Lessing, from the Standpoint of His Religious Views Before 1765

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"Lessing from the standpoint of his religious views before 1766."
Selling, from the standpoint of his religious views before 1765.

Those who have discussed the religious principles of Selling have almost invariably based their investigations and conclusions on the three great works of Selling's life which have to do with religious subjects—Die Erziehung des Menschen, Geschlechter, Nathan der Weise, and Selling's arguments in the series of controverses called forth by his publication of the Holzschnitt-Fragmente—all these within the last decade of his life. To be sure these contain the best evidence; and it is the conclusions at which the mature man arrived in which we are the most interested. But it may also be of some benefit to consider for a moment the opinions which the younger Selling held so as to be able to note the growth he made as well as to see how early he may have developed some of
the ideas which he first set forth sys-
tematically only in his latest writings.
For being Waldensian he opinions and
he tells us as early as 1753 that "die
Religion ist schon seit verschiedenen
Jahren die Beschäftigung meiner
ernsthafteren Muse gewesen."

No attempt is going to be made to
place Lessing in a certain class of
men or in a specified school
whether as leader nor as follower
does he belong there. Just as little
as his independent mind and nature
permitted him to be a docile disciple
in any movement, just as little
did it crave to be looked up to as
a leader or teacher in any line of
thought or action. As in literature,
so in his religious views, does
Lessing occupy a position apart:

On the other hand, it cannot be
maintained that Lessing stood en-
tirely alone in the opinions he held
or that he was uninfluenced by
the prevailing ideas of his time.
However the question of circumstances versus character may be decided, it must remain uncontested that no man can be entirely outside the sphere of influence of his contemporaries. Neither was Lessing, though he towered above them not only in sentences of thought and bundles of intellect, but also in the facility and directness with which he gave expression to his ideas.

Lessing can scarcely be called orthodox. Neither were the times in which he lived orthodox. In fact we discover from the first of the century a distinct opposition to the old and traditional religious dogmas of the Evangelical and Roman Churches. The Church of the times immediately succeeding the Reformation had gradually entrenched itself in a fortress of creeds and doctrines which the spirit of reverence for tradition guarded against all attacks of enemies outside the sphere of the Church.
These creeds had become fixed and fossilized, presided over initially by a fossilized orthodox clergy and the religious life of the people encompassed in this frame of dead dogmas had become with them powerless and lifeless.

But a new spirit sprung up with the beginning of the eighteenth century and put a new face on religious conditions. Within the Lutheran Church itself arose a class of men who later called themselves Pietists, who upheld individual belief and the purity of the private life against the despotic rule of creed and dogma and the dogmatic preaching of the orthodox pastors. This movement of Pietism with Spener as its leader grew to wield great influence in Germany and became a formidable enemy to the artificial structures reared by the clergy of the old church.

These were days too of strife
between sects - Luthiane against Reformed and it was plain that certain trouble was brewing in the religious world. The old orthodoxy had plainly served its time and new forces were springing up in more than one quarter. The Pietists cared little for a science of theology. They did not trouble themselves about the truth or falsity of certain tenets of the old church, but were concerned altogether with maintaining a standard of purity of life for the individual in accordance with the teachings of the Bible, rather than trusting for salvation to a set of dry formulae which belonged, not to Christianity as a whole, but had been developed by a sect.

On the other hand sprang up a movement just as much opposed to the existing orthodoxy as church but having nothing in common with Pietism. This movement was introduced by Leibniz with Wolff as its
propagator at Halle.

While in the old church the Bible, in the beginning the foundation of all, had come to be in a manner subordinate to creeds and was interpreted in the light of doctrines already established, which was often the cause of greatly perverting its meaning, the followers of Lessing and Wolff, the founders of the natural theology endeavored to interpret the teachings of the Bible according to reason and subjected everything to this critical test. Wolff disseminated his doctrines in the university at Halle and Wolfianism came to be a formidable opponent both of the existing orthodoxy and of Pietism. It introduced as its point of support what finally became the watch-word of the Century—judgment according to reason. Everything in relation to the Bible—its origin, growth, principles—had to come under the search light
of reason and what before in the teaching of the Church had been shrouded in mystery was now brought out into the open.

The deistical movement of the eighteenth century had its origin in England with Lord Bolingbroke as its chief representative there. From England it crossed the Channel into France which in its turn had a great influence on Germany. Its mouthpiece in France was Voltaire with whom Lessing during his residence at Berlin came into personal contact. Voltaire was not himself an atheist, but he was a representative of that deism which among many of his followers degenerated into atheism. He believed in a God but a God who was far removed from the little world of man and the private concerns of the individual. The religion of the deists in the end resolved itself into a system of morals. The churches,
Protestant and Roman were alike to Voltaire both forms of the same superstition. He ridiculed the fundamental doctrine of the church, the idea of original sin, of the fall, the atonement of Christ, and revelation. All alike came under the rain of his scathing withcisms.

From these movements it is easy to perceive that the trend of the spirit of the Century was away from all orthodoxy religion and toward free-thinking, an attempt to measure and judge of everything according to the standard of reason, cold calculating, inflexible. If we listen for a moment to the words of one who had remained a faithful adherent of the Lutheran church, we shall see how conditions were viewed by those finer spirits who were of the bitter part of the church. It is Lessing's father himself who laments the condition of religious thought in his day and complains that in the many
changes which have taken place in the last fifty years now have seen the
utterment of the Christian religion; that while the day of persecution
has gone even a greater evil has taken its place—for the day of free-
thinking—Freiglauberei—has come and the minds of men are ruled
by it. "Der nun sich gefressene
Glaube hat sich auf den Thron
der Aberglauberei gesetzt. Die heilige
Schrift hat jedermann lesen aber
auch schänden dürfen." Thus was,
morover, an indifference toward
religion even among those who
called themselves Christians and
no good religious books were written
or read.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was the
son of a Lutheran minister in the
days when it was fully expected
that the oldest son should follow
in the footsteps of his father. Not
only was Gottfried Lessing himself a
philosopher, but lack of him for long
generations extended a line of men of the same calling. Lessing was the first one in many a family to break the succession of mayors, advocates, and pastors. His grandfather Theophilius Lessing, a man of large ability, had chosen as subject for his doctor's thesis "Von der Toleranz der Religionen." Johann Gotthard Lessing, the father of the author, was a scholar and a theologian, a man of talent, the pastor in the small town of Kamenz where Lessing was born. The father had written much on theological subjects, had translated theological works from French and English, and was really above the station which he occupied in life. Altho he was a strictly orthodox member of the Lutheran church, still he was not radical in his adherence to the one sect, but represented rather the broader idea of the opposition of Protestantism to the Papacy. On that idea was concentrated his zeal and
not on petty controversies and backkitchens of classes and sects.

The mother of Lessing was the daughter of a pastor but she is not thought to have excited much influence over her son though she had most firmly set her heart on his becoming a minister and the disappointment of her hopes hurt her deeply.

Unless we are to consider that excess of any one thing, however good it may be in itself, creates a distaste for it, Lessing's early training certainly had a decided tendency to start him aright in path this parents wished him to follow. Such a home would necessarily be pervaded by a distinctly religious atmosphere; and from his earliest childhood Lessing was surrounded by a spirit of reverence for religious things. And whatever may be said to the contrary, it seems more than probable to one who reads Lessing with this early training in mind, that this
spirit exercised a lasting influence on his life. Leiser, as we have remarked was not orthodox, he was in essence of the word not a Christian, but the spirit of mockery of religious things which so often characterize the writings of many critics on religious subjects is ever absent from Leiser's words, and always he bowed his head in reverence before the religion of his father even tho' he most emphatically denounced the tenets and creed of some of its professors. Now in his writings is a trace found of the rude razzle which Voltaire so often employed in his criticisms of the Bible.

