its own authority through its life-changing effects and its ongoing use in the Christian communities. "Therefore I believe in the truths that are revealed in the Bible, not because they are part of the Bible, but because I have experienced their sanctifying power, their eternal divine truth in my consciousness."<sup>12</sup> This is of course a circular argument if communities using other scriptures are seen as nonorthodox.

### *Is the Bible the absolute word?*

Grassmann disapproves of Catholics whose dogmas go beyond the Bible, regarding these dogmas as mere human legislation (*Menschensatzung*) and their creators as light-headed visionaries (*Schwärmer*) who expand the Bible with new revelations in the spirit. In contrast, the task of the true Church is simply to repeat the text of the Bible and remind the faithful of their duties. This is because the Bible is an objective and perfect document of divine revelation.

What does Grassmann have to say about the scholarly investigation of the New Testament? Here, his embarrassment becomes very clear: on the one hand, he clings to the immediate revelation, and yet he rejects verbal inspiration in which the authors of the New Testament would be mechanical instruments of the divine spirit. Then it would not be the meaning, but the letters on the paper which carry this inspiration. Christianity always opted for the concept of real inspiration because the New Testament was not written in the language of the Lord, but was always already a Greek translation. However, Grassmann does not deduce such arguments from the history of religion; instead he quotes the Bible itself: Paul never said that he was possessed by the Spirit while writing down his letters, and the authors of the Gospels do not mention any

<sup>12</sup> "Ich glaube also den in der Bibel geoffenbarten Wahrheiten nicht darum, weil sie in der Bibel stehen, sondern weil ich ihre seligmachende Kraft, ihre ewige, göttliche Wahrheit in meinem Bewußtsein erfahren habe" [ibid., 31].

experience of ecstasy during their writing process, but quote the testimonies of others who saw and heard Jesus. This is another classical *petitio principii*: Grassmann explains his concept of inspiration by relying on arguments from the Bible, which is, in turn, the text whose inspiration is up for discussion.

Grassmann goes into detail on this topic because he observes how modern philology erodes faith in the Bible. Faith is threatened by scholars who discover dissenting manuscripts of the Gospels and direct parallels in other religious traditions. Grassmann fears that these theologians could become the new teachers of the Church and that they will be the ones to determine which passages in the Bible are to be regarded either as original, or as the product of later editing processes, which passages can in fact be traced back to the historical Jesus, and which are only legends about the mythological Christ. Grassmann's conviction is the following: where the credibility of the Bible is weakened, apostasy is inevitable. He projects a model of a slippery slope. Whoever breaks the unity of the scripture by distinguishing early Jesuanic and later communitarian sayings will soon come to a distinction between authentic and unauthentic, then to a division of important and unimportant passages, and end up bringing forward the opinion that everything in the Bible could be considered unimportant. In some respect, Grassmann anticipated modern historical research on the New Testament scriptures in which Jesus is described as a charismatic Palestinian preacher of a baptismal movement. All sentences about his divine qualities, about revelation and so forth, will collapse under this verdict. The slippery slope has seven stages:

- a) The word of God loses its absolute authority if one doubts the authority of Christ and rejects his law as too rigorous. *This person has then created his personal interpretation of the Saviour.*<sup>13</sup>
- b) Others will follow in this apostasy and mocking of the faithful, declaring them unscientific, naive people.
- c) Christ will be criticized, called a dreamer, too radical or too harmless a teacher of wisdom.
- d) The divine creator will be substituted by the God of the deists, a kind of higher intelligence which does not interfere with history.
- e) The immortality of the soul will be questioned and man will shrink to a mere natural being.
- f) Truth will be reconstructed as mere subjective certainty and brain functions.
- g) Morals will lose their power because there is no good and bad, but only biological and psychological pleasure or distress.

<sup>13</sup> "[...] hat sich einen Heiland zurecht gemacht nach seinem eignen fleischlichen Sinn" [Grassmann 1878, 38].

At the end of Grassmann's slippery slope we find the pure materialists, whom he considers to be *worse than pagans and cannibals* [H. Grassmann 1878, 41].

### *Who interprets scripture?*

By rejecting the concept of verbal inspiration and yet holding on to the theory of the absolute text, Grassmann runs into the following problem: if we do not have to take the holy text word-by-word and if it still requires an interpretation, who then has the authority to decide between contradictory interpretations? Religion needs institutions outside the scripture because the text is not unambiguous.

