Chapter 5

Contested Fields II: Concepts of Religion and Anti-Monotheism

Positing a ‘native,’ ‘progressive,’ Western, Euro-Christian or ‘Judeo-Christian’ tradition against an ‘unenlightened,’ ‘foreign,’ ‘Oriental’ Islam is a common figure of thought in the discourse of neo-ethnification. Obviously, since Neopaganism is by definition set in opposition to Christianity, this is not a viable dichotomy within our context. Pagans tend to perceive Christianity itself as ‘foreign,’ and as a destroyer of ‘native’ spiritual heritage. An article in the German Heidnisches Jahrbuch reacts to this problem:

The ongoing discussion about Islam, integration, and immigration politics has put the question about our own culture into the foreground. In this context, one likes to emphasize that our society has a Christian-Jewish background. The so-called ‘Western values’ of the Occident, which include a separation between religion and state, are set in a brusque opposition to a religion of immigrants that does not know this separation and has barely thematized it. The unreflected-upon repetition of a Judeo-Christian understanding of values requires a closer look, because: Is it really true that Germans and Europeans are Christians and derive their orientation for action from religion? Democracy, pluralism and legal equality are some of the bedrocks of European societies, but they cannot be derived from the Bible.¹

¹ Christian Brüning, “Zum Unterschied von Monotheismus und Kosmotheismus,” Heidnisches Jahrbuch 5 (2011), 217: “Die anhaltende Diskussion um den Islam, Integration und Zuwanderungspolitik hat die Frage um die eigene Kultur in den Vordergrund gerückt. In dem Zusammenhang wird gerne betont, dass unsere Gesellschaft einen christlich-jüdischen Hintergrund habe. Die sogenannten westlichen Werte des Abendlandes, zu denen die Trennung von Religion und Staat gehört, stehen schroff einer Religion von Zuwanderern gegenüber, die diese Trennung nicht kennt und kaum ansatzweise thematisiert hat. Die unreflektierte Wiederholung des jüdisch-christlichen Werteverständnisses bedarf einer näheren Ansicht, denn: Ist es wirklich so, dass Deutsche und Europäer Christen sind und aus der Religion ihre Handlungsorientierungen ableiten? Demokratie, Pluralismus und rechtliche Gleichheit stellen einige der Grundpfeiler der europäischen Gesellschaften dar, doch aus der Bibel lassen sie sich nicht herleiten.”
The author initially remains within the common opposition between a modern secularism and an unenlightened Islam. However, he then goes on to associate Islam with the “Christian-Jewish” tradition and answers the questions he himself poses by delving into both traditional, anti-clerical secularist literature, and into recent theories of religion that make a distinction between monotheism and its other, polytheism. In this process, he aligns the traditional anti-Christian attitude of Neopaganism with currently circulating anti-Islamic stereotypes – and, as we shall see, he does so in much the same way as the German Faith Movement’s aligning of its critique of Christianity with contemporary mainstream anti-Semitism.

Against such contemporary political backgrounds, it becomes all the more important to ask how Germanic Neopagans have constructed their attitude toward Christianity and other religions, and how they conceptualize their own religion – to look at the theories they draw upon and the traditions in which these attitudes are entangled.

**Attitudes Towards Christianity**

Attitudes towards Christianity vary considerably among Asatruers today, ranging from more relaxed or indifferent attitudes to a vigorous rejection of the religion as the main antagonist, or as one of the “alien religions that do not truly speak to our souls.” The most common allegations against Christianity are directed against its (violent) proselytizing which, in the eyes of Heathen critics, has led to the extinction of Pagan religions in the past, and to a loss of religious and cultural diversity in the present. In addition, criticisms are aimed against what is seen as Christianity’s repressive morality, and its demand to ‘mortify flesh’ and nature. In areas where Christian fundamentalism or puritan traditions are entrenched, such as in parts of provincial Norway or in some North American contexts, the idea that Christianity is a simplistic, authoritarian religion spreading fear of hell and punishment reverberates through many of the interviews I conducted.

Such positions are offset by other Asatruers, mostly from a-racist groups. Prominent German and Scandinavian Heathens have spouses who identify as Christians, and report no problems with this fact. Only groups in Scandinavia,
where they are officially recognized as religious communities by the respective states, require members not to be registered in Christian or other congregations. This is not due to ideological reasons, but rather serves to comply with state regulations limiting membership to only one official religious community. A few, such as the former leader of Swedish Samfundet Forn Sed, Henrik Hallgren, are open to integrating Christian elements into their beliefs and practices, and perceive them as part of a religious tradition that should be taken seriously, and which may serve as a source of inspiration for Asatru. He claims: “For me the dividing line is not as sharp: Christianity – Paganism; I feel: what is it that inspires me?” Even Stephen McNallen, of the American Asatru Folk Assembly (AFA), has put forth a related argument, and has modified what he himself called his earlier “stridently anti-Christian” attitudes. In contrast to Hallgren, he does not put it into the frame of a post-modern cultural bricolage, but one of ancestry. McNallen reminds his followers:

that (1) Asatru is an ancestral religion and (2) most of our recent ancestors have been Christian. [...] I honor my Christian ancestors just as I do my pre-Christian forebears, because blood is thicker than water – and, specifically, thicker than the water of the baptismal font.

Others tend to emphasize their appreciation of the ethical values of compassion and charity, which they either positively associate with Christianity or interpret as universal human ideals. René Gründer has demonstrated that square rejections of Christianity are not constitutive or instrumental for the construction of individual Asatruers’ worldviews and lived religious attitudes. The fairly widespread indifferent or tolerant attitudes towards Christianity and other religions among younger Asatruers can be understood as the result of a diminished influence of Christian churches and doctrines in families and Western secularized education systems.

4 Interview with Henrik Hallgren (Samfundet Forn Sed): “[...] för mig är inte gränsen så skarp: kristendom – hedendom, utan jag känner att, vad är det som väcker inspiration inom mig?”
5 All quotes: Stephen McNallen: AFA Update 5-7-10, E-mail Newsletter, also available at: http://asatruupdate.blogspot.com/2010_05_01_archive.html, last accessed December 16, 2012.
6 The now-defunct Danish online forum Kindir ran a discussion about positive aspects of Christianity under the title “Compassion and Christianity” in 2008 (“Medlidenhed og kristendommen,” http://www.kindir.dk/forum/viewtopic.php?t=3982, last accessed November 14, 2011). Hermann Ritter, “Zaubern ohne Gott?,” Herdefeuer. Die Zeitschrift des Eldaring e.V. 6, no. 22 (2008) criticized simplistic anti-Christian attitudes amongst Pagans in the German Eldaring’s journal Herdefeuer.
7 Cf. Gründer, Blötgemeinschaften, 314–324.
Nevertheless, a general tendency persists within Asatru of all varieties to configure everything in history that harmonizes with one's own perspectives as originally Pagan, while all that one despises is understood as an expression of Christianity's 'foreign' influence. This attitude can take as many different forms as there are political, social, and cultural ideals. A-racist German groups, for example, like to distance themselves from Ariosophy by underlining the monotheistic core and thus ultimately Christian nature of such theosophical ideas. Stephen Flowers, in his version of the story of the “reawakening of the Germanic spirit,” celebrates the alleged fact that a unified “Germanic cultural matrix has come to dominate not only Europe but the world” – a claim which implicitly justifies Euro-American imperialism and colonialism as a consequence of an innate spiritual Germanic heritage. In contrast, Flowers does not consider the negative implications of such endeavors, in “Germany in the first half of the 20th century,” for example, as “the natural outcomes of Germanic culture per se, but rather [as] the eventual results of prolonged attempts at the admixture of ultimately incompatible cultural features” and the “Christian doctrine.”

More importantly, anti-Christian attitudes characterize programmatic definitions of Heathenism. This indicates that the opposition to Christianity might not be instrumental for all individual Asatruers’ personal beliefs, but that it still forms the basis for group philosophies. An instructive example is a contribution listed under “basic articles” on the German Eldaring’s homepage, which carries the programmatic title “What is Heathenism?” Here, Heathenism is consistently defined in opposition to Christianity and its alleged oversimplifying ethics of good and evil. Asatru appears as a religion of nature, based in experience and oral wisdom, as opposed to a religion in need of external revelation, blind faith, priestly authoritarian mediators, and codified texts – as a system that seeks salvation (“Heil”) in this world and not in the hereafter; a faith that rates deeds higher than abstract values, abrogates the artificial

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8 See for example Eibensang, "Ariosophie – was ist das und wo kommt sie her? (Basiert auf: "Ariosophie – ein Überblick" von Hans Schuhmacher 1996. Textliche Neufassung samt Erweiterungen von Duke Meyer 2004)," Nornirs Âtt, http://www.nornirsatt.de/ueberblick-uber-ariosophie/, last accessed November 14, 2011. See also Chapter 3, in particular the discussion of fulltrú or patron gods.

9 Stephen E. Flowers, The Northern Dawn. A History of the Reawakening of the Germanic Spirit, vol. I (From the Twilight of the Gods to the Sun at Midnight) (Smithville, TX: Runa-Raven Press, 2006), xiv.

10 Kurt Oertel, “Was ist Heidentum? Wie kann man den Begriff verstehen,” Eldaring e.V., http://www.eldaring.de/pages/germanisches-heidentum/was-ist-heidentum.php, last accessed November 14, 2011.
division between the secular and the spiritual, and rejects the central concept of original sin.

Paralleling the rhetoric of earlier proponents of a ‘heroic’ Germanic religion, the article’s author finally invokes an implicitly Nietzschean framework and grants Christianity in contemporary society a function for those with insufficient moral strength and will:

From this follows one of the reservations as to why the old Heathen way is not suitable for everybody: People who depend on others or some “holy scriptures” to constantly tell them what they ought to do; people who are not willing to take responsibility for their own life; people who are too weak to develop a persuasive ethic and an individual character on their own; people who need a divine system of prohibitions, e.g., in the form of the biblical Ten Commandments, in order to understand the most natural things; for these people, the Heathen way is indeed the wrong alternative.11

The article succinctly summarizes some of the most widespread Heathen attitudes about the evils of Christianity and benefits of a Pagan worldview. At the same time, it demonstrates striking parallels between the concepts of religion within contemporary Asatru and Germanic Faith or völkisch religion of the early 20th century.