Prayers were constant in Leiser's home and as soon as he could talk he was taught passages from the Bible and his first poetry was hymns. This influence was not destined however to remain long undisturbed. The school boy Leiser had as instructor a young man named Heinitz, a disciple of the movement of Illuminism-Auf-
flaring—and was known as a free-thinker. He wrote an article on "The Stage as a School for Oratory" and was attacked immediately by all orthodox believers, Lessing's father among them; and the boy was consequently withdrawn from his influence; however great or little that may have been, Lessing was then further prepared for the Fürstenschule at Meissen by Pastor Leiber and he entered there in the year 1741. Here, too, the religious atmosphere was all-prevailing. The Fürstenschule had been established for the children of rich and poor alike with the sole purpose of training up men who should be defenders of the Protestant religion and strong in the Evangelical faith. Here were to be formed theologians and pastors and the discipline and instruction were in accordance with this aim. The sphere of life was narrow, the discipline extremely strict, and the me-
instruction, while very thorough, all
ended along the line. Twenty-five
hours a week were devoted to devo-
tional services and exposition of
the Bible. Seeing himself however,
stands as a striking example of
the fact that the mill did not
always grind out orthodoxy grain.
It must have been with his brother
in mind that Karl Leisung said of
the pupils at Meisen: "Sie beteten
nicht aber frommelten sehr wenig,
und nur mehr vom Studium als vom
Beten hielt studierte ohne zu beten."

We may feel confident that Leisung
studied for that is characteristic of
him through life but we doubt
as to his equal industry in devotion.
Even as early as this the boy must
have made up his mind that
the calling for which his parents had
destined him was not to be his;
for his efforts were certainly not
in that direction. We have, however,
no express statement as to the fact.
He developed here that acuteness of mind, that love for delving to the bottom of the matter, that characterized what he did all through life. More than that, he exhibited that independence of spirit and disregard for established authority which probably caused one of the inspectors of the school to speak of him as "ein guter Knebel nur etwas mutiger." The study of the ancients, which in the course was made entirely subordinate to the study of the Bible, he made an end in itself. In short, his young mind received here a stimulus toward mathematics, philosophy, natural science and literature. Everything but religion.

By the time Lessing was seventeen years old, he had so far outgrown the restricted course at Meissen that he rebelled against staying there longer and was sent to the university at Leipzig.

At this point it seems as if
the "Zufall" of which leaving himself
so often speaks had entered in to still
further divert the youth's mind from
orthodox religious pursuits. Witten-
berg, the home of the Reformation,
and not Leipzig was the university
which a student of theology would
naturally be expected to attend in
order to be in the proper atmosphere
and gain the best results. But Le-
pzig's father was not rich and
Leipzig was the eldest of many sons
so the office of a free Stelle at Leip-
zig was sufficient to cause a division
in favor of that university and
Leipzig was entered there in 1746 as a
student in theology.

There was no official theological
stir or excitement in Leipzig at the
time when Lessing entered the uni-
versity. No movement had gone on
from there as Pietism and Wolffian
influence had from Halle. So far the
old orthodoxy had not been greatly
disturbed though Gottsched stood for

Wolfianism. But the professors of theology still taught the same dry, lifeless theology in the same dry, lifeless manner. Thus there was very little in the city or in the university to draw Lessing toward a study of orthodoxy theology, and on the other hand everything to distract him. For Leipzig was at this time the literary and social centre of Germany and the university was the centre of the city. It was the home of the aristocracy and of the well-to-do middle classes and full of life and activity—truly as Lessing wrote home to his mother “a little Paris.” There were congregated the learned minds of the day, Gellert at the head of his school, and Goethe at encouraging the theater and French taste in literature. People's attention was drawn to science, literature, philosophy, but not to religion. Thrown into this maze of life and
action while still fresh from the quiet, secluded life at Meissen, the boy lessing lived for a time a life even more retired and isolated than he had there.

To his mother he wrote describing his first weeks at the university: "Jetzt bei den Büchern, nur mit mir selbst beschäftigt, dachte ich ihm so selten an die übrigen Menschen als vielleicht an Gott. But lessing was not the nature to continue long a life so shut off from his fellow men and he soon plunged with all the ardor of his soul into the busy scenes around him. His thoughts now of ever settling his thoughts on study for another lutheran pastor. And if he still had clung to that idea, the friendships he made were not of the nature to draw him more towards it.

Most intimate perhaps of these, the one which gave his solicitous parents the most uneasiness and concern, was that with Mylius a young writer and decidedly a freethinker, condemned most severely by orthodox
thinkers because of his heretical views on the miracles of the Bible. Mylius looked with contempt upon the "kümmeliche orthodoxie" and published a paper which he called the "Freigest." He said of himself that he was ein Weltweiser, der die Vernunft und die Jugend liebt und die Vorurtheile und Laster hasst. As a Druck he believed only in a device "Wirkmeister" and in the immortality of the soul.

It was through Mylius that Lessing became acquainted with the theater and had his interest in the drama so thoroughly and significantly aroused. There, too, he became intimate with that class of comedians who aroused so much the apprehension of his parents.

So much for Lessing's life outside of the university. Inside he pursued his studies with zeal, if not, as he himself confessed, with system or definite purpose. In the university of Leipzig at that time the bright lights were
Johann August Ernesti and Johann Christ, the founders of the new system of philological study of the eighteenth century, and exponents of the critical-historical movement. From Ernesti, living gained a lively interest in the old writers, and from Christ who was a man of rich intellect and culture, and acute historical insight, an increased impulse toward the study of the old poets and a dictate for Gottsched and his school. But he was influenced by them too in what was more important for his spiritual development. Ernesti was regarded as the founder of the new exegetical school whose dominant purpose was to secure an interpretation of the scriptures according to their own language, and not in the light of previously existing dogmas or prejudices of the church, to subject the utterances of the Bible to the light of reason, and let them stand or fall on their own merits. He was nominally orthodox but wi-
dependent in his views.

Kästner, too, brought together the brightest intellects of Leipzig in his philosophical disputations and Lessing was not slow in being drawn into controversies of his own with his various friends where he soon learned to doubt all until he had tested and proved by reason.

These men perhaps more than any others among his instructors at the university exercised over Lessing a double influence and brought him into touch not only with a new taste in literature but with a new spirit in theology. In this way the boy in his new surroundings and susceptible to all influences brought to bear upon him was truly introduced at the same time to two of the forces which were at work undermining the old established creeds of the Church—a new and to an orthodoxy way of thinking, a dangerous attitude toward the scriptures.

*Hagedorn, History of the Church in 17th and 18th Centuries.*
Lessing's parents, hearing of the company which their son was keeping at Leipzig, and disapproving most heartily of his intimacy with the Freygeist, Mylius, called him home on the pretex that his mother was ill. While there he wrote a sermon for his mother, whom he had so bitterly disappointed, in order to prove to her that if he chose he could "alle Tage Pfarrer werden könne." But though he had, by the time he returned to Leipzig, partly at least reconciled his parents to the course of action he had taken, he gave them no hope of ever seeing him in the pulpit of an Luthera Church.