This calls – according to Grassmann – for “steadfast and uncompromising commitment to belief”.<sup>14</sup> Commitment to belief (*Bekenntniß*) does not refer to the subjective conviction of individuals, but to the beliefs as they are written down in The Book of Concord (*Bekenntnisschriften der lutherischen Kirche*). *Bekenntniß* has to be disseminated and deepened through means of print media and communities for “inner mission” (according to the nineteenth-century concept of instruction by catechism of churchgoers). Those who still oppose infant baptism (for instance reformed Protestants), who react polemically to Christianity (for instance scientific critics), who live in sin (for instance unmarried couples), who refuse the *Bekenntnisschriften* (for instance liberal theologians) should be banned from the lists of candidates and voters in Christian parishes. Grassmann wants to collect the holy remnant in small communities which will form the “true Christian Church” (*Wahrhaft christliche Kirche*) within the official Protestant State Churches (*Evangelische Landeskirchen*). If a *Landeskirche* shows tendencies of apostasy, Grassmann threatened, a new Church had to be established.<sup>15</sup>

Grassmann's *On the loss of faith* is a document against the hard-line conservatives in Frederick William IV's Prussia. In contrast to the liberals and the moderate conservatives, these conservatives defended the idea of a Christian state, with a king as God's official representative (*Amtsmann*) at the top of the state hierarchy. The Synod of the Church of Prussia (*Preussischer Kirchenrat*) should preside below him. Both the king as *summus episcopus* and the *Kirchenrat* as the highest synod are obliged to enforce the law

<sup>14</sup> “[Das] feste und rücksichtslose Bekenntniß.” Grassmann continues: “[...] jede Nachgiebigkeit gegen die oft mit großer Kunst vorgetragenen Einwürfe und Meinungen der Unglücklichen, jeder Versuch der Vermittelung ist ein Verrath an der Wahrheit” [ibid., 42].

<sup>15</sup> Grassmann refers to the so-called *Gustav-Adolph-Vereine*. These societies helped Protestant brothers and sisters in the diaspora and considered themselves the protagonists in a cultural battle (*Kulturkampforganisationen*), considering Catholics enemies of the German Reich (*Reichsfeinde*) and trying to expel them from public life and education.

as it is revealed in the Bible. The Church is seen as the second power beside the state, but its authority is reduced to the realm of faith and belief. In the long run, Churches would have become a mere source of religious positions (*Weltanschauungsorgan*) within the state. A hypothetical Ministry for Faith and Culture, the Church could never represent a kind of ecclesiastical parliament of small parishes and synods, but would inevitably turn into an instrument of state administration. It seems that Grassmann feared that the cooperation of throne and altar would monopolize all religious authority and that religious convictions would become instruments of the state.

### III

After having looked at this polemic book, which sets out in a philosophical manner and ends with a quite staunch Lutheran position which rejects all ecumenical dialogue, it seems rather strange that Grassmann focussed his research on Hinduism. Between 1872 and 1875 he wrote his Rig-Veda dictionary, *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda*, and published the two volumes of his translation of the Rig-Veda in 1876/77 [H. Grassmann 1873–1875, 1876, 1877a]. In a paper called *Die älteste Religion der Inder* [H. Grassmann 1874]<sup>16</sup> – only three years before his book *On the loss of faith* – he expressed his admiration for the early Vedic religion: “that there was no people among the pagans whose fervour and depth of religious feeling could be compared to that of the Indians of the Vedic period”<sup>17</sup> He sees parallels between Christianity and Hinduism in their “amenity and simple clarity”<sup>18</sup> in the connection of spirituality and sensuality, in the fatherly relation of God to the faithful, in the faith in immortality, in the belief in the presence of God during sacrifice, and so forth. One should know that the texts of the Rig-Veda are mostly hymns to different gods (the God of the sun, storm or fire) and that these gods are identified with the sun, storm, or fire. Grassmann explicitly reads these texts not as mythology but as a poetic means of expressing original and pure faith in a benevolent God (singular!). My assumption is that Grassmann was influenced by Creuzer's book *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen* [Creuzer 1812–1821]. According to Creuzer, the ancient religions were based on a pure and primal monotheism which deteriorated into polytheistic forms due to priestly teachers, their

<sup>16</sup> According to present research these hymns were written around 1000 B.C. and probably compiled to form the Rig-Veda only around 500 B.C. The earliest commentaries are from the third century B.C., cf. [Witzel and Gotō 2007, 467–478].

<sup>17</sup> “daß es kein Volk unter den Heiden gegeben hat, welches an Innigkeit und Tiefe der religiösen Empfindung mit den Indern der vedischen Zeit verglichen werden kann” [H. Grassmann 1874, 480].

<sup>18</sup> “Anmut und einfachen Klarheit” [H. Grassmann 1874, 473].

symbols and narratives (*Symbole und Mythen*), folk legends, poetic transformation and the experience of a spirit-filled nature. Creuzer aimed to find the kernel of this pure religion by comparing it to Oriental religions and their Greek transformations.