While a majority of followers of German völkisch religion in the early 20th century adhered to a ‘purified’ version of Protestantism – purged of its ‘Jewish,’ universalist, and Paulinian elements, and promoting an ‘Aryan Christ’ – the Neopagan minority in the German Faith Movement set itself apart by combining its anti-Semitism with a pronouncedly anti-Christian stance as its guiding force and strongest motivation. Early manifestos by Ernst Wachler and Ludwig Fahrenkrog, to mention just two, constructed their ideas for the “future of the German Faith”12 in clear opposition to what they perceived as the central

11 Ibid.: “Und daraus folgt nun eine der Einschränkungen, warum der alte heidnische Weg nicht für jeden Menschen geeignet ist: Menschen, die darauf angewiesen sind, dass andere oder irgendwelchen “heiligen” Schriften ihnen dauernd sagen, was sie zu tun haben, Menschen, die nicht willens sind, Verantwortung für das eigene Leben zu übernehmen, Menschen, die zu schwach sind, eine überzeugte Ethik und einen individuellen Charakter aus sich selbst heraus zu entwickeln, Menschen, die z.B. in Form der biblischen Zehn Gebote erst ein göttliches Verbotssystem benötigen, um Selbstverständlichkeiten zu begreifen, für die ist der alte heidnische Weg in der Tat die falsche Alternative.”

12 Wachler, “Über die Zukunft des deutschen Glaubens”; Ludwig Fahrenkrog, “Germanentempel I,” Der Volkserzieher 6 (1907); “Germanentempel II,” Der Volkserzieher 6 (1908); “Germanentempel III,” Der Volkserzieher 10 (1908).
Christian and Jewish dogmas. Christianity appeared as an authoritarian religion detached from the world, fixated on the hereafter, promoting a bleak, unnatural gospel of sin, repentance, punishment, and the need for redemption due to the inherent evil of human nature and sexuality. The ‘Aryan’ or ‘German’ religion appears as this life-negating Christianity’s polar opposite: a religion celebrating (human) nature’s goodness, cultivating “a pure view of nature, an affirmation of the world, a self-confident, high-handed view of life and custom,” and the possibility for, as well as the duty of, self-redemption through one’s own (heroic) deeds.

German Faithlers ultimately saw the reason for the destructiveness of Christianity in its foreignness, i.e., in its being based on a Semitic worldview that despises “natural differences” between races, classes, and sexes. Under its influence, the Germanic peoples’ “faith and myth, poetry and morals, custom and law were annihilated or distorted and deprived of their creative power.” While dominant German Christianity can be understood as a radicalization and racialization of Lutheran Protestantism and anti-Catholicism, its Neopagan counterpart in the German Faith Movement integrated elements originating in Catholicism as well. This can partly be attributed to the influence of Austrians, such as the Ariosophists Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels and, in particular, Guido von List, who, in accordance with folklorists in the Alpine area, interpreted local (mainly Catholic) folklore and other Catholic rites as concealed remnants of pre-Christian practices.

13 Wachler, “Über die Zukunft des deutschen Glaubens,” 16.
14 Cf. ibid., 4.
15 Ibid., 7.
16 Gründer, Bötgemeinschaften uses Uwe Puschner’s thesis that the völkisch movement is a predominantly Protestant affair to distinguish the völkisch and racist religion of the early 20th century and its remnants in current völkisch Pagan groups from ‘universalist’ groups that integrate Catholic folk customs and beliefs into their faith. However, Puschner, Die Völkische Bewegung im wilhelminischen Deutschland, already alerts us to the fact that the Neopagan minority within the völkisch movement was significantly influenced by what can be called crypto-Catholic ideas, in spite of its anti-Roman attitudes and its origin in the Los-von-Rom (“Free from Rome”) movement (see also “Katholisches Milieu und alldeutsch-völkische Bewegung. Die Münchner Zeitschrift ‘Odin’ (1899–1901),” in Le milieu intellectuel catholique en Allemagne, sa presse et ses réseaux (1871–1960) / Das katholische Intellektuellenmilieu in Deutschland, seine Presse und seine Netzwerke (1871–1960), ed. Michel Grunewald and Uwe Puschner (Berne: Peter Lang, 2006)). Thus, a mixture of crypto-Protestant and crypto-Catholic elements can be seen in the anti-Christian Neopagan faction of the völkisch movement as well as in modern Asatru. This particular differentiation is therefore not well suited to distinguishing contemporary Asatru from its völkisch forerunners.
The Question of Anti-Semitism

The obvious parallels between German Faithlers’ outlook on Christianity and anti-Christian attitudes held by contemporary Asatruers can be traced back to a broader critique of Christianity originating in a number of 19th century strands of politico-religious thought. Most prominent among them are the anti-universalist attitudes of National Romanticism, biblical criticism, and research on Jesus’ life in the wake of the works of French political philosopher Ernest Renan (1823–1892) and the German philosophers David Friedrich Strauß (1808–1874), Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), as well as the free religious and free thinker movements. These inspired many later academic theories of religion, and thus lie at the basis of the academic field of History of Religions (or Religionswissenschaft). At the same time, they informed both völkisch and other alternative religious movements of the 20th century and found their way into diverse Neopagan ideologies.¹⁷

In his discussion of völkisch versions of Nietzschean religiosity, Steven Aschheim maintains that “the ideologies of the Glaubensbewegung […] created a Germanic religion that transposed Nietzscheanism onto a racial-national base.”¹⁸ However, he under-emphasizes that these German Faithlers found a fertile ground for their ideas: the pre-existing distinction between Aryan and Semitic languages, myths, and religions. It is important to note that the linguistic differences discovered in the early 19th century were imbued from the beginning with, if not outright racial, then cultural connotations.¹⁹ In Renan’s work in particular, Judaism and its offshoots – Christianity, and particularly Islam – appear as static, conformist (monotheistic), nomadic, intolerant, and oppressive religions of revelation, whereas Aryan religion is painted as diverse (polytheistic), rational, immanent, modern, and formed by god-men or

¹⁷ For a systematic discussion of the interrelations between the study of religion and new religious movements in the 19th and 20th centuries see e.g. Kippenberg, Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte. Cf. also Friedrich H. Tenbruck, “Die Religion im Maelstrom der Reflexion,” in Religion und Kultur, ed. Jörg Bergmann, Alois Hahn, and Thomas Luckmann, Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, Sonderheft 33 (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1993).

¹⁸ Aschheim, The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890–1990, 227.

¹⁹ For a critical discussion of the Aryan-Semitic dichotomy in the study of myth see Arvidsson, Aryan Idols. Cf. also Poliakov, The Aryan Myth, Maurice Olender, The Languages of Paradise. Aryans and Semites – A Match Made in Heaven, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 2nd revised and augmented ed. (New York: Other Press, 2002).
avatars.\textsuperscript{20} This distinction recalls Enlightenment climate theory (cf. Chapter 1) and assigns all the negative traits of a sterile and rootless monotheism to its origin in a nomadic desert culture (hence the catchword ‘desert religion’). The positive characteristics of Aryan polytheism are attributed to a climate in favor of a fertile, cultivated nature.\textsuperscript{21} The distinction between a life-affirming polytheism or nature religion and a life-denying, unnatural monotheism has been productive in many alternative religious contexts in the 20th century. As later chapters will show, they have all been burdened by this anti-Jewish heritage and criticized within and beyond their respective movements for their overt or implied anti-Semitism.

Anti-Jewish affects of this ilk can be found within contemporary Germanic Neopaganism as well. For racial-religious groups, a more or less outspoken anti-Semitic attitude is foundational. More indirect anti-Semitic arguments are occasionally voiced by ethnicist Asatruers. Garman Lord, the founder of Theodism in the United States, sees the origin of both Judaism and Christianity in “one little nomadic tribe of gypsy traders whose whole tribal economy was based on foreign trade and commerce.” He invokes the stereotype of the Jewish usurer, and stresses the utterly different nature of the “Semitic value system of cunning and a guilty conscience.” He contrasts it with the “Germanic” value system, which purportedly combined the need for a struggle against a perilous nature with “individual toughness, resourcefulness, and vigor, as well as an abundant flow of the milk of human kindness.”\textsuperscript{22} On the British \textit{Odinic Rite}'s website, Heimgest writes about the “judeo/christian holocaust” [sic] which “our people suffered.”\textsuperscript{23} And Jack Jackson claims in the Danish journal \textit{Valravn}:

\begin{quote}
[...] we allow ourselves to be at odds with and doubt a basic Jewish self-understanding which is simultaneously humble towards their god-concept, and arrogant, ignorant and self-satisfied in relation to human diversity. [...] Still, after a thousand years, the Semitic religious systems
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{20} In asking the question whether or not the avatar Jesus could be Jewish at all, Renan first brought up the idea of an Aryan Christ, born in the green and fertile Galilee, rather than in the arid desert. \textit{Cf.} Arvidsson, \textit{Aryan Idols}, 113–115. For a discussion of Renan's attitudes towards Islam see, for example, Mattias Gardell, \textit{Islamofobi} (Stockholm: Leopard, 2011), 66.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Cf.} Arvidsson, \textit{Aryan Idols}, 102–118.

\textsuperscript{22} All quotes Lord, \textit{The Way of the Heathen}, 165.

\textsuperscript{23} Heimgest CG, “Continuing Tradition,” The Odinic Rite, http://www.odinic-rite.org/main/continuing-tradition/, last accessed April 18, 2014.
\end{flushright}
treat their adherents like primitive, half-conscious, stupid animals that have to be kept under control by all means.\textsuperscript{24}

Such an (anti-Christian) anti-Jewish attitude appears today as a less important facet of Neopaganism, and represents a minority position within current Asatru. Even within the faction that promotes a strongly ethnicist or even racial attitude toward Germanic religion, ‘the Jew’ is rarely the first figure of an enemy that is mentioned. This, however, does not mean that stereotypes about Judaism are absent. Some see and sometimes admire Judaism itself as a religion without universalist claims that is based on blood ties, and which is able to integrate religion, culture and ethnicity. They thus perceive it as a non-threatening ‘ethnic religion,’ among others. A member of Danish Forn Siðr would like to see missionary religions “disappear from the face of the earth” because of their bloody repression of ethnic religions, but emphasizes that he “doesn’t distance [himself] from Judaism in the same way. It is not totalitarian in this way. They take care of themselves. And they are not missionary.”\textsuperscript{25} Such attitudes mirror the reluctant admiration some völkisch anti-Semites had for the resilience of Judaism. Moreover, as the quote in the beginning of this chapter has shown, even those who still see Judaism as the root of the despised monotheistic religions are usually quick to mention Islam as the most threatening, non-native foreign religion.

