

the intellectual world, have to regard very rough things as simple – but rather it is only the ceaseless aim of analytic skill to be able to depict such a primal element. In spiritual things the original cannot be brought forth for you, except when you beget it through an original creation in yourselves, and even then only in the moment when you beget it. I beg you, understand yourselves on this point, for you shall be ceaselessly reminded of it. But as far as the sources and original documents of religion are concerned, this interference of metaphysics and morals with them is not merely an unavoidable fate; it is rather an artificial plan and a lofty intention. What is presented as the first and last is not always the truest and highest. If you only knew how to read between the lines! All holy writings are like the modest books that were in use some time ago in our modest fatherland, which treated important matters under a sketchy title. To be sure, they only give notice of metaphysics and morals, and in the end are happy to return to that which they have announced, but you are encouraged to crack open this shell. Thus even the diamond lies wholly enclosed in a base substance, yet surely not in order to remain hidden but rather to be found all the more certainly. To make proselytes out of unbelievers is deeply engrained in the character of religion; those who impart their own religion can have no other purpose. Thus it is in fact hardly a pious deception but an appropriate method to begin with and appear concerned about a matter for which the sensibility already exists, so that something may occasionally and unnoticeably slip in for which the sensibility must first be aroused.³ Since all communication of religion cannot be other than rhetorical, it is a clever engagement of an audience to introduce them into such good company. Yet this device has not only reached but overstepped its goal, since even for you religion's essence has remained hidden under this mask. Therefore it is time to take up the subject from the other end and to start with the sharp opposition in which religion is found over against morals and metaphysics. That was what I wanted. You distracted me with our ordinary concept; I hope it is now settled and you will interrupt me no more.

In order to take possession of its own domain, religion renounces herewith all claims to whatever belongs to those others and gives back everything that has been forced upon it. It does not wish to determine and explain the universe according to its nature as does metaphysics; it does not desire to continue the universe's development and perfect it by the power of freedom and the divine free choice of a human being as does morals. Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. It wishes to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe's own manifestations and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe's immediate influences in childlike passivity. Thus, religion is opposed to these two in everything that makes up its essence and in everything that character-

³ Paul Seifert, *Die Theologie des jungen Schleiermacher* (Gütersloh, 1960), p. 118, cites this as the most explicit "methodological" passage in the work; the passage justifies the rhetorical stance and hermeneutic of the work, which seeks out common assumptions with its audience, even if the argument eventually challenges these assumptions.

izes its effects. Metaphysics and morals see in the whole universe only humanity as the center of all relatedness, as the condition of all being and the cause of all becoming; religion wishes to see the infinite, its imprint and its manifestation, in humanity no less than in all other individual and finite forms. Metaphysics proceeds from finite human nature and wants to define consciously, from its simplest concept, the extent of its powers, and its receptivity, what the universe can be for us and how we necessarily must view it.⁴ Religion also lives its whole life in nature, but in the infinite nature of totality, the one and all; what holds in nature for everything individual also holds for the human; and wherever everything, including man, may press on or tarry within this eternal ferment of individual forms and beings, religion wishes to intuit and to divine this in detail in quiet submissiveness. Morality proceeds from the consciousness of freedom; it wishes to extend freedom's realm to infinity and to make everything subservient to it.⁵ Religion breathes there where freedom itself has once more become nature; it apprehends man beyond the play of his particular powers and his personality, and views him from the vantage point where he must be what he is, whether he likes it or not.

Thus religion maintains its own sphere and its own character only by completely removing itself from the sphere and character of speculation as well as from that of praxis. Only when it places itself next to both of them is the common ground perfectly filled out and human nature completed from this dimension. Religion shows itself to you as the necessary and indispensable third next to those two, as their natural counterpart, not slighter in worth and splendor than what you wish of them.⁶ To want to have speculation and praxis without religion is rash arrogance. It is insolent enmity against the gods; it is the unholy sense of Prometheus, who cowardly stole what in calm certainty he would have been able to ask for and to expect. Man has merely stolen the feeling of his infinity and godlikeness, and as an unjust possession it cannot thrive for him if he is not also conscious of his limitedness, the contingency of his whole form, the silent disappearance of his whole existence in the immeasurable. The gods have also punished this crime from the very beginning. Praxis is an art, speculation is a science, religion is the sensibility and taste for the infinite. Without religion, how can praxis rise above the common circle of adventurous and customary forms? How can speculation become anything better than a stiff and barren skeleton? Or why, in all its action directed outwardly and toward the universe, does your praxis actually always forget to cultivate humanity itself? It is because you place humanity in opposition to the universe and do not receive it from the hand of religion as part of the universe and as something holy. How does praxis arrive at an impoverished uniformity that

⁴ The metaphysical stance sketched here alludes to Kant's reduction of metaphysics to the realm of finite human experience in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

⁵ An allusion to the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

⁶ The notion of religion as a necessary counterpart to "speculation" and "praxis" is retained, though embellished and elaborated in the 1806 and 1821 revisions.

means of portrayal as if it were the essential itself, a complete departure from its characteristic ground.

