Contradictory Concepts
An Essay on the Semantic Structure of Religious Discourses

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ABSTRACT

The widespread opinion among conceptual historians is that political concepts are always contested in their actual usage. Religious concepts in modernity are also not only contested; they are constructed on an ontological contradiction. They imply that the object to which they refer exists, and at the same time that it does not. I demonstrate this idea using four religious concepts: *religion, God,* the *beyond,* and *spirit.* I conclude with discussion on the reality status of religious concepts in modern historiography and religious studies.

KEYWORDS

conceptual history, God, reality, religion, spirit, transcendence

In the field of conceptual history today, many scholars agree on the fact that political and social concepts are always contested when used in praxis. By defining concepts as being essentially contested,[1] they draw a line between such concepts and simple words. Taken by their lexicographical definitions, these words may have several meanings, but in a given context are always strictly defined. On the other hand, the idea of concepts being essentially contested underlines a hypothesis expressed very early on by Reinhart Koselleck, the leading conceptual historian of the last generation: in contrast to the philosophical and linguistic definitions of concepts (which are based on the idea of "one word–one object"), Koselleck insisted upon the fact that key concepts in political and social discourses are always semantically ambiguous, not only in their lexicographical definition, but also in their actual usage in a given discourse. If they were not ambiguous, he argued, there would be no dispute about their proper meaning, which is the essential element of political conflicts.[2]

1. For the debate on essentially contested concepts in English political theory, see Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

2. Reinhart Koselleck, "Introduction to *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe,*" in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland,* vol. 1, O.

Contributions to the History of Concepts Volume 10, Issue 1, Summer 2015: 69–88
doi:10.3167/choc.2015.100104 ISSN 1807-9326 (Print), ISSN 1874-656X (Online)

One cannot catch the meaning of key concepts with simple definitions. In fact, concepts are used in such a way that they build on an idea by representing it. Namely, key concepts are employed in repetitive arguments and descriptions of an object, and because of this they can stand for a complex object by representing it in a single word. To be contested is simply the effect of debates in which the object itself is contested. Had it not been contested, the object would not survive in the social praxis of arguments for and against it.

In conceptual history, little attention has been given as yet to religious concepts. Most religious concepts were excluded from the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe,* the representative eight-volume German encyclopedia of conceptual history published in 1972–1997. Therefore, some scholars have already raised the question of whether religious concepts may be included in the category of social and political concepts at all—concepts that underwent a significant semantic change in the so-called *Sattelzeit* of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, defined by Reinhart Koselleck by the historical features of "temporalization", "politization", "ideologization", and "democratization" of the political and social language of Europe.[3] To what degree religious concepts underwent similar changes in the *Sattelzeit* is too large a question to be addressed here. Instead, I wish to add an aspect through which one could examine their semantic history.

Religious concepts in modernity, I would argue, are not only contested in their actual usage; they are constructed on an ontological contradiction. At the same time, they imply that the object to which they refer exists, and that it does not. It is not necessary to think of such a contradictory claim in each single usage of religious concepts. But on the level of discourses encompassing many arguments, one can observe that even opposing arguments often rely on contradictory meanings of one and the same religious concept. This observation is not meant to argue for religious concepts being pure nonsense, but that they elaborate their religious essence only by entailing such contradictory propositions.

Thus, in the modern criticism of religion, when religious objects are fundamentally questioned, this criticism does not come merely from without, but also from within religion. It would be misleading to confine this kind of self-referential criticism to the twentieth century. It was, to a certain degree, already inherent to the very concept of religion from the time of its modern installation as a key concept in eighteenth-century discourses onward. The modern concept of religion (and in fact, religion itself) cannot do without

Brunner, W. Conze, and R. Koselleck, eds. (Stuttgart: Klett, 1972), xiii–xxvii. Translation by Michaela Richter: "Reinhart Koselleck, Introduction and Prefaces to the 'Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe,'" *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6, no. 1 (2011) 1–37.

3. Stefan Jordan, "Die Sattelzeit: Eine Epoche für die Theologiegeschichte?," in *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte,* vol. 105 (Fribourg, 2011), 525–535.

its secular criticism, as much as it cannot do without the criticism of the secular world. That is why in a conceptual analysis of religious concepts secular statements should be read as theological statements, as much as theological statements should be read as secular ones.

Before illustrating my general hypothesis about the contradictory nature of religious concepts on the basis of four religious key concepts, two reservations should be noted. First, it may be asked whether my hypothesis holds only for modern times. The critical reader will object that some contradictory propositions of modern religious concepts already existed in premodern disputes on theological topics. The existence of God, for example, was questioned already in ancient and medieval times.[4] Nevertheless, there are good reasons for arguing that these kinds of disputes have been radicalized in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when new concepts of realism changed the nature of religious beliefs and the dichotomy of religion and secularity became an essential feature of Western European societies. To demonstrate this in detail, however, goes beyond the ambitions of this article. Here I limit my argument to modern, that is, from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, Christian and Western European societies, leaving open how far the argument can be extended to other periods of time and other regions. Second, it is obvious that the evidence for most of my arguments is taken from German sources. Hence, the reader may ask whether my arguments would hold for empirical data taken from other Christian cultures too. I assume that this would turn out to be true going deeper into religious discourses, with perhaps some variations in time and with slightly different terminology in other cultures. But again, I leave open the question of how far the following argument will prove true when others apply it in other times and locations.

The Modern Concept of Religion

The modern concept of religion was established in Europe only by the age of Enlightenment and cannot be transferred to older times or to other regions outside Christendom without misunderstandings.[5] This becomes clear when we analyze the change of meaning that the expression *religio*/*religion* underwent throughout its long history. As has been elaborated by recent research, it was only around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that *religion* became a generic term referring to both a pluralistic and an anthropological under-

4. See James Thrower, *A Short History of Western Atheism* (London: Pemberton books, 1971); Winfried Schröder, *Ursprünge des Atheismus: Untersuchungen zur Metaphysik- und Religionskritik des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: frommann holzboog, 1998).

5. Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

standing of religion.[6] Only then were older concepts such as *lex* or *secta* excluded, turning *religion* from the name of a specific form of divine service to a reference to a more general dimension of human existence.

