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Gedanken über die Religion: Der “stille” Krieg zwischen Schelling und Schleiermacher (1799–1807), by Ryan Scheerlinck. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-holzboog Verlag e.K., 2020. 221 pp., € 68.00, ISBN 9783772829307.

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The title of Scheerlinck’s study on the relationship between two of the most important thinkers of Romanticism, the philosopher F.W.J. Schelling and the theologian F.D.E. Schleiermacher, undoubtedly alludes to the latter’s main work from 1799, the popular *Speeches On Religion*. This text, together with the 1807 dialogue, *Christmas Eve Celebration*, also written by Schleiermacher, defines the time frame of the investigation, which is understood as a visualization of a dialogue between two great minds, and not as an investigation into their mutual influences and dependencies.¹ Another thesis mentioned here is that the “silent war”² between these two thinkers, as Schleiermacher expressed it, extended over a much longer period of time, namely up to Schelling’s late philosophy.³ The main theme of the discussion, as Scheerlinck puts it, is revealed in the different attitudes of both thinkers to the relationship between theology and philosophy. While Schelling, from the point of view of his efforts towards a positive philosophy, advocates a scientific representation of Christianity,

¹ Ryan Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion. Der “stille” Krieg zwischen Schelling und Schleiermacher (1799–1807)* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog Verlag e.K., 2020), XIII.

² Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, XIIn2.

³ See Wolfgang Ullmann (Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, XII).



Schleiermacher strictly rejects a rational construction of religion. The presentation of this mutually stimulating exchange is predominantly based on “peripheral texts,”⁴ i.e. texts that are less well known as they were written anonymously or published by the literary estates of the authors in question. This makes the already complex editorial situation confusing in some cases. The presentation is further limited to Schelling’s perspective, whose following four works are laid out chronologically by Scheerlinck: the parodistic poem, *Heinz Widerporst’s Epicurean Confession of Faith* (1799), which also contains an early critical reaction to Schleiermacher’s *Speeches*; the *Lectures on the Method of Academic Study* (1803), to which Schleiermacher responded with a review; Schelling’s review, *Christmas Eve Celebration* (1807), which discusses Schleiermacher’s dialogue of the same title; the dialogue *Clara or On nature’s connection to the Spirit World*, subsequently analysed by Scheerlinck with the greatest attention.

The chapter, “The Epicurean,” reconstructs the context in which Schelling’s poem was drafted in the network of the early Jena Romantics. The poem contains a criticism of the efforts to renew religion as expressed in Novalis’ Fragment, *Christianity or Europe*, and Schleiermacher’s *Speeches*. In the poem’s “conceptual figure,” Heinz Widerporst, Scheerlinck identifies less an intellectual critic representing a doctrine than “the embodiment of the way of life implied or required by a doctrine,” which is directed with “affect” against the ideal of the “human type” of Schleiermacher and Novalis.⁵ In the end, Widerporst is also looking for a new religion, which, however, does not coincide with the ideas of those two thinkers. Against a religion centered purely on spirit, Widerporst depicts a religion of sensuality, intellect, and the intuition of nature. Such a religion will have freed itself from the immature “fear” of the unknown (the “giant spirit” qua “earth spirit”), an achievement which the author interprets as man’s insight into his identity with nature, as well as inversely into nature’s spiritual essence.⁶ Scheerlinck recognizes the ‘Epicurean’ trait of the *Confession of Faith* in the way it founds religion on the intuition or philosophy of nature, which at the same time stands for a scientific knowledge of religion such as Schleiermacher’s position resolutely contradicts.

With Schelling’s repeated reading of the *Speeches* in 1801 and the associated change in his judgment, the “silent war” takes off again. The chapter, “The Herald,” takes up Schelling’s praise of Schleiermacher in the seventh lecture of his *On University Studies* (SW5: 207-352). This initial praise, however, develops over the following two lectures into a criticism or a “counter-proposal to Schleiermacher’s determination of religion.”⁷ Here Scheerlinck advances the thesis that Schelling’s reading of the *Speeches* may have inspired him to write the eight lecture, on religion. While Schleiermacher adheres to the primacy and independence of (Christian) religion, primarily defined by intuition and feeling, Schelling argues that theology should be grounded as a science. To do so, it should adopt the form of a historical construction of Christianity aiming

⁴ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, XV.