The anti-Jewish and anti-Islamic connotations often implied in a critique of Christianity and monotheism have made the issue of anti-monotheism into a highly controversial topic within Asatru. This has to do with the considerable public attention monotheistic world religions and the conflicts between them have received since the 1990s, when the theory of a “Clash of Civilisations” was launched by Samuel Huntington,\textsuperscript{26} and especially in the wake of the events of 9/11, 2001. At the same time, the thinking around the nature of monotheism and polytheism is part of an attempt by Asatruers to conceptualize the specificity of their religion with the help of current theories of religion. In the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{24} Jack Jensen, “Om æren, freden og lykken,” Valravn. Hedensk tidskrift om samfund og kultur 12 (2005), 7: “[…] vi tillader os at være på tværs og tvivle på en grundlæggende jødisk selvførstæelse, der på samme tid er selvudseptende ydmyg over for deres guds-forståelse, og arrogant ignorantsisk og selvtilstrækkelig i forhold til den menneskelige diversitet. […] Stadig efter tusinde år, behandler de semitiske religiøse systemer deres tilløbere som primitive og semi-bevidste dumme dyr, som for enhver pris må holdes under kontrol.”}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{25} Interview J.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{26} Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).}
following section, I want to use a few instructive examples from Denmark and Germany, where the controversies have been most vivid, in order to tease out some of the more general problems.

**Praising Polytheism**

The idea that worshipping more than one god is an expression of and contributing factor to diversity and tolerance, whereas monotheistic religions create potentially totalitarian systems, is fairly widespread within Asatru as well as Neopaganism in general. Géza von Neményi, from the ethnicist German *Einfalt*, captured this popular attitude in the slogan: “One God creates uniformity and simple-mindedness, multiple gods create diversity.”²⁷ For many Asatruers, this concept expresses an intuitive truth and serves as convincing proof of Paganism’s alliance with and suitability for modern democratic and pluralistic societies. Although it has been exposed as a “myth of modernity” rather than a verifiable statement about the politico-religious character of Greek and Roman antiquity to which it was originally applied,²⁸ the idea has developed a remarkable productivity. Already in early Renaissance thought, a “polytheism of reason” was mobilized against “a military – and perhaps also theologically – superior monotheism.” It was combined with the call for a “pragmatic state reform” directed against the “disagreements within the Christian churches.”²⁹ Some Enlightenment philosophers utilized this kind of critique of church power and invoked polytheism as a guarantee of tolerance. In *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), David Hume saw polytheism as the natural and primary religion, claiming:

> The intolerance of almost all religions, which have maintained the unity of God, is as remarkable as the contrary principle of polytheists. The implacable narrow spirit of the JEWS is well known. **MAHOMETANISM**

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²⁷ “Ein Gott schafft Einfalt, viele Götter schaffen Vielfalt.” The German *Einfalt* not only denotes uniformity, but simple-mindedness as well, cf. Ulrich Andreas Wien, “Interview mit Géza von Neményi, dem Allsherjargoden (Stammespriester) der Germanischen Glaubens-Gemeinschaft,” *Materialedienst der Evangelischen Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen* 60, no. 4 (1997).

²⁸ Joachim Losehand, “The Religious Harmony in the Ancient World. Vom Mythos religiöser Toleranz in der Antike,” *Göttinger Forum für Altertumswissenschaft* 12 (2009).

²⁹ All quotes Burkhard Gladigow, “Polytheismus und Monotheismus. Zur historischen Dynamik einer europäischen Alternative,” in *Polytheismus und Monotheismus in den Religionen des Vorderen Orients*, ed. Manfred Krebernik and Jürgen van Oorschot (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2002), 16.
set out with still more bloody principles; and even to this day, deals out damnation, though not fire and faggot, to all other sects. And if, among CHRISTIANS, the ENGLISH and DUTCH have embraced the principles of toleration, this singularity has proceeded from the steady resolution of the civil magistrate, in opposition to the continued efforts of priests and bigots.30 [Capitalizations in original]

In this passage, Hume makes use of traditional concepts of the otherness and despicability of Jews and Muslims to create a backdrop against which the criticism of Christianity first gains its momentum.31

Toward the end of the 18th century, German Romanticism revisited the “rediscovery of polytheism”32 and developed the three closely interdependent aspects which, according to Burkhard Gladigow, recur in all European and American versions of the debate since the Renaissance. The first appears in art theory, where the lament about the de-deification of nature leads to the claim that it is in (the genius of) the artist alone that the disenchantment resulting from monotheism can be compensated.33 Three works mark the beginning of a new religious paradigm promising to reunite sentiment and reason – polytheism and monotheism – in a “monotheism of reason and the heart, polytheism of imagination and art”: Friedrich Schiller’s poetic praise of *Die Götter Griechenlands* (The Gods of Greece, 1788) as an alternative to the mechanistic attitude of monotheism, the *Ältestes Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (Oldest Programme for a System of German Idealism, 1794 or 1796),34 with its call for a “new mythology” and a “new religion,” and

30 David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion. Edited with an introduction by H.E. Root* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1956), 50.
31 Robert S. Wistrich, “Radical Antisemitism in France and Germany (1840–1880),” *Modern Judaism* 15, no. 2 (1995) has analyzed the contributions of French Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, Renan and Proudhon to a modern secular anti-Semitism and argued that modern anti-Jewish “race-hatred” ”grew out of the anthropological critique of monotheistic religion.” (128) He also points out that neither French nor German anti-Semitic Weltanschauung is anti-modernist, ultra-nationalist, and culturally conservative in the beginning, but is compatible with a radical-democratic anti-clericalism, anti-capitalism and secularized humanism. (122).
32 Gladigow, “Polytheismus und Monotheismus.”
33 Cf. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany*, 192f, 223f. These aspects of art-religion and their relation to modern Paganism are discussed in Chapter 9.
34 The authorship of the short programmatic essay remains a matter of debate. It has been ascribed to Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling, Friedrich Hölderlin, and Georg Wilhelm
Friedrich Hölderlin's hymns. This art-religious polytheism was continued by Ludwig Feuerbach and Richard Wagner in the 19th century and connected with a pronounced anti-Jewish attitude in its critique of a "Hebrew monotheism."

The second aspect revolves around the idea that polytheism is closer to nature, that it recognizes myths, images, and rituals as forms in which the gods hidden in nature reveal themselves. This leads to the claim that a real understanding of nature is intimately intertwined with the respect for traditional polytheism. Johann Wolfgang Goethe's pantheistic ideals and his organicistic approach to the study of nature, as well as Johann Gottfried Herder's and later Ernest Renan's reception of climate theoretical concepts, are examples of this line of polytheistic revival.

The third aspect calls upon polytheism as an alternative to monotheism's claim of being in possession of an absolute truth. Arthur Schopenhauer, and especially Friedrich Nietzsche, can be seen as the guiding intellectual forces behind this "polytheism of tolerance" or "diversity" after the "death of God" in the 19th century. Nietzsche's combination of the 'right of individuals' with the polytheism of antiquity becomes the central theme of a new polytheism, which now defines itself as 'post-monotheistic.'

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Friedrich Hegel. An English translation is accessible as an appendix to Nicholas Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

35 "Monotheismus der Vernunft und des Herzens, Polytheismus der Einbildungskraft und der Kunst." Cf. Gladigow, "Polytheismus und Monotheismus," 17, Jacob Taubes, "Mythos und Moderne. Begriff und Bild einer Rekonstruktion," in *Mythos und Moderne. Begriff und Bild einer Rekonstruktion*, ed. Karl Heinz Bohrer (Frankfurt A.M.: Suhrkamp, 1983), 457.

36 Burkhard Gladigow, "Polytheismen der Neuzeit," in *Religion und Wahrheit. Religionsgeschichtliche Studien. Festschrift für Gernot Wießner zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Bärbel Köhler (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 47, "Polytheismus und Monotheismus," 17.

37 These aspects are explored further in Chapter 6.

38 Although the three aspects are often invoked together in contemporary criticism of monotheism, the latter two, the "polytheism of nature" and the "polytheism of the diversity of truths," are contradictory in many ways and can be understood as "competing patterns of reception and options" (Gladigow, "Polytheismus und Monotheismus," 18). In his discussion of the often incongruous lines of reception of Friedrich Nietzsche's thought in different avant-garde circles in Germany, Steven E. Aschheim points to a similar inconsistency between the invocation of a "masculine" imperative of dynamic and sovereign self-creation and the more 'feminine' submersion into a transindividual Dionysian whole." (Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890–1990*, 82).

39 Gladigow, "Polytheismen der Neuzeit," 49.

40 "Polytheismus und Monotheismus," 18: "Nietzsches Verbindung des 'Rechts der Individuen' mit dem antiken Polytheismus wird zur Leitidee eines neuen Polytheismus, der sich nun als 'postmonotheistisch' definiert."
to their promotion of religious pantheistic or polytheistic alternatives, Goethe and Nietzsche acquired “an aura, an assumed authority” in a broad range of circles yearning for a cultural and religious renewal. The ensuing popularized Nietzscheanism of the late 19th and early 20th century serves as a source of inspiration for numerous Neopaganisms, and not just those of the Germanic variety.

As has been frequently remarked upon, an inherent problem in the praise of polytheism as a religion of tolerance is that it has been polemically conceptualized as an antagonist to an ‘intolerant’ monotheism. As a result, the tolerance of the self-proclaimed new polytheists quickly finds its limits when it comes to granting tolerance to the religions perceived to be, or rather construed as, fundamentally different, i.e., monotheistic religions. As long as such anti-monotheism is directed primarily against the dominant political, social, and discursive power of the Christian churches, these problematic aspects have little obvious bearing. However, David Hume’s and particularly Ernest Renan’s theories already demonstrate that this critique of power is too easily directed not exclusively against hegemonic forces, but instead aimed at discriminated minorities, Jews in particular. Seeing the origin of the antagonist monotheism in the Jewish god, the anti-monotheist polemic criticized its target, Christianity, by simultaneously adopting Christianity’s own construct of an antagonist. Consequently, a traditional Christian construction of the Jew as ‘arch-enemy’ is preserved in an anti-Christian form. It is thus no coincidence that most of the aforementioned contributors to the several polytheistic renewals (e.g., Johann Gottfried Herder, Ernest Renan, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Klages, and Alfred Schuler) have been accused of anti-Jewish attitudes.