Granted, at this early stage of secularization most people still accepted religion; very few explicit "atheists" denied it as such. This should not be obscured by the long tradition about the nature of God, a life after death, and other religious ideas.[7] Only by the time of the Catholic and Protestant reform movements of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries did the critical attitude of "atheists", many of them living in the big urban centers of Western Europe, begin to intensify. They questioned traditional religious claims such as that the Bible would give a good explanation for the history of the world or good advice for individuals to live a moral life or guidelines for handling politics.[8] In weakening the power of religion as such we may observe two opposing strategies working together: on the one hand, religious discourses were cut down to a particular segment of social life; on the other hand, the concept of religion was extended far beyond Christianity.

It may help to demonstrate this process of universalizing and at the same time limiting the concept of religion by focusing on the reconstruction of social institutions such as, for instance, religious teaching at secular schools in late eighteenth-century Germany.[9] In the newly established "secular schools" (*weltliche Schulen*) of northern Germany, the concept of religion embraced opposing positions. These schools accepted the equal status of secular subjects as seen in the differentiation of subjects in the daily schedule, but at the same time neutralized the differentiation in the school curriculum by claiming an overarching religious interpretation of secular spheres of knowledge. How was this possible?

By the 1780s in some secular schools of northern Germany, "religion" (*Religionskunde, Religionsunterricht*) was introduced as a school subject of its own, alongside other subjects such as Latin or physics. Hitherto, religious content had been taught in every part of the curriculum; every subject served religious education in some way. Now religious education was reduced to one hour a day, releasing other subjects from the category of religious teaching. But this was only one side of the coin. The other was that some kind of religious understanding of the world was extended to secular subjects such as Latin or physics too. Teachers of these secular subjects also included the divine foundations

6. Ernst Feil, *Religio: Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997–2012).

7. See Schröder, *Atheismus.*

8. Lucien Fèbvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (1942; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

9. See Rainer Lachmann and Bernd Schröder, eds., *Geschichte des evangelischen Religionsunterrichts in Deutschland* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neunkirchener Verlagsgesellschaft, 2007).

of the world order, but on a different ideological basis, for example, by giving Christian doctrines a humanistic or materialistic interpretation. In doing so they may have weakened the evidence of religious tradition and opened access to opposing systems of knowledge, albeit without opposing Christian doctrines directly. Nevertheless, by the early nineteenth century the meaning of *religion* began to change. Some took it to refer to the biblical tradition of revelation; others thought it referred to a rational explanation of the world.

But still Christianity and secular science and culture continued to complement and penetrate each other without denying one another totally. Only by the mid-nineteenth century did the alliance begin to crumble, most obviously in the radicalized discourses of German and French socialists and materialists on one side and orthodox Christians on the other. In other segments of society too, the spiritual power of the church and the temporal power of state and civil society no longer complemented each other, as was acknowledged from both sides centuries earlier; rather, they competed against and even excluded one another.

Only under such conditions could alternatives to religion possibly convince people of the irrationality of religious avowals and of the nonexistence of religious objects such as gods, angels, demons, an afterlife, or divine miracles. Secular society began to foster "compensatory religions" such as socialism,[10] "reform movements" like vegetarianism,[11] and scientific worldviews that aimed to replace religion.[12] From the other side, churches began to penetrate secular society by building up a network of social institutions such as private parochial schools alongside ordinary public schools. They upheld church marriage even at a time when civil marriage had become obligatory, supported religious parties, established business ventures, newspapers, and publishing companies, and so forth.[13]

In political discourse, instead of *spiritual* vs. *temporal* (*geistlich* vs. *weltlich*), the conceptual distinction of *religious* vs. *secular* (*religiös* vs. *säkular*) was established as leading the semantic dichotomy. *Spiritual* and *temporal* had been complementary concepts; *religious* and *secular* now showed a tendency to lead to controversial discourse, including contradictory claims. It was no longer possible to think of church and state, religion and politics in terms of social differentiation only. Where secularists rejected the church and religion

10. See Sebastian Prüfer, *Sozialismus statt Religion: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vor der religiösen Frage, 1863–1890* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2002).

11. See Diethart Kerbs and Jürgen Reulecke, eds., *Handbuch der deutschen Reformbewegungen, 1880–1933* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1998).

12. Todd Weir, *Secularism and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Rise of the Fourth Confession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

13. Kurt Nowak, *Geschichte des Christentums in Deutschland: Religion, Politik und Gesellschaft vom Ende der Aufklärung bis zur Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Beck, 1995).

as being pre- and antimodern institutions, and conversely orthodox Christians rejected "atheist" and "materialist" claims and movements as being "secularistic" powers, there was no possibility for social cohabitation any more—most obviously demonstrated in the French separation law of 1905. However, both sides claimed to offer the goods of the other side as well: socialism and monism for the "spiritual" needs of materialists, Christian "charity" institutions run by the churches for the material needs of religious people.

In the course of such opposing developments, the term religion became a concept used in contradictory ways. An early example is Karl Marx in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), who characterized religion as "the self-consciousness and self-regard of man who has either not yet found or has already lost himself. … Religion is the generalized theory of this world … it is the fantastic realization of the human essence inasmuch as the human essence possesses no true reality."[14]

That is to say, Marx accepted religion as the true theory of human society in general, but only in claiming that the existing society was false. Twenty years later the *Syllabus of Errors* of Pope Pius IX (1864) answered this critical analysis of religion with the damnation of sentences like "All the truths of religion proceed from the innate strength of human reason" (error 4) or "All the dogmas of the Christian religion are indiscriminately the object of natural science or philosophy" (error 9).[15] Fighting the views of liberals and materialists on religion, such damnation was aimed at an understanding of *religion* that the religious critique had in mind. In contradicting the reduction of religion to human science, the *Syllabus* merely confirmed the existence of another understanding of religion. Another example may be taken from a later time: in 1920, the Protestant theologian Karl Barth called *religion* a "betrayal of God," because "it establishes a border to the world and carries something within it."[16] He purposely made a contradictory statement, for taken as the worship of God, religion could not be a "betrayal of God" without implying that it was a false worship.