Intuition is and always remains something individual, set apart, the immediate perception, nothing more. To bind it and to incorporate it into a whole is once more the business not of sense but of abstract thought. The same is true of religion; it stops with the immediate experiences of the existence and action of the universe, with the individual intuitions and feelings; each of these is a self-contained work without connections with others or dependence upon them; it knows nothing about derivation and connection, for among all things religion can encounter, that is what its nature most opposes. Not only an individual fact or deed that one could call original or first,¹⁰ but everything in religion is immediate and true for itself.

A system of intuitions? Can you imagine anything stranger? Do views, and especially views of the infinite, allow themselves to be brought into a system? Can you say that one must look at a thing a certain way just because one had to look at something else in such a manner? Others may stand right behind you, right alongside you, and everything can appear differently to them. Or do by chance the possible standpoints on which a mind can stand in order to observe the universe progress in measured intervals so that you can exhaust, enumerate, and precisely determine the characteristic of each? Are there not infinitely many of these, and is not every entity only a continual transition between two others? I speak your language in these matters, for it would be an infinite business, and you are not accustomed to connect the concept of something infinite with the term "system," but rather the concept of something that is limited and completed in its limitation. Elevate yourselves at once – after all, it is still an elevation for most of you – to that infinite dimension of sensible intuition,¹¹ to the wondrous and celebrated starry sky. The astronomical theories, which orient a thousand suns with their world systems around a common point and seek for each common point again a higher world system that could be its center, and so on into infinity, outwardly and inwardly – surely you would not want to call this a system of intuitions as such? The only thing to which you could attribute this name would be the age-old work of those childlike minds that have gathered the infinite mass of these phenomena into definite, but scanty and unseemly, pictures. But you know that there is no semblance of a system in that, that still other stars are discovered between these pictures, that even within their limits everything is undetermined and endless, and that the pictures themselves remain something purely arbitrary and highly change-

¹⁰ The German terms *Tatsache*, *Handlung*, *erst*, and *ursprünglich*, which are used to express the first principle of consciousness, the principle of identity, or $A=A$, leave no doubt that the target is Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*. See Fichte, *Sämtliche Werke* (Berlin, 1845), I, pp. 91ff.

¹¹ The expression *sinnliche Anschauung* is traceable to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 93, and elsewhere. Schleiermacher uses the term for our immediate apprehension of objects in the world in which concepts play no mediating role. Schleiermacher comes closest to his predecessor where Kant plays tribute at the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason* (Indianapolis, 1956), p. 166, to the wondrous effect on the human mind of "the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."

able. When you have persuaded another person to join you in drawing the image of the Big Dipper onto the blue background of the worlds, does he not nevertheless remain free to conceive the adjacent worlds in contours that are completely different from yours? This infinite chaos, where of course every point represents a world, is as such actually the most suitable and highest symbol of religion. In religion, as in this chaos, only the particular is true and necessary; nothing can or may be proved anything else. Everything universal under which the particular is supposed to be treated, each collection and combination of this sort, either exists in a different territory, if it is to be referred to the inner and essential realm, or is only the work of playful imagination and freest caprice. If thousands of you could have the same religious intuitions, each of you as an individual would certainly draw other outlines in order to portray how you viewed them alongside or in succession to one another; that would depend not on each mind but, rather, on an accidental condition, on a triviality. Individual persons may have their own arrangement and their own rubrics; the particular can thereby neither win nor lose. Those who truly know about their religion and its essence will utterly subordinate to the particular every apparent connection and will not sacrifice the smallest part of the particular to it. The realm of intuition is so infinite precisely because of this independent particularity.

If you place yourself at the most distant point of the material world, you will not only see from there the same objects in another order; and if you wish to cling to your former arbitrary images that you do not find there again, you will be completely in error. Instead you will even discover wholly new objects in new regions. You cannot say that your horizon, even the broadest, comprehends everything and that nothing more is to be intuited beyond it, or that nothing within this horizon escapes your eye, even the best aided. You find limits nowhere and are not able to think of any. This is true of religion in an even far higher sense; from an opposite point you would receive new intuitions not only in new regions; but also in old, well-known places the first elements would unite in different forms and everything would be different. Religion is infinite not only because acting and being acted upon ceaselessly alternate between the same limited matter and the mind – you know that such thinking is the sole infinity of speculation – not only because it is, like morality, internally incapable of completion; it is infinite in all respects, an infinity of matter and form, of being, of vision, and of knowledge about it. This feeling must accompany everyone who really has religion. Each person must be conscious that his religion is only a part of the whole, that regarding the same objects that affect him religiously there are views just as pious and, nevertheless, completely different from his own, and that from other elements of religion intuitions and feelings flow, the sense for which he may be completely lacking.