The anti-Christian and anti-Jewish elements of Nietzschean critique, especially the accusations he levels against these ‘book religions,’ ‘slave morality,’ ‘humility,’ ‘oppression,’ and enmity toward human nature’s dynamism and

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41 Aschheim, The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890–1990, 33.
42 For a differentiating critique of the “myth of religious tolerance in antiquity” see Losehand, “The Religious Harmony in the Ancient World.” See also Klaus Koch, “Monotheismus als Sündenbock?,” in Die Mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus, ed. Jan Assmann (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003), 229f.
43 Nietzsche’s contradictory attitudes towards Jews and Judaism, his “anti-anti-Semitism” in particular, indicate that he himself was aware of this problem.
44 For Klages and Schuler see Aschheim, The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890–1990, 78; for Renan see Arvidsson, Aryan Idols, 102–118; for Herder see Sauerland, “Die fremden Völker in Europa.”
heroism, were eagerly adopted within emerging Germanic Neopaganism. At the same time, the religious alternatives promoted by them were not outspokenly polytheistic, but rather related to a pantheism inspired by the era’s Goethe-cult and a general ‘cult of the genius,’ who either embodies the transcendent or strives for self-deification. An overt praise of polytheism in the wake of Nietzsche’s anti-bourgeois, libertarian, intellectual and aristocratic individualism first became fashionable again in the 1970s, in a variety of national and political contexts. The rise of Neopaganism in general thus coincided with a ‘new wave’ of philosophical praises of polytheism. The two tendencies were not always directly related, but they indicate a general discursive climate in which Germanic Neopaganism could re-emerge and thrive.

In 1974, American professor of religion David L. Miller published his much-debated book *The New Polytheism*, ascertaining that the appropriate philosophy for modern, pluralistic democracies must be polytheistic. Starting with Friedrich Nietzsche’s praise of polytheism’s “marvelous art and capacity for creating Gods,” he observes “an incipient polytheism” which is “always lurking in democracy,” and stresses that polytheism is today both a social reality and a philosophical condition.45 Relying on historians of religion such as Mircea Eliade and Gerardus van der Leeuw,46 Miller does not promote any overt anti-Christian, anti-Jewish or anti-Islamic sentiments, but rather identifies polytheistic elements in all of these religions. He thus does not take the step of promoting Neopaganism as a lived religious option, but instead points to the necessity (in his view) to re-connect with the Greek gods in particular. They lie in the depths of “our heritage” and are therefore compatible with “Western consciousness and behavior,” whereas the Christian tradition forms a more superficial layer.47 In his fourth chapter, Miller discusses renegade Jungian analytical psychologist James Hillman’s polytheistic psychology as one of the expressions of this contemporary polytheism. Consequently, in the second edition of *The New Polytheism* (1981), Miller includes an older essay by Hillman, augmented with a postscript by Hillman himself, in which he discusses the objections made against his alleged “polytheistic theology whose target is Christianity and Judeo-Christian monotheism.”48

He claims that one of the main problems of the hegemonic monotheistic framework is the impossibility of “an understanding of our cultural foundations,” i.e., the polytheism of Greek mythology. This implies that he considers

45 Miller, *The New Polytheism*, 26.
46 Ibid., 89.
47 Ibid., 33.
48 Ibid., 127.
“Judeo-Christianity” as less foundational for “our culture.” The ensuing debates on Miller’s “new polytheism” within an American context did not take up the potential political dangers of such mythologies of the 20th century, i.e., the reversion to cultural essentialism. Instead, critics voiced fears of a privatization of religion, of the emergence of individual wealth accompanied by a diminished social cohesion.49

In Germany, the discussion on polytheism was taken up by conservative philosophers and authors, rather than psychologists. The first among them was the philosopher Odo Marquard, who opened a similar debate about the suitability of polytheistic thought for post-modern pluralistic societies in 1978. In his poignant essay “Praise of Polytheism”50 he delivers an aestheticist, post-modernist critique of grand, unifying narratives which he calls “mono-myths,” and which he sees as motivated by the belief in one god, who only has one story. He sets such mono-myths against a polytheism that guarantees “a separation of powers in the absolute,”51 a system of checks and balances between different gods and their diverse stories, as compared to monotheism, which appears as “essentially tyrannical.”52 Marquard identifies two stages in the demise of the poly-mythic worldview: The first was the end of polytheism through the Christian mission during the Middle Ages; the second, the philosophy of history of the French revolution, which gave rise to the idea of a linear history of progress toward a greater freedom.53 Marquard makes a direct reference to the “Oldest Programme for a System of German Idealism” and its call for a new mythology and a new era, as well as to Nietzsche, who saw the “end of monotheism” as the beginning of modernity. He thus conceptualizes

49 Cf. Robert S. Ellwood Jr., “Polytheism: Establishment or Liberation Religion,” Journal of the American Academy of Religion 42 (1974). For a more recent philosophical plaidoyer for a polytheistic worldview see the book by John Michael Greer, A World Full of Gods. An Inquiry into Polytheism (Tucson: ADF Publishing, 2005), a member of three Druid organizations. The book is reviewed favorably by Diana Paxson on amazon.com and recommended for “the pagan clergy training programs with which I am involved.” Cf. http://www.amazon.com/World-Full-Gods-Inquiry-Polytheism/dp/0976568101/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1321353383&sr=8-1, last accessed September 16, 2014.

50 Republished several times, e.g. in Odo Marquard, “Lob des Polytheismus. Über Monomythie und Polymythie,” in Abschied vom Prinzipiellen. Philosophische Studien, ed. Odo Marquard (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1991); “Lob des Polytheismus. Über Monomythie und Polymythie,” in Zukunft braucht Herkunft. Philosophische Essays, ed. Odo Marquard (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 2003).

51 “Gewaltenteilung im Absoluten.”

52 “Seinem Wesen nach tyrannisch.”

53 Marquard, “Lob des Polytheismus,” 99.
polytheism as a “possible political theory for modernity” and promotes a program of aestheticist conservatism.54

In 1993, author and dramatist Botho Strauß published a cultural critical essay titled “Anschwellender Bocksgesang” (Swelling Chant of Male Goats, an allusion to the literal meaning of the Greek tragedia which derives from tragos: male goat and ēidē: song). Although he does not directly mention polytheism, he delivers an implicit polemic against a “leftist phantasm” which, according to him, merely parodies a Christian history of salvation. He supports what he calls a “right” alternative to a shallow, “economicist and democratistic” modernity and promotes the search for a connection to an (implicitly pre-Christian) “long past,” which “in its essence is deep memory, and thus a religious and proto-political initiation.”55 He furthermore calls for a new understanding of the necessity of pain, catastrophe, and sacrifice in order to shock modern Western man out of his superficial, materialistic selfishness. Strauß calls for a deeper understanding of, for example, Eastern European new nationalisms, with the deliberately provocative words: “We no longer understand that a Volk wants to assert its moral law against others and is ready to make blood sacrifices for it, and we consider it wrong and abominable in our liberal-libertarian self-centeredness.”56 This cultural critical impulse of a radical aestheticist in the Nietzschean sense found great sympathy among supporters of an intellectual New Right in Germany, who republished Strauß’ essay in 1994, followed by a series of articles on the necessity of a new German patriotism bearing the telling title Die selbstbewusste Nation (The Confident Nation). The ensuing controversy demonstrated that this kind of aestheticist evocation of myth and a deep past was perceived as particularly useful for the German New Right.57

54 Cf. Alois Halbmayr, Lob der Vielheit. Zur Kritik Odo Marquards am Monotheismus, vol. 13, Salzburger Theologische Studien (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2000).
55 Botho Strauß, “Anschwellender Bocksgesang,” in Die selbstbewusste Nation. ‘Anschwellender Bocksgesang’ und weitere Beiträge zu einer deutschen Debatte, ed. Heimo Schwilk and Ulrich Schacht (Frankfurt A.M.: Ullstein, 1994), 25.
56 Ibid., 21: “Dass ein Volk sein Sittengesetz gegen andere behaupten will und dafür bereit ist, Blutopfer zu bringen, das verstehen wir nicht mehr und halten es in unserer liberal-libertären Selbstbezogenheit für falsch und verwerflich.”
57 On the dust cover of the third edition, some of the negative criticism of the book is quoted in an affirmative sense, such as the verdict: “It shows the intellectual right in Germany quasi in the moment of its self-creation,” or “Most contributions are a challenge to parts of the basic consensus of the old Federal Republic.” Cf. also Jonathan Olsen, Nature and Nationalism. Right-Wing Ecology and the Politics of Identity in Contemporary Germany (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 118f, who mentions this book as a prime example of German right-wing intellectuals’ central discursive moves: “the relativization of the
In his intervention in the debate in 1998, novelist Martin Walser attacked the apocalyptic scenarios permeating contemporary media discourses. For him, the ecological, social, and political suggestions for a solution to such global problems appear to be “utopias of salvation” directly derived from Christian “missionary zeal.” He combines an anti-universalist critique of Western humanism with a Nietzschean critique of the Christian doctrine, which sees human nature as evil and thus produces this evil in the first place by demanding submission to one jealous god. Walser concludes by praising the ‘local’ (“das Hiesige”) and the ‘near,’ setting it against the universalist, international, and global in his verdict: “By all means, no ethic for everyone.” He combines it with a call for a restorative return to an older, pre-Christian tradition, the “protective screen of a diversity of gods spread over meadows and forests,” which allegedly poses no danger to the planet.

These attacks on monotheism and complaints about the lack of myth and gods in modernity are united by their reference to a Nietzsche-inspired post-modernism that defends individual freedom and difference against universalist claims of equality. The latter are seen as agents of the tyrannical, disciplinarian central power personified in the monotheistic god. They are thus also connected to a post-modern, post-structuralist and post-colonial impulse, which posits a logic of difference against a unifying, colonizing logic of sameness. However, the nationalist implications of Strauß’ and Walser’s anti-monotheism point to other, not always latent political implications of such tributes to polytheism. Considering this, Jacob Taubes’ early critique of Marquard is not as far-fetched or one-sided as it might have seemed at the moment of its publication in 1983. Taubes suggested that Marquard might produce exactly the “mythic atmosphere” it pretends to merely indicate, and drew an implicit parallel to the Kosmiker (Alfred Schuler and Ludwig Klages) re-mythologizing project.