Lessing's intimacy with Mylius continued, and in 1748 he followed him to Berlin where he was given employment on a paper of which Mylius was editor.

The atmosphere of the city of Berlin was at this time perhaps no more conducive to fostering
orthodox belief than Leipzig had been. The influence of Frederick the Great was everywhere strongly felt and feared, though he was never favoured by the great ruler, was always his admirer and now looked up to him with great reverence.

Frederick's leaning toward French ways and ideas made him peculiarly susceptible to the new freedom of spirit which was at this time rapidly making its way through Germany, especially as the war so slavishly influenced by Voltaire the leader of the new thought movement in France. Freedom was demanded in everything. The censorship of the press was for a while removed and then on account of the abuse of the privilege was again put into operation. The spirit of immodesty in literature and in religion was abroad and whoever breathed the atmosphere of Berlin could not well remain unaffected by it.
Voltaire was an active advocate of tolerance and Frederick had been infected by it through him. Not the same tolerance as that of Lessing, as we shall see, but it doubtless had its influence on the youth especially through Voltaire's 'Essais sur les moeurs et l'esprit des Nations' the key note of which is tolerance.

Some time after Lessing's arrival in Berlin, we read in a letter to his father what sounds as if the youth were still trying to make himself believe that he is perfectly regular in his belief and as if it were not only only his father but himself as well that he is trying to assure that all is well. "Wie haben Sie sich vorstellen können dass ich, wenn ich auch nach Wien gegangen wäre, deshalb meine Religion würde verändert haben? Daraus kann ich schlussweise sehr Sie wider mich einnehmen sein müssen. Doch Gott, hoffe ich, soll mir Gelegenheit
gehör sowohl meine Liebe gegen meine Religion als gegen meine Eltern deutlich genug an Tag zu legen. Und again, soon after, he tried to justify his leaning toward the theater and his love for play writing. "Drei Beweise waren ein Komödiensschreiber kein guter Christ sein könne, denn ich nicht begründen. Ein Komödiensschreiber ist ein Mensch der die Last der auf ihre lächerlichen Sitten schildert. Darf denn ein Christ über die Last der nicht lachen? Und wenn ich nun gar versproche eine Komödie zu machen, die nicht nur die Hym. Theologen lesen son-
den auch loben sollen? Nie wenn ich eine auf die Freiheit und auf die Verächter dines Stauden möchte!"

This last letter touches upon a point which introduces us to some of the earliest of Lessing's writings which bear in any degree whatsoever upon his religious standpoint.

Although it was not until almost the end of Lessing's literary career—of
his life indeed— that we have anything from his pen from which we can get anything which approaches an organized statement of his system of theology—if it may be called that—still it is apparent to one who reads many of his writings from his Leipzig Career on—that from his earliest years he maintained the liveliest interest in religious subjects. True, one who had been early trained as Lessing had been and who had his family traditions behind him could not well be utterly indifferent to such matters; but more than that it was in the nature of the man. Lessing did not live on the surface of things. Life with him was a serious, earnest matter and in the wide field of thought over which his active mind ranged the subject of religion could scarcely fail to receive more than a passing interest.

Although we have in Lessing's own words the declaration of his primary
object in writing the play called the 'Freigeist,' one cannot help feeling convinced on reading it that his motive was more to express his contempt for the narrow prejudices of the orthodox clergy than to decry free-thinking. It is thought by some that the model for the character of Theophan was Lessing's father. However that may be, it is true that Theophan represents the real Christian, the heart and feeling of the play and is a type of the best of the class upon which Lessing looked with respect if he did not altogether share their views. On the other hand Adiast is the representative of Versunk, Lessing himself in no one of the characters. While he holds the character of the Freigeist up to ridicule, at the same time he lets his satire fall heavily upon those who regard the Freigeist as a monster of evil. The defects in both he gives expression to in what he has
Doubtless, however, a certain attitude on the part of Adriaen is characteristic of living at this time in his residence at Berlin. Adriaen is not represented as being a true atheists but rather as forcing himself to adhere and defend certain doctrines which in reality he does not more than half believe. We can infer with a good deal of certainty that living himself was at this time in a state of doubt and indecision but was trying to find his way to the light. In one of his letters to his father at this time are the words, "Der die einmal kluglich gezweifelt hat und durch den Weg der Untersuchung zur Ueberzeugung geland hat oder sich unzweifellos noch dazu gejagen hat." To bypass the question

Der Trug der Zeit
came all through life, “What is truth?”

It was a problem he was continually trying to solve. Yet, strange as it may seem, he seems liked this state of doubting and striving for truth. He once said that if God should hold out to him both hands, in one hand Truth, in the other Doubt, and ask him to choose, he would choose Doubt and say, “Father, pure Truth is for Thee alone.”

The play results in the triumph of Heart over Reason, personified in Thomaus, our cold and critical Reason, personified in Adrast. This attitude agrees with that taken by Leibnitz in some of his other early works, the “Gedanken über die Herrnhüter,” in which Thun is represented as the essence of man’s purpose rather than “Vernunft.”

For “Herz” means not “Schwarmerei,” but the right impulse of the heart which leads to right living, and “Vernunft” not the legitimate process of finding one’s way seriously to the
truth, but permitted reason which gnarles and argues for the mere sake of the argument, and acts out of mistaken motives. Theophan Erige is this thought when he says to Adrast: "Es (Ihr Herz) ist zu gut. Ihren Geist zu dienen, den ein Ammen von Freundlichkeit zu glänzen- den Irrthümern dahinleitet und der aus Begierde merkt zu werden, Sie mit aller Gewalt zu etwas machen will war nur Funde der Jugend, war nur Böswicht, sein sollte. Wenn Sie es wie Sie wollen - Friedriker, starker Geist, Drit. ---- Es ist ein Ungeheuer, es ist die Schande der Menschheit. " and again, "Ihr reien Herz, welches unendlich besser ist als in Ihr Netz, der sich in gewisser grosse Meinungen verhebt hat, vielleicht wünschet."

In spite of the play's having been intended as one which the clergy should not only read but praise, as it represents the triumph of one of their order on a Freigeist yet Theophan does not typify the orthodox clergy.

so often severely measure but the ideal of the order, and seeing this early exhibits that hatred of intolerance which characterizes his life; and he cannot restrain some very telling thrust at the religious intolerance of many of the "geistlichen." "Drehe Herr ein Atheist!" cried Martin to Johann. "Das glaubt sonst einer! Er sieht ja aus wie ich und du. Er hat Hände und Füsse, er hat das Maul in der Breite und die Nase in der Länge wie ein Mensch. Er redet wie ein Mensch; er ist wie ein Mensch — und soll ein Atheist sein? Es ist eine Pest der Erde, ein Vieh, — ein Teufelskannibal, ein Antichrist — ja das ist ein Atheist. So hat ihn dieser Pfarrer abgelacht; der kennt ihn aus großen Büchern."

And again Adrast to Theophan:
"Ihr Mund würde mich keine gute Stelle gebühren haben die mir Ihre simmere Überzeugung nicht zugestehet. Sie würden mich geradewegs einen Ruchlosen geschalten haben der sich

130 & § 5.
der Religion nur dessen zu entziehen, den man durch diese Dienste dasselbe nachhängen könne. Sie würden keine Verwunderungen erfahren, die würden sich erweisen, wie sich ein Theolog gegen die Wächter seines Abendlandes zu erwiesen muss.