To speak of religion in contradictory propositions seems to be a theological necessity in our time. It allows for the fact that for some people religion is

14. "Und zwar ist die Religion das Selbstbewusstsein und das Selbstgefühl des Menschen, der sich selbst entweder noch nicht erworben oder schon wieder verloren hat, … Die Religion ist die allgemeine Theorie dieser Welt … Sie ist die phantastische Verwirklichung des menschlichen Wesens, weil das menschliche Wesen keine wahre Wirklichkeit besitzt." Karl Marx, "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie, Einleitung" (1843), in *Über Religion,* Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, ed. (Berlin: Dietz, 1958), 30. All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.

15. http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syll.htm (accessed 15 February 2015).

16. "Das ist *Verrat* an Gottes Sache, das ist Religion, die sich von der Welt abgrenzt und etwas in sie hineinträgt." Karl Barth, "Der Christ in der Gesellschaft" (1920), in *Die Anfänge der praktischen Theologie,* Jürgen Moltmann, ed. (Munich: Kaiser, 1962), 5–6.

the true fundamental element of human life, while for others it is nothing but a "wordly" ideology or even a merely social institution and doctrine without any divine background—and that both positions taken together seem to be relevant for the theological interpretation of religion.[17] Hence, even when today the strong opposition of believers and nonbelievers has become much more moderate in Germany and other Western European societies, the concept of religion refers to the perspectives of both. One has to take them together in all their contradictory aspects when speaking of religion as a religious concept.

Thus, looking back through its history, the concept of religion reveals its contradictory nature in changing constellations. It was used as a generic concept of universal applicability in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at a time when large parts of the enlightened public in Western Europe were eager to reduce its impact to a limited province of human life. Later, in the nineteenth century, the concept entered into fierce competition with secular ideologies, which denied the existence of any substance in religion altogether. Finally, in the twentieth century *religion* became a concept, which entailed affirmation and denial of the existence of its object at the same time.

The Modern Concept of God

Christian religion stands and falls with the existence of God. But in Western Europe from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries onward, and with the rise of secular fields of knowledge and practice, traditional ideas of God began to change. The more descriptions of the "world" began to rely on empirical knowledge and practices, the more the reality of God had to be redefined. This led, in the eighteenth century, to the theological dispute about the "immanence" of God. One can retrace this development in the theological debates of the time.

Although quickly rejected as heresy by Christian and Jewish communities at the time, Spinoza's proclamation on the identity of God and nature (*deus sive natura*) in the late seventeenth century questioned for the first time the old images of God that had been passed down from ancient and medieval times. Spinoza did not conceptualize God as a persona or principle outside the world, but as identical with the laws and orders of the world. The same can be said of the deistic images of God widespread among educated people of the enlightened age. They reduced God to the role of having constructed the world machine and his present activity to the workings of the laws of nature. In

17. See Lucian Hölscher, "The Religious and the Secular: Semantic Reconfigurations of the Religious Field in Germany from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries," in *Religion and Secularity: Transformations and Transfers of Religious Discourses in Europe and Asia,* Marion Eggert and Lucian Hölscher, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 35–58.

these conceptualizations there was little space for the idea of God as an agent independent from and interacting with the world.

Thus, the concept of God lost its traditional qualities to the idea of representing the unity of the world and of an ultimate authority in moral issues. Such an idea was still necessary, because without it there was no guarantee for the ideas of an all-embracing world and of a moral government. That is why in the secular discourse of the eighteenth century the idea of God was constantly present, though little usage was made of the term *God* within the parameters of all human sciences; rather, the anthropological concepts of reason and morality were used, or the scientific concepts of space and time.

In Germany it was Kant's transcendental philosophy above all that tried to avoid any mention of transcendent beings, but at the same time relied heavily on the idea of God as ensuring the validity of the moral laws. Kant's ideas of moral philosophy affected the discourse of philosophical thinking, not limited to Germany, for most of the nineteenth century. According to Kant, God's omnipotence could be demonstrated just by his absence as a personal God exerting influence on empirical actions. In the "religion of German idealism,"[18] the transcendental explication of the ego took the place of the transcendent God. By calling moral laws "divine," Kant surely gave his philosophy a certain religious spirit, but his transcendental categories of reason could not bridge the gap produced by the lack of the idea of God as a persona. Around the year 1800 many enlightened people in Europe had dismissed the name of God from their personal conduct of living, or at least they were not able to fill the concept of a transcendent God with any substantial ideas. Schleiermacher in his "Reden über die Religion" (Lectures about religion) and Hegel in his "Religion der neuen Zeit" (Religion of the new age) both responded to this new situation, albeit with very different answers.[19]

The erosion of the idea of a transcendent God was apparent and was publicly discussed in the "debate on atheism" at the turn of the century, a consequence of which the philosopher Johan Gottlieb Fichte lost his chair of philosophy at the University of Jena in 1799. Rejecting the idea of a divine ruler of the world, Fichte had postulated the idea of a divine government (*göttliche Weltregierung*) based not on a belief in a transcendent God, but in the moral nature of man. Fichte argued that one would gain nothing from the idea of a

> defined Being seen as the agent/cause of the moral order of the world. … This Being should be separated from the world, it should have … personality and

18. Wilhelm Lütgert, *Die Religion des Deutschen Idealismus und ihr Ende,* 4 vols. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1922–1930).

19. See Christian Link, "Das *leere Jenseits*: Hegels Analyse der neuzeitlichen Religion," in *Das Jenseits: Facetten eines religiösen Begriffs in der Neuzeit,* Lucian Hölscher, ed. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), 63–79.