⁵ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 6.

⁶ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 12–14.

⁷ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 27.

to identify Christianity as the one true religion. For the philosopher, this project is prefigured in the (intellectual) intuition of the absolute in nature and history, which thus recognizes both polytheism (mythology) and Christianity as forms of revelation. Schleiermacher's reply follows with his review of *On University Studies* one year after its publication. The focus is on his understanding of Christ. The theologian denies Schelling's idea of "reconciliation," according to which Christ symbolizes both the climax of the old world of gods and the turning point to the new world in combination with the idea of a timeless Christianity, which undermines the historical uniqueness of the birth of Christ as an event. Criticizing the ideal or mythological character of this speculative construction, Schleiermacher demands "support by a historical individual." He recognizes the demand for a theology of history, which, in "high arbitrariness," Schelling "disregards."⁸

In 1806 Schleiermacher's dialog, *Christmas Eve Celebration*, appeared, which Scheerlinck considers to be an answer to Schelling's construction of Christianity in *University Studies*. Schelling's review of Schleiermacher's new text followed in 1807. The chapter, "The Educated Despiser," analyzes this renewed exchange of blows, which, according to Scheerlinck, represents the "breakthrough" of the "decisive difference"⁹ between the two thinkers: the "concept of fall" or the idea of "redemption." Among the various speeches of the *Christmas Eve Celebration*, the querulous figure of Leonhardt stands out, obviously bearing traits of Schelling's position. As a representative of a rationalistic criticism of religion, Leonhardt, like Schelling, supports a mythical understanding of Christianity that is derived from the lack of historical facts. At the same time, however, the "idea of the Redeemer" falls away, insofar as it is linked to a unique historical event. Ernst, on the other hand, emphasizes the "human need for redemption." His speech is followed by the historical theological draft of Eduard, who claims that the discrepancy between appearance and idea, caused by the "fall" and ensnaring the individual, can only be removed by redemption.¹⁰ Schelling's review, unsurprisingly, centres on the figure of Leonhardt, from whose point of view the philosopher undertakes a critical analysis of the family members present and their constellation with one another. His review thus amounts to an "apology of Leonhardt."

In this way, Schelling criticizes the religious practices of the discussants, whom he accuses of a "lack of universality" and "subjectivity" due to their Protestant culture, their exclusion of philosophy or their emotional bigotry.¹¹ Schelling's understanding of the idea of Christianity, interpreted by Scheerlinck as 'mythical,' differs sharply from Schleiermacher's position. The latter insists on historicity, and advances an 'empirical' understanding of those themes Schelling treated as concepts of reason, namely *redemption*, *fall* and the *church*. In Schelling's opinion, this approach leads to various inconsistencies. For example, the concept of the church as a remedy leading

⁸ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 53f.

⁹ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 55.

¹⁰ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 61–63.

¹¹ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 73–76.

to salvation is not compatible with the idea of an empirical institution, since the difference among believers from the world of ideas caused by the fall continues to exist.

The fourth and final chapter of the study is entitled “The Teacher,”¹² and is devoted to Schelling’s dialogue, *Clara or On Nature’s Connection to the Spirit World*. The setting of this text, which includes conversations about the immortality of the soul, is autumn in the country, on Christmas Eve, and at the threshold of spring. It is clearly reminiscent of Schleiermacher’s *Christmas Eve Celebration*. Scheerlinck’s interpretation contradicts the common thesis on the dating of this fragment, which is usually associated with Caroline’s death in the fall of 1809. Instead, he cites various pieces of evidence that place it in the context of Schelling’s writings on the philosophy of identity (*Philosophy and Religion* (1804), *Bruno* (1802), and others. Remarkable are the reflections on the way the contents of the three conversations in *Clara* are structured, which Scheerlinck places in analogy with the gradual introduction into the mysteries, as it is carried out in *Bruno* and presented in *Philosophy and Religion* respectively. With regard to this schema, however, Clara does not reach the highest level of “imageless watching” according to Scheerlinck, which is why the dialogue remains a fragment.¹³