You see how immediately this lovely modesty, this friendly inviting tolerance springs from the concept of religion and how intimately tolerance nestles up to it. How wrongly, therefore, do you turn on religion with your reproaches that it is

bent on persecution¹² and spitefulness, that it wrecks society and makes blood flow like water. Indict those who corrupt religion, who want to inundate it with philosophy and fetter it to a system. What is it in religion over which men have argued, taken sides, and ignited wars? Sometimes over morals and always over metaphysics, and neither of these belongs to it. Philosophy indeed strives to accommodate those who wish to know under one common knowledge, as you can daily see; but religion does not strive to bring those who believe and feel under a single belief and a single feeling. It strives, to be sure, to open the eyes of those who are not yet capable of intuiting the universe, for every one who sees is a new priest, a new mediator, a new mouthpiece; but for just this reason it avoids with aversion the barren uniformity that would again destroy this divine abundance.

The mania for system does indeed reject what is foreign, even if it is quite conceivable and true, because it could spoil one's own well-formed ranks and disturb the beautiful connections by claiming its place. In this mania lies the seat of contradiction; it must quarrel and persecute; for to the extent that the particular is again related to something individual and finite, the one can indeed destroy the other through its existence. But in the infinite everything finite stands undisturbed alongside one another; all is one, and all is true. Moreover, only the systematizers have caused all this. Modern Rome, godless but consistent, hurls anathemas and excommunicates heretics; ancient Rome, truly pious and religious in a lofty style, was hospitable to every god and so it became full of gods. The adherents of the dead letter that religion casts out have filled the world with criers and tumult; the true contemplators of the eternal have ever been quiet souls, either alone with themselves and the infinite or, if they glanced around themselves, happily granting his own way to everyone who only understood the mighty word. But with this broad view and this feeling of the infinite, religion also looks at what lies outside its own realm and contains in itself the capacity for unlimited multiplicity in judgment and in contemplation that, in fact, cannot be found elsewhere. No matter what inspires a person – I exclude neither ethical life nor philosophy but rely instead, as far as they are concerned, on your experience – his thinking and striving, to whatever object they may be directed, draw a narrow circle around him in which his highest lies enclosed and outside of which everything appears to him to be common and unworthy. Whoever only thinks systematically and acts from principle and design and wants to accomplish this or that in the world inevitably circumscribes himself and constantly sets himself in opposition to what as an object of aversion does not further his actions. Only the drive to intuit, if it is oriented to the infinite, places the mind in unlimited freedom; only religion saves it from the most ignominious fetters of opinion and desire. Everything that exists is necessary for religion, and everything that can be is for it a true indispensable image of the infinite; it is just a question of finding the point from which one's relationship to

the infinite can be discovered. However reprehensible something may be in another connection or in itself, in this respect it is always worthy of existence and of being preserved and contemplated. To a pious mind religion makes everything holy and valuable, even unholiness and commonness itself, everything it comprehends and does not comprehend, that does or does not lie within the system of its own thoughts and is or is not in agreement with its peculiar manner of action; religion is the only sworn enemy of all pedantry and all one-sidedness.

Finally, to complete the general picture of religion, recall that every intuition is, by its very nature, connected with a feeling. Your senses mediate the connection between the object and yourselves; the same influence of the object, which reveals its existence to you, must stimulate them in various ways and produce a change in your inner consciousness. This feeling, of which you are frequently scarcely aware, can in other cases grow to such intensity that you forget both the object and yourselves because of it; your whole nervous system can be so permeated by it that for a long time that sensation alone dominates and resounds and resists the effect of other impressions. But that an action is brought forth in you, that the internally generated activity of your spirit is set in motion, surely you will not ascribe this to the influence of external objects? You will, of course, admit that this lies far beyond the power of even the strongest feelings and must have a completely different source in you. The same is true for religion. The same actions of the universe through which it reveals itself to you in the finite also bring it into a new relationship to your mind and your condition; in the act of intuiting it, you must necessarily be seized by various feelings. In religion, however, a different and stronger relationship between intuition and feeling takes place, and intuition never predominates so much that feeling is almost extinguished.

On the contrary, is it really a miracle if the eternal world affects the senses of our spirit as the sun affects our eyes? Is it a miracle when the sun so blinds us that everything else disappears, not only at that moment, but even long afterward all objects we observe are imprinted with its image and bathed in its brilliance? Just as the particular manner in which the universe presents itself to you in your intuitions and determines the uniqueness of your individual religion, so the strength of these feelings determines the degree of religiousness. The sounder the sense, the more sharply and definitely will it apprehend every impression. The more ardent the thirst and the more persistent the drive to grasp the infinite, the more manifoldly will the mind itself be seized by it everywhere and uninterruptedly, the more perfectly will these impressions penetrate it, and the more easily will they awaken again and again and retain the upper hand over everything else. That is how far the realm of religion concerns us in this respect; its feelings are supposed to possess us, and we should express, maintain, and portray them.

But should you wish to go beyond that dimension with these feelings, should they cause actual actions and incite you to deeds, then you find yourselves in an alien realm. If you still hold this to be religion, however rational and praiseworthy

¹² "Gedanken I" (no. 121), *KGA* 1.2, p. 31: "Religion has never persecuted."