> conscience. … By attaching such a predicate to that Being you make it into something limited, into something similar to you, and you have not conceptualised God, but only redoubled yourself.[20]

Thus, in the discourse of idealism the concept of God was conceived as metaphor. According to the idealistic point of view, after all, evidence for God's transcendent existence had collapsed. The concept of God could no longer serve as a guarantee for the existence of a divine being independent from the world, but only as a guarantee for the existence of something divine in human nature. In answering the question of "what guarantees that in the idea of God we do not have but a product of our fantasy," Johann Traugott Krug, a disciple of Kant, stated in 1833: nothing but the "hypothesis of a law of morals or of a voice of conscience [*Gewissen*]. … In, with and by the law of morals something divine is innate to us and this divine drives us, to take the idea of God for something real, and hence to believe in God."[21]

Thus was charted the path of scientific investigation of the belief in God in the nineteenth century. Theologians no longer presupposed the real existence of a transcendent God, but instead looked for empirical evidence giving form to the existence of a religious consciousness or sensibility. It is important to underline that this was not a secularized reinterpretation of orthodox concepts of God, which would have insinuated the real existence of God and even defended such a concept against the attacks of materialism and idealism. Rather, it was the theistic idea of a personal God itself developed by theologians such as Immanuel Hermann Fichte, Christian Felix Weiße, and others that explained God in terms of human understanding. God was a partner in dialogue with man and a guarantor of a divine order that did not merge with human reason and the laws of nature.

But even such indirect proofs of the existence of God held only as long as the corresponding religious sentiment was found in a sufficient number of people. After such sentiment began to recede by the turn of the twentieth century, new theological concepts of God, which accommodated the objections of atheists, emerged after World War I. In Germany the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer elaborated by far the most advanced concept of such a posttheistic theology. "A God that exists doesn't exist," Bonhoeffer wrote in a letter from prison in 1944.[22] The Protestant theologian Dorothee Sölle pointed in the same direction in the late 1960s when she coined the phrase "believing in God athe-

20. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Die philosophischen Schriften zum Atheismusstreit: Mit Forbergs Aufsatz: Entwicklung des Begriffs der Religion,* F. Medicus, ed. (Leipzig: Meiner, 1910), 13.

21. Johann Traugott Krug, *Allgemeines Handwörterbuch der philosophischen Wissenschaften,* 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1833), 304, art. Gott.

22. "Einen Gott, des es gibt, gibt es nicht." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Werke,* 4th ed., vol. 8, Eberhard Bethge, ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2011), 514.

istically" (*Atheistisch an Gott glauben*). The point of her argument was that speaking of God always means to first realize that God is not a transcendent person, but a moving power in this world, a symbol for life.[23]

Looking back to the history of theological disputes in modern times, we again find that speaking of God implies contradictory propositions. The enlightened concept of an immanent God dissolved God into the moral law and the unity of the world, but nevertheless held on to the notion of a divine order of things. The idealistic philosophy replaced God with an innate moral consciousness too, but never gave up the idea of a divine being corresponding to such a consciousness. Finally, in appealing to a Christian belief that affirmed God's existence in denying it, the theology of existentialism gave to the twentieth century the experience of discovering God as the essence of life simply by and through his "death" in modern society.[24]

The Modern Concept of *Jenseits*

Especially good examples for the contradictory character of religious concepts are *transcendence* and the German concept *Jenseits.* Polls and surveys in modern Germany often take the belief in a *Jenseits* (afterlife, or "the beyond") as one of the most important criteria of religiosity. Time and again they underline the fact that people are split over the question of whether or not there is life after death.[25] *Jenseits* and *Diesseits* (literally, "that side" and "this side") exclude and condition each other at the same time. And even those who did not believe in *Jenseits,* life after death, took part in its development, in that their use of the concept implied the nonexistence of what it represented from the very beginning.

Unlike the three concepts *Gott, Jenseits,* and *Diesseits, Immanenz* and *Transcendenz* are rather recent concepts. They emerged in Germany soon after 1800.[26] This does not mean that there were no other, earlier terms to refer to a transcendent world, concepts like *God, spirit, heaven, hell,* and so forth.[27] The genesis of words rarely coincides with the genesis of the objects they refer to.

23. Dorothee Sölle, *Atheistisch an Gott glauben: Beiträge zur Theologie* (Freiburg: Walter Verlag, 1968).

24. Dagmar Herzog, "The Death of God in West Germany: Between Secularization, Postfascism and the Rise of Liberation Theology," in *Die Gegenwart Gottes in der modernen Gesellschaft,* Michael Geyer and Lucian Hölscher, eds. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), 431–466.

25. Michael Ebertz, *Die Zivilisierung Gottes: Der Wandel von Jenseitsvorstellungen in Theologie und Verkündigung* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2004).

26. See Hölscher, *Jenseits.*

27. Bernhard Lang and Colleen McDannell, *Der Himmel: Eine Kulturgeschichte des ewigen Lebens* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996).

But here, as in other cases, it is useful to take a closer look at what may have changed in the structure of such "objects" when new concepts were born. In general, the new concepts of *Jenseits* and *Diesseits* served to distinguish between two separate worlds: the transcendent and the immanent. Concepts of transcendent powers such as demons, angels, God, and the devil had of course existed before, but up to that point they had interfered with nature and society easily and in a rather straightforward manner. By distinguishing between *Jenseits* and *Diesseits,* two separate spheres were established, which constituted a much deeper and more existential distinction.

Also, as far as *Jenseits* and *transcendence* are concerned, this article does not argue that these terms represent totally new concepts, since as early as ancient times life after death, or a world to come, were posited. But in the age of Enlightenment, such ideas were situated in a new context.[28] The emergence of these new terms stands for a long-term transformation of religious worldviews at the time of transition from the Enlightenment to the romantic age. According to the physical worldview of the Enlightenment, all real things, including those of the "other" world, should have their proper place in space and time. This should be true also for transcendent subjects such as angels, demons, and the souls of men after death. As far as the souls of the dead were concerned, enlightened people of the eighteenth century were no less busy speculating about how long these souls would exist after death[29] and where they would spend their postmortal lives. Some assumed the planet Venus would be their home after death.[30] Widespread ideas found material basis, such as the idea that one would reunite with one's beloved after death.[31] Visionaries like Swedenborg depicted a counterworld in heaven, where the souls moved as swiftly as an arrow, lived in cities, visited schools for education, and even produced "spiritual children."[32] Great influence on the belief in a transcendent world

28. For a discussion in greater detail, see Hölscher, *Jenseits.*

29. The English bishop Samuel Butler and, following him, the German theologian Johan Spalding may serve as an example. Already in the early eighteenth century they imagined a future life of a man to be about ten thousand years—time enough for the perfection of the soul, which in most cases turned out to leave the earth in a poor condition. See Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion* (London: John Beecroft, 1738); Johann Joachim Spalding, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* (Tubingen: Balz und Schramm, 1748).