Perhaps Theophanes expressed as well as anyone in the play Lensing's idea at this time in regard to the so-called Truthseekers, and again in his plea for tolerance in the words: "Adreas, ich mich überrascht bin, es von der jungen Art Trefüster, die wohl etwas Gesitives zu sein verdienten. Es ist auch sehr begreiflich dass man in der Jugend so etwas gleichsam wider Willen wurden kann. Man ist es aber bald nun so lange bis der Verstand zu einer gewissen Reife gelangt ist, und sich das aufwollende Geblute abgehühlt hat. Auf diesem kritischen Punkte steht jetzt Andreas auch noch mit wackelnden Füßen."

\[\text{act I \text{ sc. I}}\]

\[\text{act IV \text{ sc. I}}\]
It is Julian who best voices Lessing’s respect for religion as a true guide of life.

"Nein, Adriast! die Religion ist eine Quelle für alle Menschen und muss ihre ursprüngliche Züge sein. Was kann unsere Seele mit erhabeneren Begriffen füllen als die Religion? Und was kann die Schönheit der Seele anders erscheinen als in solchen Begriffen, in würdigen Begriffen von Gott, von uns, von unserer Pflichten, von unserer Bestimmung? Was kann unser Herz, unser Herz, diesem Sammelplatz verleiblicher und unschöner Leidenschaften, mehr erhöhen als ihn diese Religion? - Was kann uns zu wahren Menschen, zu treuen Bürgern, zu aufrechter Freundschaft machen als sie?"

Lessing’s intimacy with Myhina did not continue long after he went to Berlin but there came into his life two other men with whom he kept up a very close friendship as long as he lived. They were Friedrich Nicolai.
and Moses Mendelssohn. Both were representatives of the Aufklärung movement out of Deism. From 1765 on in Berlin Nicolai was the publisher of a work called the Universal German Library with which fifty or more writers were in connection. It was the mouthpiece of all those who opposed fanaticalism, superstition or prejudice in any form. It was the high tribunal of Rationalism, a merciless critic cold heartless basing everything on understanding and reason. Its boasted tolerance soon changed into extreme intolerance and bigotry.

The career of Moses Mendelssohn was in a manner made by being and he in turn exercised an influence over Lessing which did not in the least tend to strengthen orthodoxy.

No can speak of the influence of different men on Lessing only in a relative degree. He was one who doubted until he had proved and
was filled with such an independence that it often led him to contraryness and enriched him rather to the opposite side, for Lessing never followed tamely in any given track.

If there is any one idea which can be said to be the keynote to Lessing's critical and political writings, and to his opinions on religious subjects in general, it is the idea of tolerance. He struck that note in one of his earliest plays, "Die Juden" and sounded it in its fullness and perfection only in his last great poem, "Nathan der Weise." Both deal with the same nation, at that time so downtrodden and despised in all countries of Europe. It is true that Lessing's close friendship with, and love for Moses Mendelssohn greatly influenced his ideas in regard to that people in particular. But while his later and more fully developed knowledge in regard to the Jews doubtless came through his phils-
his friend, it is significant for his early ideas on tolerance that the play "Die Juden" was written before he became acquainted with Mendelssohn, and shows that he was uninfluenced by personal relations. The drama gives expression solely to Linneg's nature which was a constant cry against blind prejudice and for untrammeled freedom in thought, belief, action, and everything. We must distinguish, however, between the tolerance of Linneg and that of such men as were many of the deists and illuminists of the day. His tolerance was not that which says to the world: "I am absolutely indifferent in regard to what you believe. I have no belief and care not for what my fellow-man believes." Linneg did have a belief and was not indifferent to that of others but his struggle was against that intolerance which set up arbitrary standards...
and maintained that they were right and all others wrong.

In "Die Juden," Martin Krumm expresses very well the prevailing sentiment toward the Jews at that time and through him again Levin makes his thwart at the clergy.


--- Ach, Gott behüte alle rechtseheffnen Christen vor diesen Leuten. Wenn sie der liebe Gott nicht selber haette weswegen wären denn nur vor Kurzem bei dem Unglückliche in Breslau ihnen bald noch (mehr) einmal so viel als Christen geblieben? Unser Herr Pfarr erinnerte das sehr weislich in der letzten Predigt."

"Der Reisende" also reveals the attitude of the Christians toward the Jews, from another standpoint however.

"Wenn ein Jude betrügt, so hat ihn unter neun Fällen der Christ vielleicht niebrum mal dazu genötigt. Ich zweifle"
Ob viele Christen sich rühmen können, mit einem Jüden aufrecht verfahren zu sein. Und sie wundern sich, wenn es ihnen gleiches mit gleichen zu vergeltet nicht. Sollten Tausend und
Rudelhiten unter zwei Völkernchaften herrschen, so müssen beide gleich viel dazu beitragen.

And we can distinctly hear a prophecy of Nathan der Wee in the words of the Reische, to the Baron: „Ich will die Wahrheit zu gestehen, ich bin kein Freund allgemeiner Utheile über ganze Völker. — Ich sollte glauben, dass es unter allen Nationen gute und böse Seele gibt könnte. But what in the whole play speaks most strongly lessing's conviction of what a Jew can be in the noble, generous character of the Reische himself. As a matter of course, this conception of a Jew would not go unchallenged by those less prejudiced than Lessing himself and he was often compelled to defend the character in

"Seme \textsuperscript{tii} \quad \textsuperscript{ii} Seme\textsuperscript{tii}"
the drama. In his remarks on "Die Judin" in "Zur Dramatischen Poesie" he says: "Besteht man aber darauf dass Reichtum, bessere Erfahrung, ein aufgeklärter Verstand, nur bei einem Jüden keine Wirkung haben könnten, so muss ich sagen dass dieses eben das Vorurtheil ist welches ich durch mein Lustspiel zu schwächen gesucht habe; ein Vorurtheil dass nur aus Stolz oder Hase fließen kann und die Jüden nicht bloß zu rohen Menschen macht, sondern sie in der That mit unter (allen) die Menschheit setzt. --- Ich sage es gerade heraus, noch abgesehen wenn mein Rezeide ein Christ wäre, würde sein Charakter sehr selten sein."

In yet another one of Lessing's "Jugenddramen" one written while he was yet at Leipzig, do we find sentiments expressed in regard to the orthodox clergy which are in a large measure at least, Lessing's own. In "Der Junge Gelähmte" "Dann siehe Die Geistlichen überhaupt sind..."
schlichte Heldin in der Gelehrsamkeit.

and again: "Der Theolog glaubt dich (die Gelehrsamkeit) bei einer Menge heiliger
Sprüche, fürchterlicher Erzählungen,
und einigen übl angebrachten Figuren
zu treiben."