Grassmann assumes that his spiritualist interpretation of the Vedic texts was already the intention of the authors of the Rig-Veda: "Every time the myth [of Indra killing the snake Vrta] occurs, it is only a metaphor, and the poets are well aware of the symbolism of this story."<sup>19</sup> In order to prove this assumption, he quotes hymn 203 (II, 12) *To Indra (An Indra)*. The first seven stanzas are about Indra, King of Gods, the creator, dragon-slayer and tamer of the castes, lord over the other tribes, helper of the obedient and lord over animals, sun and water. Grassmann stops his quotation here. Perhaps the quote was too long, or perhaps he wanted to suppress the following stanzas in which Indra is depicted as an angry warrior and partaker of the sacrifice. Similarly Grassmann avoids those hymns to Varuna in which Varuna is a member of the sacrificial community, which would weaken his idea that the early Vedic religion shows "a clear reminiscence of original monotheism"<sup>20</sup>

If one shares Grassmann's clear distinction between gods of nature and high gods, and if one reads the hymns as selectively as he does, one can certainly find elements of monotheism there. But his determination to find such monotheism is quite startling if we keep in mind how Grassmann envisioned a history of religion in which only Christianity represented the full presence of self-consciousness as a consciousness of God. Since only three years separate these two texts, we cannot explain the dichotomy in his conclusions – on the one hand, Lutheran orthodoxy, on the other, religious openness – by a biographical change of opinion. It is much more likely that Grassmann's thinking represents the rift within Protestant self-consciousness in the nineteenth century: interest in old religions and documents of a pure monotheistic faith, clashing with a feeling of dissatisfaction with one's own religion, so closely connected to the Prussian state. The identity of Protestantism was based on the fact that it considered itself an alternative, not merely an amendment to dogmatic Catholicism. But Protestants were also aware of the fact that their alternative would not necessarily lead to a compact faith, but to a broad spectrum of divergent denominations (especially between Reformed and Lutheran Protestants, who merged in the Prussian union of 1817). The rift was even deepened by the upcoming historical approach to religion. It forced Christians to view their own religion as one among many and showed them that Christianity had only gained its present form by undergoing a long development throughout the centuries. There were two possible reactions to the pluralization and historization of

<sup>19</sup> "So oft dieser Mythos [Indra erschlägt die Ur Schlange Vrta] vorkommt, so ist der doch nur ein Bild, und die Dichter sind sich des Bildlichen in dieser Darstellung wohl bewußt." [H. Grassmann 1874, 478].

<sup>20</sup> "deutliche Anklänge an einen ursprünglichen Monotheismus" [ibid., 479].

Christianity: one could interpret it as a development brought about by the Spirit, or as a historically contingent process, so that the Church and dogma are subsequent disciplinary functions. Grassmann, of course opts, for the second possibility. He wants to save the core of religion – which in his view is the Holy Scripture – from the force of historical interpretation. He is not motivated by stubborn conservatism. Rather, it is the result of a philosophical insight: consciousness is unable to ground itself or criticize itself. Whenever consciousness turns itself into an object of reflection, it is thrown back upon its own means and remains confined to its own perspective. In order to break out of transcendental, circular reasoning about the ego there must be something that comes from outside and from above, something that is not posited by consciousness itself (*vom Bewusstsein gesetzt*). This support from above is – Grassmann's view – the Bible. Therefore, this is the point at which his religious openness reaches its limitations.

Grassmann thus avoided the fallacy of many Orientalists who saw the Bible as a bad copy of pre-biblical texts. He insisted on the revelatory character of the Bible, motivated by philosophical reasons. But how can his high esteem for the Rig-Veda and his faith in the Bible be reconciled? Let me add one last assumption.

Perhaps Grassmann relied on Max Müller's insight, who declared the study of the Rig-Veda the most important source for understanding mankind. The ancient Indian hymns (Müller dated them 1500–1000 B.C.) originated centuries before the biblical and Buddhist texts came into existence and therefore were closer to the beginnings of human self-reflection. Thus, the Rig-Veda could be the first source for anthropology, the Bible the first source for theology. This division of labour would have fitted the Protestant self-perception very well. According to Paul, even the pagans, who had never heard of God, understood the reality of God in the works of creation (cf. *Romans 1,20*). The Vedic hymns could then be viewed as an expression of universal human reflection, which would lead to the paradox, unresolved dichotomy (*unversöhnter Widerstreit*) that man is capable of understanding his own finiteness, but simultaneously reaches a state of consciousness in which he realizes that his reflection on finiteness *and* infinity is finite! The biblical revelation would then function as a philosophically inspired liberation from this dilemma, a liberation which man himself can never accomplish.