30. See Martin Mulsow, "Das Planetensystem als Civitas Dei: Jenseitige Lohn- und Strafinstanzen im Wolffianismus," in Hölscher, *Jenseits,* 40–62; Walter Sparn, "*Aussichten in die Ewigkeit*: Jenseitsvorstellungen in der neuzeitlichen protestantischen Theologie," in Hölscher, *Jenseits,* 12–39.

31. For the broad discussion about the afterlife in journals of the Enlightenment, see entries such as "immortality" and "afterlife" in the *Index deutschsprachiger Zeitschriften des 18. Jahrhunderts* at the University of Göttingen.

32. Emanuel Swedenborg, *Himmel und Hölle, nach Gehörtem und Gesehenem* (1758); see Lang and McDanell, *Himmel,* 250–307.

was exerted by the natural historian Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert's (1780–1860) book *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaften* (Views on the night-side of the natural sciences) (1804): his distinction between the "night-side" and the "day-side" of natural sciences established an early model for imagining *Jenseits* and *Diesseits* as two corresponding spheres of life. They were constructed as a dichotomous unity. As dreams in the night affect daily actions and as the present affects what will happen in the future, so life here on earth affects the afterlife.[33]

By the end of the eighteenth century, however, future expectations of enlightened people began to focus more and more on the immanent time of history, and the afterlife was moved outside space and time, and for many even outside human knowledge and practical relevance.[34] A group of nonbelievers emerged who doubted the postmortal existence of human souls in space and time. In Friedrich Schiller's drama "Die Räuber" (1781), the noun *Jenseits* appeared in such a context for the first time, being dismissed as very doubtful.[35] Soon after 1800, *Jenseits,* even when used in positive contexts, always implied doubts about whether it really existed or was merely the product of wishful thinking.

And still, the demarcation between *Jenseits* and *Diesseits* did not exclude one from the other; rather, both influenced and conditioned one another. In the early nineteenth century, the religious concept of a *Jenseits* had much in common with the temporal idea of a future age and the psychological idea of an imaginary "projection". Popular images of life after death, as expressed in obituaries and letters of condolence, alternated between images of perfection and balance, illusion, and promise. One of those who already denied the belief in a life after death was David Friedrich Strauß, the famous author of the "Life of Jesus" (1835). In his consolation letter to a friend whose wife had died, he wrote that she would survive in her children: "This is that kind of immortality

33. "Was aber jenseits ist, wird uns nicht im dunklen Traume, nicht in dumpfen Vorahnungen verkündigt, sondern nur in dem klaren lichten Werke des Lebens, in dem tiefen und heiteren Streben des Gemüths verstanden, und aus diesem fällt ein seliger Schimmer auf die dunkle Kluft jenseits, welcher uns mit fröhlichem Vertrauen hinüberschauen lässt." Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert, *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft* (Dresden: Arnold, 1840), 157.

34. Lucian Hölscher, *Die Entdeckung der Zukunft* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1999), 49–84.

35. The bandit Karl Moor exclaimed: "Be what thou wilt, thou undefined futurity, so I remain but true to myself. Be what thou wilt, so I but take this inward self hence with me. External forms are but the trappings of the man. My heaven and my hell is within (Sei, wie du willst, namenloses Jenseits, bleibt mir nur dieses mein Selbst getreu. Sei, wie du willst, wenn ich nur mich selbst mit hinübernehme. Außendinge sind nur der Anstrich des Mannes. Ich bin mein Himmel und meine Hölle)." Julius Petersen and Hermann Schneider, eds., *Schiller's Works,* vol. 3 (Weimar, 1953), 211. Trans. The Project Gutenberg. See also Schiller's criticism of *Jenseits* in his poem "Resignation" of 1784.

in which we believe. And we must prove that this belief doesn't contain less consolation than that of the church-faith."[36] The possibility of illusion was always present and inscribed in the idea of life after death, even if people clung to such hopes and wishes all the more.

Introduced to philosophical terminology by Hegel as an "empty concept,"[37] the concept of *Jenseits* began to take a radical turn in the early 1830s. In his provocative "Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit" (Thoughts on death and immortality), Ludwig Feuerbach, one of Hegel's disciples, denied the reality of an afterlife, provoking an outcry among academic theologians and pastors. It was, however, only at this point that the concepts of *Jenseits* and *Diesseits* began to dominate the religious and theological debates of the time and sparked a fierce dispute among those who believed in an immanent world exclusively and those who saw the immanent world embedded into some kind of transcendent reality.

Feuerbach fueled this debate by launching a broad attack against all kinds of images of the *Jenseits*. Concrete images, he argued, such as the belief in a personal reunion of the dead after death, could easily be unmasked as projections of human wishes. Abstract notions of a transcendent world as such, however, proved their idleness already by their abstraction from all concrete content.[38] According to this argument, only things that had some physical form could exist. Hence, those who had embraced the idea of an abstract *Jenseits* had in fact put its existence out of their mind.[39] The notion of an abstract *Jenseits* as such was, as Feuerbach saw it, already a symptom of doubt. Of course, a similar criticism could be launched against all kinds of religious concepts. As a result of such arguments, the idea of nonexistence was ascribed to the concept of *Jenseits* when it was established as key concept in the early 1830s. It did not so much cast doubt on the concept, but was instead part of its very essence.

By the 1840s in Germany, the moment and the context were ripe for *transcendence* and *immanence* to emerge. Again, whether *transcendence* denoted something that really existed was much in dispute. Søren Kierkegaard may have been one of the first who used the term as an affirmative theological cat-

36. David Friedrich Strauß, *Ausgewählte Briefe* (Bonn: Verlag Emil Strauß, 1895), 478; see Lütgert, *Religion,* vol. 2 (1925), 244.