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58 “Ich vertraue. Querfeldein,” re-published in Martin Walser, Ich vertraue. Querfeldein (Frankfurt A.M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), 9–22.
59 Ibid., 19: “Bloß keine Ethik für alle.”
60 Ibid., 18: “der Schirm einer über Wiesen und Wälder hingestreuten Göttervielfalt.”
61 “mythische Geisteslage,” Taubes, “Mythos und Moderne,” 464, cf. Gladigow, “Polytheismen der Neuzeit,” 57.
62 Taubes, “Mythos und Moderne,” 462. For Schuler’s and Klages’ anti-Jewish polytheism see below, as well as Chapter 6. Even though Burkhard Gladigow, “Polytheismen der Neuzeit,” 56, modifies such a critique by pointing to the fact that Marquard’s “enlightened
In his critique, Taubes refers directly to French intellectual Alain de Benoist’s seminal book, “Comment peut-on être païen” (How to be a Pagan), first published in France in 1981. In his praise of “being Pagan” as a religio-philosophical alternative for Europe, the leading political theorist of the New Right in France questions and modifies the totalitarian ideas of the ‘old’ extreme right and condemns the ‘Judeo-Christian’ idea of monotheism as the root of all totalitarianism. This take on polytheistic tolerance and diversity motivates his ethno-pluralist approach discussed in Chapter 4: the idea that, in order to grant this desired diversity, cultures need to be preserved in their own areas of origin and kept pure and unmixed in order to thrive and develop.

In the context of this chapter, Benoist’s perspective is pivotal; he considers the mission mandate and universalism of Christianity originating in the rootlessness of Judaism as one of the main culprits for the demise of cultural diversity and globalization. It comes as no surprise that since the 1980s, Benoist’s anti-Christian, pro-Pagan approach has found supporters among Asatruers, and is even sold on the ethnicist AFA’s homepage with the following commentary:

In this book, the founder of the profoundly Pagan “French New Right” argues that Christianity has failed Europe, and that only a re-linking with the eternal truths of our pre-Christian heritage can rescue us from the guilt, fear, and rootless nihilism of the present age. This book is highly intelligent, compelling, and designed for men and women living real lives in the 21st century.

Among a-racist German Asatru groups, Benoist’s ethno-pluralist, anti-monotheist ideology has not been so well received. Interestingly, the same is true of the anti-monotheist praises of polytheism featured in the aforementioned intellectual and media debates. Its early contributors, Odo Marquard, polytheism” owes too much to the complexity of the “Oldest Programme for a System of German Idealism” to be easily appropriated by a political New Right, Taubes’ overall critique of this anti-monotheist formation has become even more valid in the light of the debates surrounding Strauß’ and Walser’s essays.

63 Taubes, “Mythos und Moderne,” 469.
64 A German translation appeared in 1982, an English translation was made available only in 2004 in Joshua Buckley’s publishing house Ultra with a preface by Stephen Edred Flowers. See also Chapter 4.
65 http://www.runestone.org/shop-afa/lonlinestore/product/show/cid-16/name-on-being-a-pagan-by-alain-de-benoist/category_pathway-10.html, last accessed May 05, 2013.
Botho Strauß, and Martin Walser, are rarely evoked by Asatruers in their attempts to describe, theorize or contextualize their own religion.66

In recent years, an internationally better-known German contributor to the debate about the negative implications of monotheism – the Egyptologist, Jan Assmann – has provided international Heathenism with another concept of religious distinctions.67 In his attempt to explain the deep historical genesis of violent intolerance, religious persecution, and especially anti-Judaism, Assmann identifies a revolutionary, decisive religious shift from “polytheistic’ to ‘monotheistic’ religions, from cult religions to religions of the book, from culturally specific religions to world religions.”68 Assmann makes use of a distinction between “primary” and “secondary” religions proposed by the professor of missiology, Theo Sundermeier,69 and explicates the relation between primary and secondary religion as follows:

66 The only exception to this, a thread on Eldaring’s online forum from 2004 on Martin Walser’s essay, shows that some German Asatruers are aware of the anti-Semitic potential in Martin Walser’s dichotomization of a “Judeo-Christian culture” and the “pre-Christian Germanic” as the “original German culture.” Others, Swiss and Austrian participants in the discussion in particular, accused these critics of Walser’s positions as intolerant and overly “politically correct.” See thread “Martin Walser ist Heide” (Martin Walser is Pagan) started in 2004: http://www.eldaring.de/pages/forum---community.php, last accessed December 16, 2012. “What Walser is up to stands in a long tradition of anti-Semitism which occasionally declares itself anti-Christian, but constantly emphasizes Christianity’s Jewish roots by always mentioning both terms simultaneously.” (“Was Walser treibt, steht in einer langen Tradition des Antisemitismus, der sich gelegentlich auch als anti-christlich deklariert, dabei aber unentwegt die jüdischen Wurzeln des Christentums betont, indem beide Begriffe immer gemeinsam genannt werden.”).

67 See Jan Assmann, Die Mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003), English translation The Price of Monotheism, trans. Robert Savage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

68 The Price of Monotheism, 1. Die Mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus, 11: “von ‘polytheistischen’ zu ‘monotheistischen’ Religionen, von Kultreligionen zu Buchreligionen, von kulturspezifischen Religionen zu Weltreligionen.”

69 Theo Sundermeier, Was ist Religion? Religionswissenschaft im theologischen Kontext (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999); “The Meaning of Tribal Religions for the History of Religion. Primary Religious Experience,” Scriptura 10 (1992). In contrast to Assmann, and in an attempt to demonstrate possibilities of religious dialogue between contemporary ‘tribal religions,’ especially in Africa and Christianity, Sundermeier does not see a fundamental difference between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ religious experiences, but maintains that they form various syntheses. He also stresses the distinctions between different religious experiences and avoids speaking of primary and secondary religions. See Anja A. Diesel, “Primäre und sekundäre Religion(serfahrung) – das Konzept von Th. Sundermeier und J. Assmann,” in Primäre und sekundäre Religion als Kategorie der
Primary religions evolve historically over hundreds and thousands of years within a single culture, society, and generally, also language, with all of which they are inextricably entwined. [...] Secondary religions, by contrast, are those that owe their existence to an act of revelation and foundation, build on primary religions, and typically differentiate themselves from the latter by denouncing them as Paganism, idolatry and superstition.\textsuperscript{70}

In his attempt to characterize the core idea of this turn, for which he coins the term ‘mosaic distinction,’ Assmann notes that the crucial difference is not the one between polytheism and monotheism, “but the distinction between truth and falsehood in religion, between the true god and false gods, true doctrine and false doctrine, knowledge and ignorance, belief and unbelief.”\textsuperscript{71} The claim that this distinction motivates a new kind of religious hatred and violence is crucial for the reception of his theses in contemporary debates.\textsuperscript{72}

For our purposes, the differences between Sundermeier’s and Assmann’s theses are of little relevance, as is the fact that both have been criticized by theologians and historians of religion for their insufficient and anachronistic descriptions of religious distinctions.\textsuperscript{73} What matters instead are the ways in
which they describe primary and secondary religions, as well as the shift from one to the other. They have been inspiring and productive for the conceptualization of Neopagan religions and their own distinction from Christianity and monotheism. Assmann claims that the turn from primary to secondary religion goes hand in hand with a turn from ritual to text, from cult religion to book religion. This medium shift led to an identification of writing with the transcendent, whereas ritual became identified with immanence. This idea is well suited to the image of Heathenism as an immanent religion based on a unity of practice and community. The same applies to the idea that secondary religion is not fulfilled through the correct performance of ritual but instead leads to the invention of an inner self and needs to be fathomed introspectively, thus requiring faith, belief, and a distinction between truth and falsehood.

Jan Assmann is certainly not a thinker with affiliations to right-wing ideology. His theory of a potentially destructive ‘mosaic distinction’ does however recall the more radical rejections of monotheism circulating in anti-Semitic and right-wing contexts. Elements of his main argument have, for example, been appropriated by the Hindu nationalist Council for the Hindu Revolution or Hindu Kranti Parishad (HKP) in order to justify a radically anti-monotheist, anti-Capitalist and anti-Communist, anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic agenda.

Accordingly, the theory of the ‘mosaic distinction’ between ‘true’ and ‘false’ religions and other anti-monotheistic ideas has been actualized in quite divergent ways within European Asatru.

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sind die ‘mosaische Unterscheidung’ und deren angeblich violente Folgen ein diskursives Produkt eines anachronistischen Religionsdiskurses.

74 Assmann, Die Mosaische Unterscheidung oder der Preis des Monotheismus, 145.

75 Cf. ibid., 156.

76 A more recent contribution by the popular German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk shows the appeal of Assmann’s distinction. Veering considerably from Assmann’s statements, Sloterdijk makes monotheism and its “holy warriors” into an even cruder construction and blames it for having “attacked the natural and cultural being of mankind […] their all too secure rootedness in their descent” (“das natürliche und kulturelle So-Sein der Menschen anzugreifen […] ihre allzu sichere Verwurzelung im Herkommen.” Peter Sloterdijk, Gottes Eifer. Vom Kampf der drei Monotheismen (Frankfurt A.M.: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2007), 184f). Sloterdijk aims his attack at what he calls the “para-monotheism” of the Enlightenment as well.

77 Dhirendra Nath Shastri Monotheism and the Western Pathology. Causes, Development and Impact of the Western Drive for World Domination from the 1st Millennium BCE to the Present, http://www.hindurevolution.org/oi/monotheism-and-the-western-pathology-contents.htm (2009).
Anti-Monotheism in Asatru

At the one end, we find attempts to merge anti-monotheism with the ethno-pluralist and violently anti-monotheist theories of the New Right. In 2005, a passionate debate on the topic erupted in Denmark, starting with the publication of a series of articles in the magazine *Valravn*, titled “The Mischief/Terror [uvæsen] of Monotheism. A Religious Liberation of Concepts.”  