Although numerous references to
religious and theological subjects may
be found in almost any of Lessing's
writings, we have no discussion on
any purely theological matter until
his residency of one year in Witten-
berg from 1751 to 1752. As a result of
his life and study there we have
several short writings, some only frag-
ments, which are of importance as so
far as they indicate the condition of
Lessing's opinions at so early a stage
in his career. He went to Wittenberg to
study and the atmosphere of the city
and university led him to make a special
study of the period of the Reformation.
Moreover his reading of Bayle had
directed his attention to the Geschichte-
sehichte and the result of these two

1 Die junge Heldin Act 1 Scene 1.
2 II.
lines of investigation is the Rettinger. Bereng and the French sceptic Peter Bayle were to a large degree kindred spirits and the writing Bayle exercised a great influence upon Leesing though, as was always the case, any ideas he got from Bayle took their characteristic form with him, for Leesing was never a slavish imitator. Bayle was a forerunner of the Aufklärung movement of the eighteenth century. He was an ardent enemy of the clergy and waged continual warfare with them. He had reached a height distant from all sects and parties from which he persecuted the machinations of superstition every moment ready to shoot his sharp darts at the theological archenemy especially the order of the Jesuits. He lived in the time of the strife of sects and in the bitterness of his hatred for their petty struggles he turned almost against religion itself. But he was not a fight but a seer. Sein meliorierter Skeptizismus.
war nichts anders als jenes Process der allzeitigen Verleumdung und Vergeist-
igung der Gelehrsamkeit selbst, "is the
Opinion which Dauzel gives of him.
With his loss of freedom and tolerance
he drew the admiration and attention
of Lessing and the Pietûgen are
largely due to the impulse given by
the study of Bayle's works.
The question has been raised by
some as to whether Lessing had any
settled opinions on matters of religion
before 1765 or 1770. To one reading these
early writings, which received their
impulse at Wittenberg, this could
scarcely seem a matter of doubt.
Not that his opinions remained
unchanged. But Lessing never ac-
cepted things on faith. He consid-
ered it his duty to investigate before
expressing an opinion, and we have
his own word for it that he had from
the earliest years, thought seriously
on these matters. He said in regard
to the controversy with Göze that he
was drawn into it by the hair, not because he was not sure of his subject for he had always considered it his duty to try with his own eyes the truth of the Christian religion, that in his time writings for the truth of Christianity were Modeschriften and he read them. Thus he could not rest until he had read the other side and in this way he was tore from one side to the other. "Je wundriger mir der eine das Christenthum erweisen wollte desto zweifelhafter ward ich. Je muthwilliger und triumphierender mir es der andere ganz zu Boden treten wollte desto geneigter fühlte ich mich es zu widersteuern in meinem Herzen aufrecht zu erhalten."

In his "Rettung des Cardinal" Lessing takes occasion first to defend Cardinal in his Comparison of Confession of the four religions—heathen, Jewish, Mohammedan and Christian—by saying: "Was ist nütziger als sich von seinem Glauben zu überragen—wenn was
ist unmöglich als Übersetzung ohne vorhergehende Prüfung? And in answer to the objection that it may be dangerous to one's faith to investigate other religions: "Der muss ein schwacher Überzeuger auf die ewigen Wahrheiten der Heilnahme haben, der sich fürchte, sie mit Lügen gegen einander zu halten."

He maintained that Cardanus, far from putting weaker arguments into the mouth of the Christian had sided had him utter stronger ones than Jew or Mohammedan. And as Lessing in turn has the Jew and Mohammedan refute what the Christian has said, he proves that he has indeed investigated the other side.

In the Retelling des Cochlaeus Lessing grants that Cochlaeus must certainly be hated by all good Lutherans because he did little much injustice and did not act as an honorable, truth-loving opponent. He proves, however, that Cochlaeus was not the first to accuse Luther of having started the
Reformation out of jealousy because the Ablace was given to the Dominican instead of to his own order. At the same time he declares that such a thing is entirely unconnected with the unselfish and magnanimous character of Luther; but that even if it were true the results of the Reformation are none the less great and beneficial to the world. God does not always choose the most perfect, but the most convenient instruments to accomplish his purpose; and we none the less owe the Reformation to the Vorschung des Himmels.

The Gedanken über die Herrnhuter was not published until after Lessing's death but was probably written between 1750 and 1755. His brother Karl Lessing regarded it as the earliest of Lessing's writings on theology. In it he takes the part of the Herrnhuter against the Geistlichen and maintains that the latter did not win a real victory over the
Herrnhuter.

The idea of the development of religion as expressed here strikes the same note as "Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts," which indicates that Plessing had decided opinions on the subject as early as 1833. The old Jews, however, especially by God, gradually added to their simple religion according to their own notions, and gradually the number of "selbst erwählter Glaubens" grew so great that the true conception of God was lost in the mass of formulas and rites. No mortal could rescue them. Therefore Christ came to restore religion in its simplicility. "Gott ist dein Geist. Den sollt ihr im Geist walten, was Herr lehrt und leistet." Also: "Welcher Satz ist vernünftiger als dieser?"

Again, when the early Christians ceased to suffer persecution, they too degenerated and began to support and add
To the the divine Truth by human proof until finally all came to depend on one man (the Pope) desDEST
often virtute je sicherer er wirksam wurde. How and others came, thought differently and were turned for their beliefs. How did it happen that Truth now so little through Luther and others like him? How fortunate it would have been for them if they had had successors as pious as learned. The same thought is in the opening words of the article: Glückselige Zeit in der Jugendhaftigkeit der Geburteste war. Als alle Wahrheit in kurzen Lebensregeln bestand. And he sums it all up in the one sentence which is really the key note to this discussion: Was hilft es recht zu glauben wenn man unrecht lebt? And he continues: Der Abglaube füll, aber elne das wodurch ihr ihm stützter - die Vernunft - die es schwer in ihrer Sphäre zu erhalten ist - die Vernunft führte euch auf einem anderen Erweg der zwar wenig von der Wahrheit...
loch desto weiter von der Ausübung der Pflichten eines Christen entfernt wäre.

Now, he maintains, that men have such a splendid combination of Melchizedek and Gottesgelobtheit—a true Christian—is now rare than in darker times.

What being conceives to be the mission of the Herrnhuter is to lead the simple virtuous life. Suppose a man were to come who despised the knowledge of the Melchizedek and pointed only to the one thing that can make a happy life—virtue—he would teach not only to believe in God but what is more important—to love him.

But if he knew nothing of science the Melchizedek would despise him. What such a man would be to the Melchizedek, the Herrnhuter would be to the Theologians.

Lessing when he wrote this discussion was evidently at the point where he was disgusted with the constant gnawings of the clergy and the lack
of consistency between their lives and their belief. For though it all the
Herrnhuter stand to him simply for
the principle of virtuous living as
opposed to dead formulas. And the
words, "Der Mensch ward zum Thun
und nicht zum Vernunfteleus erscheinen
contain it all in a nutshell.
This is not the thinking who later
himself indulged in as much theoriz-
ing on theological subjects and
yet the principle remained the
same; for it was not the the
serious reasoning which one does to
ground one's faith that he objected to
but the petty reasoning over a few dogmas
and creeds out of which no good could
result to any one.
"Das Christenthun der Verschieden"-
was probably written about the year
1753 but undoubtedly after the "Ge-
danken also die Herrnhuter for les-
ing he indulges in a very elaborate
process of reasoning of the kind which
he seems to have condemned in earlier
writings. Having now or may not have really learned all that he sets forth in 'Das Christenthum der Vernunft,' but an acute and very intellectual mind doubtless took pleasure in working out the scheme he develops here; and yet in the 'Erziehung des Menschengeistes' he makes almost the same statements also in the form of a hypothesis as if the ideas had not gained in positive views in all the intervening years.

Luing had plainly reached the speculative stage when he wrote 'Das Christenthum der Vernunft' and was trying to reason out for himself the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion, namely, the divinity of Christ as the Son of God and the nature of the Trinity.

The line of argument is this: With God, Conception (Vorstellung), Willing, (Wollen) and Creating (Schaffen), are one. God can conceive of himself in two ways—either he conceives his perfection (Vollkommenheit) together and himself as the substance (Inbegriff) of them or he thinks of them as separated and "Seel..."
God conceived of himself from eternity in all his perfect qualities. That is he created a being which possessed all of his own perfection and this being was the Son of God or better the Son-God, - God because he possesses all of the qualities of God and Son because is necessarily gives a certain priority to the original conception or conceives. This may be an image (Bild) but an identical image of God.