37. Link, "*Leeres Jenseits,*" 63–79.

38. "The essence of theology is the transcendent, i.e. set outside of him, essence of man" (Das Wesen der Theologie ist das transzendente, außer den Menschen gesetzte Wesen des Menschen). Ludwig Feuerbach, "Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie," in *Sämtliche Schriften,* vol. 2, W. Bolin and F. Jodl, eds. (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 1904), 226.

39. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1840) (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 1969), 272. See also Simone Thielmann, "Den Himmel überlassen wir den Engeln und den Spatzen … Der Jenseitsbegriff in der Unsterblichkeitsdebatte um die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts," in Hölscher, *Jenseits,* 80–94.

egory, when in the late 1840s he argued against the "immanence" of Hegel's philosophy of consciousness.[40] On the other side were the well-known polemic rejections of *Jenseits* by materialists such as Karl Marx and Rudolph Virchow, or by freethinkers and free religionists such as David Friedrich Strauß, Ludwig Büchner, and Ernst Haeckel.[41] They no longer saw the *Jenseits* as a supplement to the present state of life, as it was by the romanticists, but rather as a deceptive puzzle delivered to the naïve public by spiritualists and idealists as much as by the clergy. For dealing with the perfection of human life they employed other concepts such as the future or the material, which gave an "immanent" superstructure to the empirical descriptions of the present world.

Nevertheless, in the human sciences *Jenseits* and *transcendence* were not simply pure illusions, but reality in its own right. The concepts were not excluded from empirical research or degraded to serve only as a foil for materialist philosophy; rather, they were raised to become religious key concepts by the late nineteenth century, when the young discipline of religious studies began to collect concepts of the beyond that existed in cultures far away from Europe or from contemporary times.[42] From religious studies the concept was transferred to academic theology around 1900[43] and adopted by the "two-level theology" of Catholic new scholasticism.[44]

In Protestant theology too, a broad and controversial theology of *transcendence* and of *Jenseits* emerged at the turn of the century, culminating in concepts of an immanent transcendence in theological writings such as those of Ernst Troeltsch and Paul Tillich.[45] They too added to the understanding of

40. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Zwo kleine ethisch-religiöse Abhandlungen* (1849), 2; M. Enders, "Transzendenz," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie,* vol. 10 (Basel: Schwabe, 1998), 1447ff.

41. Todd Weir, "*Keine Lücke mehr im Menschen, worin das Jenseits sich einnisten könnte:* Naturwissenschaft und Dissidenz in der frühen freireligiösen Bewegung," in Hölscher, *Jenseits,* 95–122.

42. Volkhard Krech, "Vom *paradiso terrestre* über die *Himmelsreise der Seele zum fundus animae*: Jenseitsvorstellungen als Thema der Religionswissenschaft im späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert," in Hölscher, *Jenseits,* 152–178.

43. The theological encyclopedia *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart,* vol. 3 (Tübingen, 1912), 291, was the first German encyclopedia with references to the new concept: "Jenseitsglaube: cf. Immanenz und Transzendenz Gottes, Welt, Eschatologie, Tod und Jenseits."

44. Bernhard Lang, "Die zweigeteilte Welt: *Jenseits* und *Diesseits* in der katholischen Theologie des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts," in Hölscher, *Jenseits,* 203–232.

45. Phrases like "the beyond can be imagined only as a consequence of the immanent" (das Jenseits kann nur als eine Folge des Diesseits vorgestellt warden) or "transcendence is the power of immanence" (Das Jenseits ist die Kraft des Diesseits) are frequent in their writings. See Alf Christophersen, "*Das Jenseits ist die Kraft des Diesseits*: Zur Entwicklung protestantisch-theologischer Transzendenzdeutungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," in Hölscher, *Jenseits,* 179–202.

theology as a discipline, which can speak of God only in terms of contradiction—as Paul Tillich observed in 1933: "Human expectation is always transcendent and immanent at once, to be more exact: the opposition doesn't exist for expectation. … In the expectation of the prophets … the immanent in fact is transcendent."[46] In other words, to be inside this world is to already be beyond this world. This is one of those contradictory figures of argument that modern theology employs for expressing the dialectic nature of God's presence in this world.

The Modern Concept of Spirit (*Geist*)

As a final example of the self-contradictory nature of religious concepts, comparable to the concepts of religion, God, and *Jenseits* or transcendence, I shall focus on the religious concept of spirit. In the eighteenth century this concept served, above all, the transformation of theological knowledge into secular knowledge and secular into theological. By the early nineteenth century it even rose in rank to become a key concept of the later so-called *Geisteswissenschaften* (literally the "science of spirits"), at the same time being opposed to scientific rationalism in phenomena such as spiritualism (*Spiritismus*).

The interaction of contradictory secular and theological positions may well be illustrated by two major disputes, which by the 1770s and the 1840s, respectively, dealt with the relationship of reason and history concerning the true meaning of the Bible. The first of these disputes, known as the Battle of the Fragments (*Fragmentenstreit*), involved Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who was at the time librarian at the Herzog August library at Wolfenbüttel. Lessing published fragments from an anonymous work in the library's journal that presented arguments in defense of an Enlightenment view of natural religion, and an attack on Lutheran orthodoxy. His major opponent in the debate was Johann Melchior Goeze, pastor at the Katharinenkirche in Hamburg. One of the points in the debate was about whether Christian religion was based in the Bible and how.

In this debate Lessing argued that the true religious content of the Bible could only be founded on reason, whereas taken literally the Bible would contain a lot of mistakes and inconsistencies.[47] Goeze replied that the "spirit" of the Bible, its true content, could not be separated from its "letter", that is, the literal expression of the Bible: "The letter is the spirit and the Bible is the religion." Goeze argued that "either the entire Bible was the word of God, namely

46. Paul Tillich, "Die sozialistische Entscheidung" (1933), in *Writings in Social Philosophy and Ethics,* Erdmann Sturm, ed. (Berlin: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1998), 365.