Author Starkad Storm Stensgaard motivates the need to exterminate monotheism with a set of sharp distinctions:

The differences between monotheism and polytheism are greater, more important, and more essential than it is possible to communicate verbally. The necessity to make these differences known, however, grows with the pace in which monotheism's intellectual and spiritual pest casts the darkness of chaos over the world, this time armed with modern technology and weapons of mass destruction.

He criticizes the “totalitarian monopoly of existence, a monopolization of all that is sacred” using a rhetoric of poisoning, pollution, contagion, and psychiatric pathology, e.g., when he describes Judaism as the origin of “monotheism's evil obsession.” Polytheism, in comparison, appears as the “in all respects superior and natural religiosity.” Quite obviously, Stensgaard's objection to monotheism's alleged intolerance, and his praise of polytheism's tolerance of other gods beyond one's own pantheon, mainly performs the limits of this tolerance: It explicitly excludes the tolerance for a monotheism posited as fundamentally irreconcilable with a polytheistic paradigm – hence the author's unambiguous call for open-eyed hatred of and revenge against monotheism.

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78 Starkad Storm Stensgaard, “Om Monoteismens Uvæsen. Religiøs Begrebsbefrielse, del 1,” *Valravn. Hedensk tidsskrift om samfund og kultur* 14 (2005); “Om Monoteismens Uvæsen. Religiøs Begrebsbefrielse, del 2,” *Valravn. Hedensk tidsskrift om samfund og kultur* 15 (2005); “Om Monoteismens Uvæsen. Religiøs Begrebsbefrielse, del 3,” *Valravn. Hedensk tidsskrift om samfund og kultur* 16 (2006).

79 All quotes “Om Monoteismens Uvæsen 1,” 18: “Forskellene mellem monoteisme og polyteisme er større, vigtigere og væsentligere, end det fyldestgørende er muligt at kommunikere verbalt. Nødvendigheden af at bevidstgøre disse forskelle volker imidlertid, i takt med, at den monoteistiske åndspest atter sænker kaosmørke over verden, denne gang bevæbnet med moderne teknologi og masseødelæggelsesvåben.” “[…] et totalitært eksitensmonopol, en monopolisering af alt helligt.” “Polyteisme er i stort set enhver henseende den overlegne og naturlige religiositet.”

80 Cf. “Om Monoteismens Uvæsen 3,” 20.
uses the familiar rejection of racial hatred in the spirit of the New Right, claiming that his anti-monotheistic resentment is based exclusively on religious and philosophical grounds. He promotes a societal structure combining Social Darwinist and ethnicist elements, and calls for a revival of the “aristocratic culture of trust” which, according to him, characterized both ancient Greek and ancient Germanic societies. Here, the best prove themselves as natural leaders by inspiring trust in their followers — an ideal allegedly directed against both totalitarian rule and an equally despised egalitarian, ‘superficial’ democracy of the masses.

Starkad Storm Stensgaard’s attacks, which he continued to launch in Forn Siðr’s journal Völse in 2008 and 2010, have been constantly commented on and contradicted by a-racist Danish Asatruers. They see such anti-monotheism as the expression of an unnecessary fixation on the concept of an enemy, and instead advocate concentrating on the building and promotion of one’s own faith. Moreover, they point out that anti-monotheists fall prey to exactly the exclusionary logic they project onto monotheism.

The anti-monotheism controversy has not remained purely theoretical within Danish Asatru, but has motivated several leading members who had opposed the radicalism of such positions and their influence on Forn Siðr’s board to leave the group altogether. This demonstrates the potential for dissent and split which lies in a radical anti-monotheist position. At the same time, meta-political theories such as Stensgaard’s anti-monotheism are able

81 Steensgaard also offered training in the principles of heroic leadership and a culture of trust on the basis of ancient Germanic and Greek principles in his company Heroic Consulting. The company’s homepage is now defunct: www.heroic.dk, last accessed December 16, 2012.

82 Starkad Storm, “Politisk Polyteisme og Antimonoteistisk Selvforsvar,” Völse 45 (2008), see also Völse 52, 2010.

83 This could be read as a structural analogy to the debates in völkisch religion and the völkisch movement mentioned in Chapter 1 around the exclusive fixation on a ‘negative’ anti-Semitism versus a ‘positive’ national and racial renewal.

84 Cf. Martin P. Hansen, “Politik og religion,” Völse 44 (2008), Martin Mørch, “Om politik og religion,” Völse 46 (2008). One author, Morten Grølsted, “Den mosaiske skelnen,” Völse 55 (2011), also evokes Assmann and his distinction between good and evil in religion to criticize both sides in the debate while simultaneously elaborating on Assmann’s point about Judaism’s nature as a counter-religion forming the root of anti-Semitism.

85 This was discussed in detail on the threads “Min fremtid i Forn Sidr” as well as “Farvel Forn Siðr,” and “Nyt trossamfund – Nordisk Tingsfællig” (all 2010 and 2011) on the now defunct forum www.kindir.dk, as well as in the thread “Anti-monoteisme” on http://www.idasletten.dk/forum/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=300, last accessed December 16, 2012.
to give a religiously motivated framework to the more general and little reflected-upon anti-Islamic sentiments circulating not only within Asatru but also characterizing contemporary European public debates in general. Denmark so far seems to be the only country where such eliminatory anti-monotheism in the style of Benoist and parts of the New Right (as well as the anti-Jewish and even more anti-Islamic sentiments connected with it) have been able to dominate the debates within nationally active Asatru groups.86 This is probably equally related to the overall political climate in Denmark, where populist xenophobic and anti-Islamic positions have entered the parliamentary and legislative spheres.87

In Germany, similar radical distinctions between monotheism and polytheism, which rebuke monotheism for its dualistic thinking, have been circulating in Asatru contexts closer to New Right and Conservative Revolutionary thought. One example is Björn Ulbrich, who maintains in his book about the “cult and rite of the Heathen community,” *Im Tanz der Elemente* (In the Dance of the Elements), that the opposition monotheism/polytheism requires a debate not about the number of gods, but about their quality:

Therefore, the central point is the question of whether or not the world and being is to be judged according to dualistic criteria. [...] Paganism rejects the dualism of *good or evil*, of *wrong or right*, it overcomes the separation between god and the world as well as the one between body and spirit. No absolute *either–or*, but a tolerant *both–and*. The antagonistic positions of the Christian faith (obedient–arrogant, weak–preposterous, humble–self-confident, etc.) are replaced in paganism by the communicating pairs *noble–low, honorable–dishonored, ill–healthy, brave–cowardly, etc.*88

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86 A search for the term ‘anti-monotheism’ (or rather its Scandinavian equivalents) on the most important Swedish and Norwegian Asatru websites and online forums gave no hits, a search for “monotheism” and “polytheism” resulted in a few leading to threads where similar controversies were debated, but in a less inflamed manner.

87 Cf. Lisbet Christoffersen, “Religion and State. Recognition of Islam and Related Legislation,” in *Islam in Denmark. The Challenge of Diversity*, ed. Jørgen S. Nielsen (Lanham etc.: Lexington Books, 2010); Brian Arly Jacobsen, “Muslims in Denmark. A Critical Evaluation,” in *Islam in Denmark. The Challenge of Diversity*, ed. Jørgen S. Nielsen (Lanham etc.: Lexington Books, 2010); Jørgen Bæk Simonsen, “Denmark, Islam and Muslims. Socioeconomic Dynamics and the Art of Becoming,” in *Islam in Denmark. The Challenge of Diversity*, ed. Jørgen S. Nielsen (Lanham etc.: Lexington Books, 2010).

88 Björn Ulbrich, *Im Tanz der Elemente. Kult und Ritus der heidnischen Gemeinschaft* (Vilsbiburg: Arun, 1990), 18f: “Der zentrale Punkt...ist daher die Frage, ob die Welt und das
It remains unclear in this quote what the exact conceptual difference is between the latter hierarchical “communicating” and the former “antagonistic” pairs. But it is obvious that the antagonistic or dualistic logic that monotheism is blamed for is also at work in this quote as well as in Ulbrich’s entire book, which is based on a definition of Heathenism as Christianity’s other. Such attitudes also evoke critique because of their proximity to New Right thought. For Asfrid (Fritz Steinbock) of the German VfgH, Assmann’s paradigm helps to formulate a politically unsuspicious position. He suspects a tendency in (folkish) Asatru to make a dogma out of the idea that “each person” or “each land” should adhere to their own religion. Further, he identifies a trend to “make an ideology out of the relativity of the Pagan ‘correctness’ — its being tied to land and people, nature, culture, history, social group, fate (whatever one wants).”

Generally speaking, German Asatruers who promote the usefulness of Sundermeier’s and Assmann’s categories of primary and secondary religion are most attracted by Assmann’s description of “cosmotheism.” For them, it is characterized by a religious attitude that sees Gods and the world as a unit, puts nature at its center, experiences the divine as an emanation of the world, and is not dependent on a transcendent revelation. Moreover, it aims at anchoring individuals in the world and integrates them into the divine orders of the earth.

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89 Asfrid, “Warum Asatru?,” 4f: “dann machen sie aus der Relativität der heidnischen ’Richtigkeit’ — ihrer Gebundenheit an Land und Leute, Natur, Kultur, Geschichte, Sozialverband, Schicksal (wie immer man will) — eine Ideologie.”
90 Mainly, the ‘theoreticians’ of the Eldaring and the VfgH, Kurt Oertel and Asfrid (Fritz Steinbock).
91 Cf. Asfrid, “Religion der dritten Sorte,” Ringhorn. Gemeinschaftsanzeiger des Vereins für germanisches Heidentum e.V. 55 (2008), Fritz Steinbock, “Die Freiheit eines Heidenmenschen. Inhalt und Gründe der ‘Leitidee freies Heidentum’ des ORD,” Heidnisches Jahrbuch 1 (2006), 149f.
92 E-mail correspondence with Kurt Oertel, Eldaring, April 12, 2011: “Primäre Religion zielt auf Beheimatung des Menschen in der Welt und auf seine Integration in die göttlichen Ordnungen des Irdischen.”
In spite of the idealized image of primary religions painted here, there is a
certain awareness that returning to such a state is neither possible nor desir-
able. In an attempt to resolve the implicit contradiction between individualist
and collectivist strands in Asatru, Asfrid emphasizes the profoundly modern
and liberal character of contemporary Heathenism and reminds his fellow
Heathens: “We want the church to dictate which gods we should honor and
how we should do it just as little as we want a tribe or other society – fictive as
they are – to.” On the contrary, he continues invoking liberal paradigms of the
autonomous individual, whereby modern Heathenism is characterized by an
individual choice of a suitable religion based on freedom of choice. From this,
he draws the conclusion that the “primary” Germanic religion can only serve as
an inspiration, whereas modern Heathenism is of a “new, third kind;” a “ter-
ttiary religion which posits a new beginning as a critically thinking ‘enlightened’
alternative to secondary religion.” This emphatic invocation of a new begin-
ning is combined with an avowal of the “cultural fundaments” of the present
age: “self-determination of religion, critical philosophy and science, humanism
and Enlightenment, democracy and human rights.”