As to the Holy Spirit, he characterises it as the harmony existing between God and the Son. The greatest harmony must necessarily exist between two beings which have all qualities in common. And this harmony between God and Christ the Scriptures call the Holy Spirit. In this harmony is all that is in the Father and all that is in the Son. Therefore it is itself God. This Harmony however, is in such a manner God that it would not be God if the Father were not God and...
the Son not God, and that neither could he be God if the Harmony did not exist. Therefore all three are one.

He then passes on to an exposition of the creation of the world on this same principle. God conceived of his perfections as infinitely divided. That is he created beings, each one of whom should possess some of his perfect qualities. All these beings together constitute the world. These beings are created "nach unendlichen Prädien des Mehrern und Minigern welche es auf ersehner Jolgen diese mirgelnden Sprung ist;" for that is the most perfect stay in which God can conceive of his perfections as divided. Thus a series is constituted in which each member contains all that the lower ones of the series contain and something in addition. Therefore there must exist among all these "einfaue Meev" a Harmony from which can be explained all that takes place among them, that is, in the world.

Since these beings are Gods on a limited scale, their qualities or attributes must be similar to those of God as a
just to the whole. Among the perfect attributes of God in this—that he is able to be conscious of these attributes and act according to them. With the varying degrees of these perfections therefoe must be varying degrees of this consciousness and the ability to act according to them. These beings which possess perfect attributes, are conscious of them and have the ability to act in accordance with them are moral beings, that is they can follow a law. This law is inherent in their nature and can be none other than "Handle deiner individualischen Vollkommenschaften gemäss." And this is the essence of Lessing's "natürliche Religion." This last thought leads us to another of Lessing's theological writings of the year 1755: "Über die Entstehung der gesoffenbarten Religion." In this he defines his idea of a natural religion as: "einen Gott erkennen, sich die würdigen Begriffe von ihm zu machen suchet, und auf diese würdigen Begriffe tre alle unsere Hand-"
langen und Gedanken Rücksicht nehmen. Every man according to the measure of his strength is bound by this principle.

But since these powers are different in different men, and therefore the natural religion of one would differ from that of another, men have seen fit to atone for this difference by inventing on certain things and I have attached the same importance to these formal (courante) ideas as to the truths of the natural religion in itself. That is, men made a positive out of a natural religion, and this positive religion received its sanction through the "Anselmu" of its founder who claimed that its forms (das Courante) came from God through him in the same way that the essential nature (das Nennliche) of it comes directly through the reason of each man. The "Unentbehricheit" of a positive religion by which the natural religion is modified in every state according to the peculiar characteristics of that
he calls the inner Truth of the positive religion and that inner Truth is as great in one religion as in another. All positive religions are therefore alike true and alike false. True, in that it is necessary everywhere to unite on certain common points; false, in that all that one which people unite does not simply exist with the essential truth but precludes or it and weakens it. And the natural conclusion of it all is that "die erste geöffnete oder positive Religion ist die welche die wenigsten conditionellen Züüzte zur natürlichen Religion enthält, die guten Werken der natürlichen Religion aus wenigsten einschränkt." In "Von der Art und Weise der Fortpflanzung der und Ausbreitung der Christlichen Religion," Lessing considers how far, in the natural course of events, the Christian religion would have advanced and tries to prove that this advance was due to no miraculous means. He does this by showing first,
that the Jewish, the heathen philosophy, and the Roman religion were all at that time in a state of decay and thus made it an auspicious time for the spreading of the Christian religion; second, that the apostles proceeded according to all possible didactic wisdom in their manner of teaching, aroused interest by the purity of their lives and cooperation by their leniency and good fellowship with all; and third that the persecutions of the Christians were in many cases not real persecutions, were not widespread, and frequently not as much on account of their faith as on account of certain violations of the law which their new manner of life led them into.

In Lucian's poetry there is not so much to be gathered in regard to his opinions on religion or theology. Poetry was not a serious occupation with him and in only a few of his poems, in some of the Fragments in particular, is the subject seriously
considered. The most important of these is the Fragment entitled "Religion" written in the year 1783. At this time Lessing was again in Berlin and was in that period of doubt when he had long term loose from his early moorings and was, he felt, drifting too far away and was tiring amid surrounding, least profitable to aid him in the endeavor to regain a foothold on firm ground.

In the beginning of the poem he addresses Religion as "Das gottliche Geschen, das aus dieser Schöpfers Hand Den schwachen Menschen köstlich noch über dich, Verstand, Was du mit Zittern glaubst, und bald aus Stolz verschwindest, Was dein neugierig Fleiß in fromme Fesseln schläft. Dich fühlt ich ehrfurchtsvoll gleich stark als meine Jugend Das thörichte Gewebe" "Aus Lastern, Fehl, und Jugend."

"Know thyself" is the key to this poem, "Selbsterkennung" is the nearest and
sunset way to religion; that is, to the natural religion. As one who tries to fathom his true self he wonders what he is and what he will be after that passing called death.

Wisdom is silent here though man in his philosophical ravings thinks he knows. Lessing did not always regard "Philosophisches Rausch" in that light but at this period his words cannot always be taken at their apparent meaning.

He looks back over the days of his infancy - a child - knowing no more than a beast; then a playing boy. Then the tendency to evil grows ripe in him.

Ach, warme wüthte ihr Gift in Mark und Blut
Mit mir verderbte dich, doch auch noch

Eh der tiefe Seele Geist
Die Jugend kennen lernte

Von der Welte, die Natur

macht er sich selbst entfremdet!

In his soul slips the "Begriff" of good and
evil and when it wakened and the boy
wanted to choose. He was "schon bestimmt
in meiner Wahl zu fehlen."
Ich brachte meinen Feind in mir, mit
mir herfür.
Doch Täfelfen gegen die,  
die brach ich nicht mit mir."  "Laster" he calls a master which he
would but could not escape and which
held him back from following "Tugend."  
Wie Krist in quiet lounge for virtue and
deleete evil but cannot choose it.
"Du bist mir froh und Ruh
und an der Tugend Stelle
Bevormundelter Himmel
meine Himmel, meine Hölle
Du nur, du bist in mir
das Einzige seiner Art.
Das Einzige war nicht
dem Laster dienstbar ward.
Solch keinen heinen Himmel
solch martenst Unvermögen.
Die kann ein Gott zugleich
in eine Stelle legen?
Er nichtet zwang als Wahl
und Physische gleich als Schuld
Ich will, ich will', und doch
bin ich nicht tugendshaft.
Umsonst erhebt Ihr nur
des Unheils streng Entscheidun.
Die Last' kann ich all'
doch kann ich all' vermeiden?'"

It is interesting to note the opinion
of leaning upon Klopstock, the greatest
religious poet of the times in Germany.
He recognized the worth of Klopstock,
but did not like to see the combinations
he made of religious and poetry and see
try to help out the poverty of soul
by religious "Ganz farben." He declared
that orthodoxy made a pedant out of
Klopstock who turned "Nirgend" into
"Vorhing", and the "Muse" into the
"Sängerin Lious." In other words he
does not like to see Klopstock's poetry
subordinated to his religion.