47. See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Sämtliche Schriften,* Karl Lachmann, ed., vol. 10 (Leipzig: Göschen, 1856), 36ff.

inspired by God or at least approved by him. In this case all was inerrable truth, or the Bible would lose its 'credibility'. For who was able to differentiate the essential from what might be dispensable?" According to Goeze, Lessing was on the way "to abandon[ing] the Bible for religion—but what kind of religion? Certainly not the Christian, which stands and falls with the Bible."[48]

The conflict was based on differing concepts of religious truth, one concerning historical tradition, the other rational interpretation of scripture. While Lessing on behalf of rational interpretation criticized the biblical tradition, Goeze valued the biblical writings, taken in their literal understanding, above all reason. In spite of being contradictory, both positions constantly referred to one another: in understanding the Bible as the work of man, Lessing included the idea that it was the external form of God's word, in the same way that in understanding the Bible as God's word, Goeze implied that it was man-made. Also, in both positions the "spirit" of religion was bound to the "letter" of the Bible and vice versa, because only as work of man could God's word be understood by man, and only as God's word would this work of man have the power of salvation. That is to say, the concepts of *spirit* and *letter, reason,* and *history* were each constructed in dialectical positions. They encompassed religious and theological as much as secular and scientific predicates. Only in elaborating these contradictions could they unfold their potential in discourse.

It was even possible to reverse the positions of Lessing and Goeze concerning the fundamental truth of religion, as can be demonstrated by means of the debate on the so-called "facta" of the Bible: According to Goeze, "facta" were historical events and as such immediate testimonies of the truth of religion. According to Lessing, however, they were nothing but hints pointing to a truth within and behind the historical facts. Here again the positions did not exclude, but rather included one another. Goeze did not deny the historicity of God's actions, and Lessing did not deny their rationality. In fact, they relied on each other in their arguments: religious truths based on reason and historical truth based on revelation referred to one another; they could not do without one another.

Here we can observe the antinomy of religious as well as of theoretical claims to the truth in general in modern times where we rely on historical thinking. Theoretical statements about the world can always be made rela-

48. The passage in German reads: "Der Buchstabe ist der Geist und die Bibel ist die Religion." Entweder sei die ganze Bibel Gottes Wort, d. h. "von Gott eingegeben oder wenigstens gebilligt", dann sei alles darin "unfehlbare Wahrheit", oder sie verliere insgesamt ihre "Zuverlässigkeit". Denn wer könne das "Wesentliche" vom Unwesentlichen in ihr unterscheiden? Lessing gebe "die Bibel preis, um die Religion zu retten—aber welche Religion? Gewiss nicht die christliche, als welche mit der Bibel steht und fällt", ibid., 29.

tive by historical arguments, but nevertheless they stand their ground as statements beyond all historical relativity. Concerning the Bible's claim to religious truth, the dialectical structure of opposite propositions melts together into a kind of self-contradictory conceptual unit: the historical relativization of religious concepts is always already included in their theoretical development, and vice versa.

Lessing's statement that "incidental historical truths can never serve as the proof of necessary rational truths"[49] could easily be turned around. When rational truths, as they were acknowledged at one time, lost their credibility after a while, they were in no better position than historical truths that had been proven wrong. Of course, this argument was not put forward in Lessing's time because the philosophy of reason was still too young for it to be questioned. But it was already implied in Goeze's accusation that Lessing's "natural theology" was going to shape its own religion by excluding everything that was not in line with it. The above argument was put forward explicitly seventy years later by Gustav Adolph Wislicenus, a pastor of free religion who was engaged in a conflict with Protestant orthodoxy.[50]

Between Wislicenus and his orthodox opponents, basically the same question was debated as had been between Goeze and Lessing seventy years before: the question of the credibility of the Holy Scripture, especially of the biblical reports of miracles. However, by that time the arguments and the concepts had radicalized. In his 1844 lecture in Köthen, a small town in Saxony, Wislicenus publicly declared that he did not believe "that Jesus was received by the Holy Spirit and born by a virgin, but that he had come into being in the same way as all men."[51] What is remarkable is that in his answer to the orthodoxy that had denounced this argument as "unbelief", Wislicenus did not invoke metahistorical reason anymore but "free morality" (*freie Sittlichkeit*) of the present age based on "science and culture" (*Wissenschaft und Bildung*).

When Wislicenus was confronted with the accusation of unbelief, a new constellation differing from that in Lessing's case emerged. Now not only was the Bible's claim of truth historically relativized, but reason, to which Lessing still subscribed as a meta-historical source of truth, was as well. In the 1840s Wislicenus was confronted with "liberal" orthodoxy that long ago pressed for a metaphorical interpretation when the letter of the Bible differed from present knowledge or moral norms: "whereby everybody takes the Bible just as he

49. Lessing, *Schriften,* 39.

50. Gustav Adolf Wislicenus, *Ob Schrift? Ob Geist? Verantwortung gegen meine Ankläger* (Leipzig: Wigand, 1845).

51. Ibid., 8: "dass Jesus empfangen sei vom heiligen Geist und geboren von einer Jungfrau, sondern … dass er ebenso entstanden sei, wie jeder andere Mensch."

wishes, and the rationalist in particular turns the Bible into a mere book, one that is written to suit what he thinks."[52]

Basically this was the same criticism that Goeze had made regarding Lessing's position, although under inverse premises. According to Wislicenus, it proved that historical criticism of reason not only affected the accessory parts of the Bible, but also its very essence.[53] While Lessing had criticized the Bible on behalf of meta-historical religious reasoning, Wislicenus criticized religious reasoning on behalf of a scientific culture, which had little respect for theological dogmas.

The ideological background of Wislicenus's argumentation was a new empirical understanding of reality that no longer adhered only to the truth criteria suggested by modern sciences. On the basis of this new understanding of reality, he declared that in most cases it was clear "what the text of the Bible is actually trying to say."[54] According to Wislicenus, in order to understand the Bible it was not necessary to find metaphorical interpretations; one only had to understand the historical milieu in which the Bible was written. Wislicenus accused liberal interpreters of foisting a different meaning on biblical writings than the intended one: "When explaining the Bible this way, they bend the words, and therefore they bend the concepts too, or vice versa."[55] In Wislicenus's view, historical concepts of reality—which is what man takes for reality—change over time. Hence, concerning the concept of spirit one could only say that the spirit was in constant transformation throughout history.