Religion of Experience

Generally speaking, the majority of German Asatruers would support similar
values of enlightenment, religious plurality, and humanism, thus positioning
Asatru as a valid choice in a late-modern marketplace of religions. Such
notions stand in a certain, albeit unacknowledged tension to another cate-
gory German Asatruers frequently evoke to characterize their religion:
Erfahrungsreligion (religion of experience). This term is of course not new,
but has been used to describe a variety of religious trends that emphasize
personal emotional experience: from mysticism, through pietism and

93 All quotes Asfrid, “Religion der dritten Sorte,” 11: “So wenig wie von einer Kirche wollen
wir uns auch von einer – ohnehin fiktiven – Stammes- oder sonstigen Gesellschaft
vorschreiben lassen, welche Götter wir verehren und wie wir das zu tun hätten.” “Es ist
eine neue, dritte Sorte: Die tertiäre Religion, die als kritisch denkende, ‘aufgeklärte’
Alternative zur sekundären einen neuen Anfang setzt.” “Selbstbestimmtheit der Religion,
kritische Philosophie und Naturwissenschaft, Humanismus und Aufklärung, Demokratie
und Menschenrechte.”

94 This is one thesis of Gründer, Germanisches (Neu-)Heidentum in Deutschland.
Christian free-churches, to Buddhism, Hinduism, and Wicca. When invoking this category, German Asatruers seem unaware of this use of the concept, and rather ascribe it to the German historian and “natural philosopher” Reinhard Falter.\footnote{Cf. Steinbock, “Die Freiheit eines Heidenmenschen,” 152: “Reinhard Falter’s concept of religion of experience has become established in the modern ‘Heathen scene’ like no other academic term.” (Reinhard Falters Begriff der Erfahrungsreligion hat wie kein anderer akademischer Terminus Eingang in die moderne ‘Heidenszene’ gefunden).} Obviously, the invocation of the category of experience offers a seemingly self-evident description of Asatruers’ perception of the origin of their religious choice. They see it in an immediate experience of divine forces either within themselves, in the surrounding nature, or in their community, and set it against a religious concept relying on revelation and scriptural authority.

In a programmatic article in the first volume of *Heidnisches Jahrbuch* titled “What is Neopaganism?”\footnote{Baal Müller, “Was ist Neopaganismus?,” *Heidnisches Jahrbuch* 1 (2006).} Baal Müller, a former Eldaring and Ord/VfgH member and close collaborator of Falter, sharpens this distinction by derogating the dimension of “faith” and positing “experience” as superior: “A religion which bases itself on faith is worthless. […] Experience, not faith, is the true religious attitude towards the world.”\footnote{Ibid., 12: “Eine Religion, die sich auf Glauben gründet, ist nichts wert. […] In der Erfahrung und nicht im Glauben liegt die eigentliche religiöse Welthaltung.”} For Falter, as well as for Müller, the “Gods of the religion of experience” are to be characterized as “basic qualities or basic characters of the world,” as “seizing or moving atmospheres” in a similar sense to C.G. Jung’s conceptualized archetypes.\footnote{Ibid., 20: “Grundqualitäten oder Grundcharaktere der Welt – ergreifende Atmosphären.”}

Falter and Müller aptly place their own attempts at defining religion in the “tradition of a new mythology.” They stress the influence of Nietzsche, as well as philosophers like Ludwig Klages, Hermann Schmitz, or Kurt Hübner, historians of religion like Walter F. Otto and Mircea Eliade, in some respects also psychoanalysts like C.G. Jung and in an artistic sense poets like Stefan George, Gottfried Benn, Rainer M. Rilke, Theodor Däubler, Alfred Schuler, or Rudolf Pannwitz.\footnote{Ibid., 21.}

In Walter F. Otto and Mircea Eliade, they refer to two influential historians of religion, who identified religious experience of “The Holy” as the common denominator of all true religion. Similar to that of many other historians of
religion, their agenda can be called religious itself, since they saw their task as saving religion from modern critique, and saw religious feeling and experience as opportunities to reconcile the modern split between concept and reality, a desire Falter wholeheartedly embraces.

The strong reliance of Falter and Müller on both the Kosmiker Alfred Schuler and his student Ludwig Klages reveals the potentially problematic implications of this concept of a “religion of experience.” The Kosmische Runde was a circle of intellectuals in Munich around 1900, which initially stood in close contact with the circle around the poet Stefan George. They developed an irrationalist mysticism of natural essences, in which the “cosmic” truth was supposed to be preserved in the “blood.” History, progress, and capitalism all appeared as a conspiracy against this truth of eternal “images” – and the driving force of the despised historicism was seen in Judaism. This antagonism between “imageless Judah” (bildlosem Juda) and “‘cosmic’ Germania” (kosmisches Germanien) structured their worldview and their attempts to revive a Greek/Roman/Germanic Paganism based on a fierce anti-monotheism. It is this anti-historicism and religiously motivated anti-Judaism that Falter adopts unfiltered, and develops further in his work on an

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100 For an in-depth discussion of the role of European historians of religions’ in creating “a scientific store of world-views and norms to which one could recur in order to provide meaning” see Kippenberg, Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte, 266.

101 Reinhard Falter, “Die Götter der Erfahrungsreligion wieder verstehen. Das griechische Beispiel und die heutige Situation,” Heidnisches Jahrbuch 1 (2006), 95. See also the discussion on Eliade’s concept of a “holy,” mythic time in Müller, “Was ist Neopaganismus?,” 22, where he explains that for Eliade, the mythic event is not something located in the past as a singular occurrence, as the religions of revelation dependent on the Bible have it, but rather something which always happens in an archetypical sense, and which can be made present for example in a ritual act.

102 Cf. Walter Schmitz and Uwe Schneider, “Völkische Semantik bei den Münchner ‘Kosmikern’ und im George-Kreis,” in Handbuch zur ‘Völkischen Bewegung’ 1871–1918, ed. Uwe Puschner, Walter Schmitz, and Justus H. Ulbricht (Munich etc.: K.G. Saur, 1996), 722f. Cf. also Elke-Vera Kotowski, “Verkünder eines ‘heidnischen’ Antisemitismus. Die Kosmiker Ludwig Klages und Alfred Schuler,” in ‘Verkannte Brüder’? Stefan George und das deutsch-jüdische Bürgertum zwischen Jahrhundertwende und Emigration, ed. Gert Mattenklott, Michael Philipp, and Julius H. Schoeps (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2001), 205–208; Tobias Schneider, “Sektierer oder Kampfgenossen? Der Klages-Kreis im Spannungsfeld der NS-Kulturpolitik,” in Völkische Bewegung – Konservative Revolution – Nationalsozialismus. Aspekte einer politisierten Kultur, ed. Walter Schmitz and Clemens Vollnhals (Dresden: Thelem, 2005).
ethic based on nature and its laws. In contrast to Asfrid, Falter rejects enlightenment, humanism, and with it “the ideology of human rights which supports the spread of capitalism as well as of the world police,” quoting, among many others, Alain de Benoist. Championing a subjection of humanity under the laws of nature, he attests monotheism a fundamental unnaturalness, replacing the more neutral secondary religion with the biologist term “Pfropfreligion” (graft-religion). He combines his anti-monotheistic and anti-universalist opinions with eugenic sentiments, rejecting the notion that all (human) life deserves protection, a concept he feels leads to “making an idol of mere life, in other words of survival, and a levelling of hierarchies [...].”

Again, it is Judaism which he sees as the root cause of such a denial of death and sacrifice, and with it, the order of nature. With remarkable cynicism, he deplores an

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103 Falter distances himself from any kind of racial theory, claiming that his rejection of Judaism is based purely on religious arguments concurring with his anti-monotheism. Ludwig Klages’ anti-Jewish invectives are explained in a similar way. In his discussion of Alfred Schuler’s anti-Judaism, Baal Müller follows a similar line when he writes: “His anti-Judaism is not a racist anti-Semitism, but an anti-monotheism motivated by vitalism.” (“Sein Antijudaismus ist kein rassistischer Antisemitismus, sondern ein vitalistisch motivierter Antimonoteismus,” Baal Müller in his preface to Alfred Schuler, *Cosmogonische Augen. Gesammelte Schriften*, Edited, commented and with an introduction by Baal Müller (Paderborn: Igel Verlag, 1997), 10). See also Georg Dörr, *Muttermythos und Herrschaftsmythos. Zur Dialektik der Aufklärung um die Jahrhundertwende bei den Kosmikern, Stefan George und in der Frankfurter Schule* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), 193. Thomas Rohkrämer, *Eine andere Moderne? Zivilisationskritik, Natur und Technik in Deutschland 1880–1933* (Paderborn etc.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1999), 196, makes a similar argument regarding Klages’ anti-Semitism. However, the distinction between an (implicitly benign) anti-Judaism and a dangerous racist anti-Semitism can be understood as an expression of the same “appeasement syndrome,” for which Jürgen Ebach criticizes theologians who try to whitewash Christian anti-Judaism by distinguishing it from scientific racism. See Jürgen Ebach, “Amputierte Antike. Über Ursachen und Folgen des Antijudaismus in deutscher Altertumswissenschaft und Theologie,” in *Antike heute*, ed. Richard Faber and Bernhard Kytzler (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1992), 186.

104 Reinhard Falter, *Natur prägt Kultur. Der Einfluß von Landschaft und Klima auf den Menschen. Zur Geschichte der Geophilosophie* (Munich: Telesma-Verlag, 2006), 165. The book and others by Falter appeared courtesy of Müller’s publishing house, Telesma.