In those of his "Breife" which deal
with the "Messäen" he turns his
sharp criticism upon the thought in
the first few lines in a way that
plainly indicates that he is at least
no stranger to the consideration of such subjects and that he is not afraid of his ground. He sums up his discussion by saying that even if Klopstock were no poet he was at least a defender of our religion more efficient than all the writers of the so-called "geretteter Offenbarung". When Christianity is opposed by Spötterien, serious reasoning is an effective weapon with which to combat them. If the scoffer tries to make religion ridiculous, then its champion must paint it in all its grandeur. Klopstock makes no wish, he says, that the Christian religion were true, granted even that we were so unfortunate that it were not.

Hence, Lessing turned his sharp darts of criticism, everything fell before him and the "Aufseher", which Nielauff published did not escape the fate of all.

In the eighth of his "Litteratur-Brieffe", Lessing says of Nielauff "Entf-
findungen, since Christin] that these are not the sentiments of any Christian unless of one who likes to make religion the object of "Rehöhen Drucke", who works himself up into an enthusiasm and believe that that is the true Gefühl "of religion. There are always those who philosophize away religion and those who "weg-wenfen" that their theological wort-rutsche may amuse. In reference to some of Melandt's high flown religious evolutions, he remarks: "Und Ausschwüffigungen der Einfühlungs Kraft Empfindungen: Wo diese beschäftigt ist, da ist ganz gewiss das Herz leer, bald."

Concerning fanaticism he says in his remarks on Melandt's "Über Gott zu denken" that with a few clear ideas of God and divine perfections the enthusiast gives himself over to feeling and takes the liveliness of feeling for clearness of perception. With fine irony he remarks that
a good Christian is now something very different from what he was thirty or forty years ago. Orthodoxy is become a machinery. One content himself with a little real knowledge and escapes the accusation of freethinking by expatiating over religion. If one only maintains that without religion one can be no upright man, one may say what he pleases of articles of faith.

"Nehmen Sie die Klugheit sich gar nicht darübr auszulassen alle die überruhende Streitigkeiten mit einer frommen Bescheidenheit abzulehnen. So sind Sie vollende ein Christ, ein Gottgelehrter so völlig ohne Tadel als ihn die freiere religiöse Welt nur immer verlangen wird." And again,

"Also, denn, ist man schon ein Christ wenn man künftige Belohnungen, einen Nohlgeladen die Gottheit an unsere Handlunge, und eine einige Gerechtigkeit glaubt? Ich meine es gehört noch nicht dazuz und wer leugnet, leugnet der bloße die geöffnete..."
Religion."

It is of interest also to hear Lessing's opinion of one other man whose character could not well have escaped his notice, especially during his study of the Reformation at Wittenberg. This is the great Reformer himself. It was not in Lessing's nature to consider any one perfect. But he certainly had a great admiration and respect for Luther whose toiled fearless nature should appeal strongly to a man of Lessing's independent spirit. In his defence of him, none whom Luther persecuted so bitterly simply because he had dedicated a volume of poems to Luther's enemy, the Archbishop of Mainz, he says: "Luther stehet bei mir in solcher Verenngung dass es mir alles wohl übersieht, recht liebt ist einige kleine Mängel an ihm entdeckt zu haben und sich in der That der Gefahr sonst nahe war ihn zu vergötttern. Die Spuren der Menschheit die ich an ihm finde sind mir so kostbar als die Blendmarkte seiner Vollkommenheit."

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And when Luther went so far as to say that feminine ought to lose his head 
Lissing exclaims: "Wie tief erniedrigt 
Zorn und Rache auch den redliebsten, 
heiligsten Mann!

We say that Lissing was not 
an orthodox Christian, and that he op-
posed revealed or positive religion. In 
a certain sense, however, the latter is 
not strictly true. As he says in his 
discussions of revealed religion, he 
believes it necessary for men to 
unite on certain points; he regarded 
positive religion simply as a formu-
lated natural religion. This same idea 
he expresses later in his disputa-
tions with Göze over the Wolfenbüttel 
Fragments.

"Die ganze zoffreibarte Religion 
setzt im geringsten nicht die ver-
mündigte Religion voraus, sondern 
schliesst sie in sich."

But because positive religion is 
his true so often means violation of 
that principle of tolerance which
is at the root of Lessing's ideas on religion, he opposed it with all the force of his independent nature; but not as a system of belief simply but rather as a collection of dead formulas to which men cling as a saving power instead of depending upon a right relation to God and the living of a pure life in accordance with his own individual abilities.

Living, as before remarked, does not belong to any school any more in religion than in literature, but stands alone and above the others men of his age. In his life he was never at rest in any sense of the word but always seeking, always striving in every phase and condition of his existence. The love of freedom was reborn in him. He was cosmopolitan in everything. He was no more an orthodox patriot than an orthodox Christian.

"Das Lob eines ehrigen Patriziers
sei nach meiner Dünkung nur das
allerletzte vonach er gezei wurde -
des Patresten, nämlicb, der mich von
queste lehrte dass sich ein Weltbürger sein.

The same note of independence rings
in the words in the poem: "Uhr
die menschliche Glückseligkeit."

Ich glaub es ist eine Gött,
und glaub es mit der Welt.
Weil ich es glauben muss
nicht wirt es ihr gefällst."

From this it is easy to understand
the nature of the tolerance he advocated all through his life - not the
tolerance of indifference but on the
contrary, that of a broad unprejudiced
mind.

In speaking of Didroot he touched
on this point again. "Gesetzt auch ein
solcher Weltweiser wagt es Meinungen
zu bestreiten die wir gehedigt haben.
Dre Schade ist klein. Seine Träume
oder Wahrheiten, wie man sie nennen
will, würden die Gesellschaft ihn so
wenig Schaden thun als vielen Schaden
ihr diejenige thun welche die Drukbart
ileben Sinnen, leben."
aller Menschen unter das Joch der ihres gewissen wollen.”

Thus he felt the need of establishing everything for himself. In a letter to his father as early as May 1749 he wrote: “Die Christliche Religion ist kein Werk das man von seinen Eltern auf Treu und Glaube annehmen soll. Die müssen aber sie zwar von ihnen ebenso wie ihr Vermögen aber sie zeigen durch ihre Aufführung auch was vorrechtschaffne Christin sie sind.”

Though often a doubter, Lessing was never a scoffer but was ever deeply serious in any matter pertaining to religion. The attitude of Voltaire who along with his scathing satire indulged in the coarsest vituperation, regarding nothing too holy or sacred to be the object of his rude satire—this attitude could never have been Lessing’s.

Nor was Lessing a deist like Voltaire and his followers. God was not to him simply the motion force of the world, a vague, indefinite, mechanical
Being but something much more real and personal. In the fragment entitled "Wir die menschliche Glückseligkeit," he speaks of the necessity of belief in God.

"Wenn nur Gott leugnen kann,

muss sich auch leugnen können.

Dieweil, so ist auch Gott:

er ist von mir zu trennen,

Ich aber nicht von ihm.

Er war', wär' ich auch nicht.

Und ich fühle was in mir,

das für sein Dasein spricht.

Neh dem der es nicht fühlt

und doch will glücklich werden.

Gott aus dem Himmel treibt

und diesen auch auf Erden."