Returning to the fundamental hypothesis of this article, that religious concepts are constructed from contradictory propositions, the example of the concept of spirit again demonstrates how theological and secular knowledge contradict and yet penetrate each other: on the one hand, secular knowledge undermines the theological concept, but on the other, it also confirms it in terms of empirical reality. What is true in terms of empirical evidence is false in terms of theological speculation and vice versa.

52. Ibid., 23: "womit denn jeder aus der Bibel macht, was er will, und insbesondere der rationale Theolog ein Buch daraus macht, das ganz in seinem Sinne geschrieben ist."

53. Ibid., 25–26: "It comes now to the fact that in the old church, in codifying the normative authority of the Scripture, did not exclude what seemed to be incomprehensible is not; quite the contrary, took as the most important the true mystery of the realm of God and the obedience of belief for the virtue of all virtues (Es kommt nun aber dazu, dass die alte Kirche, welche die normative Autorität der Schrift festsetzte, das vermeintlich Unbegreifliche darin nicht etwa ausschloss, sondern im Gegenteil es für das Wichtigste, für das eigentliche Geheimnis des Reiches Gottes, und den Gehorsam des Glaubens daran für die Tugend aller Tugenden hielt)."

54. Ibid., 23: "was als wirklich gemeint ist."

55. Ibid.: "Mit Worten nimmt man es bei dieser Erklärungsweise nicht genau, und darum denn auch nicht mit Begriffen, oder umgekehrt."

The Remote Reality of Religious Concepts

Taking all this into account, one has to concede that in modern times religious concepts are constituted by contradictory propositions. Their objects are declared to be existent and to be nonexistent at the same time. To emphasize the contradictory structure of religious concepts is not to say that they are nonsense; on the contrary, to be contradictory is a necessary implication of expressing the truth of God's presence and message under the condition of secular societies. Also, to combine contradictory propositions is not an expression of the undetermined character of religious concepts; rather, it is an expression of their claim for both empirical and theological truth. In descriptions of religious concepts one can observe two different strategies of combining assertion of existence with that of nonexistence. Both were exploited in nineteenth-century discourse on religion, when science tended to become more and more secular. One was the historicization of concepts, by which their truth was located in a remote past; the other was the dislocation of their truth to cultures remote in space.

The historicization of religious concepts began rather early. For instance, many enlightened scholars of the eighteenth century explained miracles as acts of God, which in modernity did not take place any more, but which had happened in former times.[56] Concepts of a personal God were ascribed to the youth of mankind, which by now was overcome. The same was said about the origin of the Holy Scripture and of many other ideas. According to an enlightened hypothesis, God had dictated the New Testament to the evangelists. By ascribing ideas or events to remote times, one could vouch for their veracity without confessing it in present times. From the 1830s onward encyclopedias such as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* or the *Brockhaus* began to describe

56. Compare Lessing's answer to Johann Daniel Schumann of Hannover, who (following Origenes) had declared miracles as warrants for the truth of Christian religion. Lessing did not question the credibility of the biblical reports of miracles in general, only their credibility in the present. The reason was that such miracles did not happen any more: "If I had lived at the time of Christ, presages that had been fulfilled by him would have called my attention indeed. If I had seen him doing miracles I wouldn't have had any doubt that they had been true miracles … But me living in the eighteenth century when no miracles exist any more … what is the reason? Because this demonstration of spirit and power has neither spirit nor power any more, but has dropped to human reports of spirit and power (Wenn ich zu Christi Zeiten gelebt hätte, so würden mich die in seiner (Christi, LH) Person erfüllten Weissagungen allerdings auf ihn sehr aufmerksam gemacht haben. Hätte ich nun gar gesehen, ihn Wunder tun, hätte ich keine Ursache zu zweifeln gehabt, dass es wahre Wunder gewesen.… Aber ich, der ich in dem 18. Jahrhundert lebe, in welchem es keine Wunder mehr gibt … woran liegt es?—daran, dass dieser Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft jetzt weder Geist noch Kraft mehr hat, sondern zu menschlichen Zeugnissen von Geist und Kraft herabgesunken ist)." Wislicenus, *Ob Schrift?,* 9–10.

religious concepts by explaining their origin in ancient cultures, while general descriptions were almost nonexistent. In today's religious encyclopedias, historical and general descriptions usually stand side by side. But the general claims of religious concepts are reduced to claims of certain theological doctrines, which include the aspect of their historical relativity.[57]

Corresponding to the remote past for historians of religion, scholars of religious studies took remote space—that is to say, not their home country—as a place where they could ascribe a reality to religious concepts, something that was not possible at home. This kind of alienated reality was already constructed by authors of early modern Europe who wanted to argue that these concepts were not pure superstition but had to be taken seriously as different forms of worship to God in these remote regions. In religious studies at the end of the nineteenth century, such ethnographic inquiries adopted a systematic form: for instance, they retraced the concepts of a transcendent world in remote religious cultures, which the authors of such studies did not believe in at all. Nevertheless, they claimed that these concepts referred to real objects, because for the supporters of such concepts they were an unquestioned reality. Claiming the reality of what they referred to seemed sufficient to subject them to scientific observation and classification.[58]

Ascribing a remote reality to religious objects even today is a very common practice; it enables one to accept religious concepts as real without believing in their reality. Historians, sociologists, and scholars of religious studies usually leave the question open of whether these objects really exist, and if so, what kind of rational meaning they may have. Demonstrating the existence of such concepts far away replaces the necessity of accepting them as realities here and now. This fact may once more serve to demonstrate the contradictory structure of religious concepts: many people seem to be unable to speak of the reality of religious objects today without pushing them into a world far away; however, in doing so, they do not settle the question of their reality, but only defer the answer.

57. See the Protestant encyclopedia *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart,* and the Catholic encyclopedia *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche,* 4th ed.

58. See Krech, *Jenseitsvorstellungen.*