Scheerlinck also surprises us with new views on the constellation of the three figures in the dialogue. Thus, he suggests that the speeches delivered by the priest and the doctor proceed with the “intention” of having a “salutary or edifying” effect on Clara. At the same time, this interpretation undermines these dialogues’ claim to “truth.”¹⁴ Scheerlinck considers the supposed “mission” of leading Clara out of her rapturous melancholy “back to nature and thus placing her on the basis without which access to the spirit world cannot be found” to have ultimately failed, since the character Clara “hardly undergoes any development.”¹⁵ This creates the impression of a dystopian educational novel that does not culminate in the “transfiguration” of the protagonist in mind or the intellectual appropriation of the knowledge of immortality that Clara feels in herself, but rather in her death. Scheerlinck thus casts doubt on the scholarship viewing the dialogue as a “second *Phaedo*” (Hubert Beckers, Xavier Tilliette),¹⁶ just as he sees the real topic of the dialogue less in the question of the “immortality of the soul” than in the “problem of the transition from nature to the spirit world.”¹⁷

The interpretation of the figure of Clara as a “non-philosopher,”¹⁸ embodying the “natural or pre-philosophical consciousness,” which at the same time can be understood as a “mythicizing,”¹⁹ as well as the associated reference to natural theology, are convincing. Unfortunately, Scheerlinck only briefly touches on the

¹² Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 87–195.

¹³ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 119–121.

¹⁴ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 106.

¹⁵ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 111f.

¹⁶ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 118.

¹⁷ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 94f.

¹⁸ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 121.

¹⁹ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 185.

methodology of the maieutic process, which is so typical of Socratic dialogue, and it could be addressed more strongly. Such a reading would not only change the constellation of the three interlocutors shown here, but also the interpretation of Clara's course of education, which is drawn in a rather negative way. The nameless doctor and the priest, who is only referred to as the narrator, actually provide Clara with the means or tools available in natural philosophy and theology to translate the knowledge she feels in herself into concepts and make it visible to the inner eye. The representation of philosophy of nature by the doctor and theology by the priest finally raises the question: Who is Clara?

Scheerlinck clearly worked out the essential characteristic of the central theme of the text, the presentation of the doctrine of immortality, which can be identified as a Christian anthropology. It is the "desire for wholeness"²⁰ that is expressed in people. Above all, this desire refers to the preservation of corporality in the "triad of body, soul and spirit", which in turn contrasts with the ancient idea of a "dyad of body and soul."²¹ A striking application of these opposing positions to the doctrine of immortality, as developed by Schelling in the writings of his early identity-philosophy such as *Philosophy and Religion* and the *System of the Whole of Philosophy and of Philosophy of Nature in Particular* (1804), on the one hand, and on the other, in the *Stuttgart Seminars* (1810), which belongs to Schelling's later philosophy of freedom, could, however, just as well make another reading of *Clara* plausible with a later dating than the one suggested here.

Scheerlinck sees the relation of Schelling's *Clara* to Schleiermacher's *Christmas Eve Celebration* less in the 'feeling' provided for the philosophy of faith with an epistemic value than in Schelling's "political" aspirations:²² He sought to make the natural theology represented by Clara's perspective fruitful for overcoming Schleiermacher's distinction between the 'educated' and the 'uneducated.'

While the "silent war" between the philosopher and the theologian on view in their writings also ends with the works listed here, this should not prevent today's reader from following, on Scheerlinck's recommendation, the consequences of the dialogue thereby initiated in the authors' subsequent works. It would then be possible to read Schelling's late philosophy as a "radical alternative" to Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith*.²³

²⁰ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 147–176.

²¹ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 157–160.

²² Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 204f.

²³ Scheerlinck, *Gedanken über die Religion*, 85f., 197f.