Moreover, he continues, if God does not exist, if he does not govern the world, and we are in it only by chance, if there is no higher agency in joy or suffering, why does not man destroy himself in pain or sorrow? Because God is and rules the world, man can endure change and trouble.
to Providence but it is difficult to tell sometimes whether they are uttered simply in a general way with regard to the future and without any idea of divine agency or whether they really express his belief in a higher controlling power. In advocating the leaving of politics to politicians he says: "Man kann solchen Staff denen welche die Vorsicht erwähnte ihn auszüglich. "Hue Vorsicht" is plainly a general term for conditions or a man's special abilities. There is rather a different tone however in these words which occur in one of his letters: "Ich langweige, Krankheiten und ich weiss nicht- was für Umstände, die einen ausser Stand zu arbeiten setzen könnten zeigt ein schlechtes Vertrauen auf die Vorsicht."

And yet in most cases when he refers to Vorsicht or Verzeichnung, he seems to have in mind rather a trust that all will be well in the future, a lack of anxiety for what may come, than any settled belief in the case of
God for the individual. In a letter to Michaelis in 1754 he writes: "Das noch kommen soll habe ich der Vorsicht überlassen. Ich glaube schwerlich dass ein Mensch gegen das Zukünftige gleichgültiger sein kann als ich," by which he means, however, not a future life but merely what is to come in the present life.

In a New Year's letter to his father he writes: "Ohne Insouder, lieber Vater, wünsche ich noch viele gesunde und vergängte Jahre welche die Vorsicht Ihnen von der Zahl der meinen leugnen wolle.

In other letters he uses "Gott" and der "Himmel" in much the same way.

In a criticism of a tragedy he uses the term "Vorsicht" with perhaps the closest and most literal significance.

Sometimes we find references which seem to indicate that some believed in a blind fate, luck, or chance.

In the poem "An dem Herrn H." occur the words: "Freund noch und ich und Du dem Glücke ein leichter Schlenderbällchen."

But it must be borne in mind that this is poetry, and also that we must guard against reading too much meaning into what a man says. We are all too much given to using these terms "Providence". Such it is too freely to permit us to draw too firm conclusions from the way in which this man may have used them.

In regard to a future life there is one in which conditions are better than they are here, but up to 1765 we find no very definite utterances on the subject. In the poem to Herr H. we have the lines:

"Vielleicht das nicht in andern Welten,"

Letter to Heinrich von Gusseck, 1768.
Again in the poem "An die Lyra"—
"Er vergräbt sein Leben nicht in Tiefen,
Wir erst dann zu leben, wenn er Staub
wird neun."

In his "Kritische Briefe" of 1753 he
writes concerning the death of a friend
with whom he had had some slight
disagreement: "Und in dieser Augen-
blicke müsste er sterben, um euch
in vier Wirt mit einem schrecklichen
Gerüchte zu erwarten."

Evidently at the time at which he
wrote his fragment on "Religion" 1753,
he was in doubt as to what this future
delay may be. "Weisdom is silent here;
and "Durchforscher, Sterbliche, des
Lebens kurzer Raum
Was kommen soll ist Nacht;
Was hier ist ist die Traum."

Yet he seems never to have had
any fears on the subject nor any
dread of death for himself or others,
for he says plainly: "Ich sehe nicht
hin wahr, man nicht ein folgendes
Ich es rührt erwartet kann als wie der folgenden Tag."

On hearing of the death of his brother he wrote: "Ich habe seinen Tod ernpfinden alle man nur euer solchen Zufall ernpfinden künde und mehr vielleicht als man dem ernpfinden sollte."

The foundation idea in leavings opposition to a revealed religion in these earlier days is that the life lived speaks louder for or against than the doctrine believed in. He grants that revealed religion increases one's motives for acting uprightly, for there is the hope of a future reward but religion has higher aims than simply to make the upright man. It takes him for granted to live in accordance to lift him up to higher purposes.

In one of his letters of 1749 to his father he gives most clearly his opinion of those who follow the letter of the law rather than the spirit.

"So lange ich nicht die sache man
Die grübelnde Vernunft
dringt sich in alles ein
und will wo sie nicht hinkommt
doch nicht entbehren sein.

Ihr Flucht der Orthodox
denn sie will seinen Glauben.
Nun man itziger Zeit etwas mehr Fleiße darauf wendete, so würde man gewiss mehr Redner als Stücke auf unserm Kanzelplätz deziere, und diejenigen die oft einem Redendem ähnlicher sind als einem Apostel würden mit mehrerer Männig und Annähmlichkeit zu reden wissen.

Finally in a recension of 1754 of "Bedauern über die Herrschter" he remarks: "Es ist ein Glück dass noch hier und da ein Gottesgleichtum auf das Praktische des Christentums gedruckt zu einer Zeit da sich die allermeisten in unfreudigem Streit- 
igkeiten verheeren — bald einen ein- 
fältigen Herrscher verdammen, bald 
denieme noch einfältige Religionen.
spüften durch ihre sogenannte Widerlegungen neuen Stoff zum Spotten geben etc.

It is only fair to consider for a moment as a test of Lessing's right to say what he does of the right life, when dependence of a positive belief, and a test of the practicalness of the religion of the man, the kind of life he himself led. We know that it was a peculiar life, in many respects, not like that of other men.

It seemed as if often he had a right to complain of that Glück which seldom came to him. It seemed frequently, as if the very things he wished for most were the very ones to elude his grasp, as if the good fortune that came to other men were not destined to come to him.

Lessing's conviction of this is felt in his heart cry at the death of his only child: "Ich wollte es auch einmal so gut haben wie andere Menschen!"

But though Lessing led a most
 unsettled life and seemingly could never be long contented in any place, but was, as he himself said, "Ein Speisung auf dem Dach", yet his manner of life was near a reproach to him. It was near dissipated and near frivolous. Much as his parents and friends were shocked at his intimacy with the comedians at Leipzig, there was nothing in it which pointed to evil tendencies on Lessing's part, but merely an interest in their art rather than in themselves. In Berlin he was a hard worker and led a quiet life, though he had many friends and enjoyed them. If any period of his life could be a reproach to him, it would be the time he spent at Breslau as the secretary of General Tarantzein, and if he had any vice it was that of gaming which was a passion that followed him through life. But the conditions of life at Breslau at that time must serve as a partial excuse.
for him while there.

No one could have any thing but praise for him in his relations to other men. He was generous and whole-hearted, impartial, frank, and sincere. His friendship with Fleck would rank with those famous in literature. But above all his love and reverence for his parents are to be admired. Though he was often misunderstood by them, blamed and reproached for many things which were not his fault, never never do we find in any of his correspondence a disrespectful word or any but the most loving sentiments. Always considerate for their welfare, he aided them with money when he had scarcely a penny himself and there was no grainerason why his constant poverty was a source of grief to him than that it prevented him from doing as much as his generous nature prompted to make life happy and comfortable for his father and mother.
in their old age. And knowing what pain his unorthodox views on religion caused his father, he withheld from publication until after his father's death several articles which he knew would grieve him.

In his business relations he was the soul of honesty and uprightness. Though he was often in debt and pursued by his creditors, he managed somehow to pay them, and in many cases his debts were a result of his generosity to his family and friends. While at Dresden he was in a most advantageous position to accumulate wealth by speculating as many others did yet he never could bring himself to it as to his uprightness nature the means did not seem to justify the gain.

While he admired Voltaire's ability, and regarded him as one of the greatest intellects of his age, he distrusted the man as a man and would never have stooped to the language and
actions of which Voltaire was only too often guilty.

However different ones, according to their difference of standpoint, may praise or censure Lessing and the views he held; there can be no doubt that in religion as well as in literature he was one of the great spirits of the eighteenth century in Germany.
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