105 “Die Götter der Erfahrungsreligion wieder verstehen. Das griechische Beispiel und die heutige Situation,” 107: “Vergötzung des bloßen Lebens spricht Überlebens und eine Einbahnung der Hierarchien [...].”
inclusion which is characteristic for Judaism in every form, i.e., the will
for survival at any price or the unwillingness to accept a relation to death
as a necessary sacrifice in the sense of Anaximander.106

Such attitudes are in dramatic contrast to Asfrid’s support of human rights and
other Enlightenment ideals on which an optimistic new (Pagan) beginning is
to be based. They represent two contradictory ways of culturalizing religion
and simultaneously sacralizing culture: an outspokenly anti-modern and a
modernist one. It is a contradiction that remains implicit within Asatru and is
not openly discussed. These observations warrant the question: how can such
unacknowledged inconsistencies and their potential effects be understood?

Heathenism as Religious Secularism

Here, our previous reflections on the origin and contexts of an alleged funda-
mental difference between monotheism and polytheism, religions of experi-
ence and religions of revelation, tribal and universal religions, or Aryan and
Semitic religions come into play once again. The conception of such an essen-
tial distinction permeates both popular and academic discourse, or, as
Friedrich Wilhelm Graf claims for the “new cultural historians” of the 20th cen-
tury, they “merely reproduce the everyday knowledge which is always already
formed by the Kulturkämpfe [the struggles between church and state] in the
past.”107 In the case of Neopaganism, the academic construction and critique
of religion mutates into the formation of new religions. It is, of course, not
illegitimate to construct a new religion out of a well-established critical disc-
course on religion, and I shall discuss the mechanisms behind such construc-
tions of religion from academic knowledge in Chapter 8. However, it is equally

106 Natur prägt Kultur. Der Einfluss von Landschaft und Klima auf den Menschen. Zur Geschichte
der Geophilosophie, 290: “Eine Neigung, die für den Judaismus in jeder Form charakterist-
isch ist, nämlich der Wille zum Überleben um jeden Preis, bzw. der Unwille, ein Verhältnis
zum Tod als notwendiges Opfer im Sinn des Anaximander zu akzeptieren.” Falter’s ideas
on nature conservation are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. For a critical discussion
of Falter’s positions see Ulrich Linse, “Fundamentalistischer” Heimatschutz. Die
‘Naturphilosophie’ Reinhard Falters,” in Völkisch und national. Zur Aktualität alter
Denkmuster im 21. Jahrhundert, ed. Uwe Puschnier and G. Ulrich Großmann (Darmstadt:
WBG, 2009).

107 Graf, Die Wiederkehr der Götter, 108f: “reproduzieren die ‘neuen Kulturhistoriker’ häufig
nur jenes Alltagswissen, das immer schon von den konfessionellen Kulturkämpfen der
Vergangenheit geprägt ist.”
legitimate to point to some problems inherent in such critical and creative constructions.

The anti-monotheism of Asatruers like Starkad Storm Stensgaard, or the anti-Judaism/anti-monotheism of philosophers like Reinhard Falter are extreme examples of potential problems that are inherent in constructions of modern religiosity based on theories of essential differences between mono- and polytheism. The anti-Christian prejudices circulating in Neopagan circles do justice to neither the complex and contradictory developments, historical effects of, and lived experiences within Christianity, nor to the equally diverse manifestations of religions grouped together as ‘polytheistic.’ The logic of such a dichotomization of religious systems also frequently leads to excluding everything associated with Christianity, and thus to a curious division of history into ‘good’ Pagan eras and elements and ‘bad’ Christian or monotheistic ones.\textsuperscript{108}

In Asatru, but also in some academic contexts mainly interested in reconstructing pre-Christian religion, a similar mechanism leads to a mental exclusion of Christian elements and influences in general. An Icelandic Asatruer professed a vivid interest in history, then added: “I am interested in history except for the latest one thousand years. That is not interesting. I won’t be bothered listening to that. It has to be a thousand years or even older.”\textsuperscript{109} The one thousand years in this quote refer to the history of Iceland and the Northern European areas in general, which were Christianized fairly late in the unification of larger kingdoms. Another effect of such attempts to identify original Paganism and detach it from its Christian interpretations is a rather curious de-Christianization or ‘Paganization’ of the Middle Ages,\textsuperscript{110} an effect which can be found both in scholarship and in its Asatru appropriations.

\textsuperscript{108} Such processes of dividing out adversary tendencies from one’s own (idealized) object of study can already be observed in the construction of ‘antiquity’ in the 19th century. Jürgen Ebach, “Amputierte Antike” has shown that German classical studies and theology systematically excluded Judaism from an academic reception or configured it as a mere minority within the empires of antiquity. He concludes: “In contrast to Greek and Roman antiquity, ancient Israel was not supposed to be recognized and discussed because it was not supposed to be present.” (186: “Anders als die griechische und römische Antike sollte das antike Israel nicht rezipiert werden, weil es nicht gegenwärtig sein sollte.”)

\textsuperscript{109} Interview U: “Jeg interesserer mig for historie bortset fra de seneste etusind år. Det er uinteressant, det gider jeg ikke høre på. Det skal være tusind år gammelt eller endnu ældre, ikke?."

\textsuperscript{110} Cf. František Graus, \textit{Lebendige Vergangenheit. Überlieferung im Mittelalter und in den Vorstellungen vom Mittelalter} (Cologne/Vienna: Böhlau, 1975); Julia Zernack, “Germanische Restauration und Edda-Frömmigkeit,” in \textit{Politische Religion – religiöse Politik}, ed. Richard Faber (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1997), 147.
Not every Asatruer or group as a whole would follow these rigorous claims, which merely repeat or mirror the dichotomizing operations for which Christianity or monotheism are so frequently blamed. And not every Heathen would follow Pagan historian Michael Strmiska’s thesis that the Viking raids against monasteries starting in the 8th century should be understood as battles in a religious war of resistance against Christian missionary attempts. The Troth, in its brief and rather ‘matter of fact’ overview of Asatru’s history, summarizes the Vikings’ activities rather laconically: “more land, more gold, more lore, more glory.”

Some of these objections to Christianity may pass as justified, albeit one-sided objections to a dominant and repressive social and political force against which a more liberal and open Paganism/polytheism is cast. Frequently though, this disapproval of the Christian churches and their power turns into the vilification of Christianity’s own favorite scapegoat: Judaism, which is then seen and despised as the creator of monotheism and its evils. This stereotypical image of an ‘arch-enemy’ may more or less latently lay at the basis of many of the constructions Asatruers and other Neopagans build their religion on. However, as was demonstrated earlier, ‘the Jew’ does not figure very prominently, at least not overtly, in these contexts anymore.

Today, Islam has taken its place as the incarnation of the most radical and developed monotheism, the monotheistic religion that allegedly calls most loudly for war against polytheists and Pagans. Not all Asatruers enter into alliances with general anti-Islamic tendencies in Western societies. However, those who do give this Islamophobic discourse a peculiar twist. Within the current mainstream critique of Islam, it has become common to ascribe the capability of modernization and secularization exclusively to the ‘Judeo-Christian’ tradition. In contrast, Islam is depicted as inherently stagnant and

111 Michael Strmiska, “The Evils of Christianization. A Pagan Perspective on European History,” in Cultural Expressions of Evil and Wickedness, ed. Terry Waddell (New York: Rodopi, 2003).
112 Gundarsson, Our Troth, vol. 1, 80.
113 It is striking how many of the traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes are applied in current anti-Islamic discourse. For a critical discussion see for example Ivan Davidson Kalmar, “Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. The Formation of a Secret,” Human Architecture. Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge v11, no. 2 (2009), who alerts to the shared Orientalist background of parts of anti-Semitic as well as Islamophobic ideology.
114 For a critique of such Islamophobic secularisms see Talal Asad, “Europe Against Islam. Islam in Europe,” The Muslim World 87, no. 2 (1997); Judith Butler, “Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time,” The British Journal of Sociology 59, no. 1 (2008); Jasbir K. Puar, Terrorist Assemblages. Homonationalism in Queer Times (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2007).
pre-modern. Heathens who align with such discourses on religion take them a step further and configure ‘secularism,’ and with it a somewhat limited understanding of enlightenment and emancipation, as a specific trait of a Northern European pre-Christian tradition and religion. In this sense, Germanic Neopaganism can be understood as a Western secularism that has turned into a religion.

When we consider that one of the sources of inspiration for the early German Faith Movement in fact came from freethinkers and the free-religious movement, this observation is not as surprising as it might seem. This ‘religious secularism’ can have two related consequences. Parts of Asatru ally themselves with a modernity whose main values and ideals are then projected onto a deep past. In these cases, ‘modernity’ itself is turned into an atemporal marker of a cultural essence. In other cases, attempts to define a tradition of their ‘own’ modernist tradition versus the ‘alien’ Islam can even lead to a reluctant alliance with Christianity. An example is a contribution on the online-forum for the VfgH in a thread on “Islam and World Domination”:

I completely agree that we are not dealing with an antagonism between Christianity and Islam, but between a liberal-secular order and a religious dictatorship or theocracy. [...] Nevertheless – after this reprimand against the Christians – we must not blur the borders, not even in a Pagan forum: The separation between church and state had to be wrung from Christianity, but it could be wrung from it because it was already inherent in it (“Render to God the things that are God’s, and to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s”). In addition – in spite of being a book religion like Islam – Christianity is considerably more multi-layered and more open to different interpretations.

115 See Chapter 1.
116 An earlier example of such a-historical readings of modernity is Arthur Bonus’ idea that both saga literature and the works by Scandinavian realists and naturalists, such as Henrik Ibsen, are expressions of a timeless Nordic spirit which has always been ‘modern.’ See Chapters 1 and 9.
117 Entry by ‘Etzel’ on March 28, 2008, online-forum www.vfgh.de, thread: “Islam und Weltherrschaft”: “[... ] stimme ich vollkommen zu, daß es nicht um einen Gegensatz zwischen Christentum und Islam, sondern freihetlich-säkularer Ordnung und religiöser Diktatur bzw. Theokratie geht. [...] Dennoch dürfen – nach dieser Scheltrede gegen die Christen – auch in einem heidnischen Forum nicht die Grenzen verwischt werden: Dem Christentum wurde die Trennung von Kirche und Staat zwar auch abgerungen, aber sie konnte ihm deshalb abgerungen werden, weil sie in ihm bereits angelegt ist (‘Gebt Gott, was Gottes, und dem Kaiser, was des Kaisers ist’). Zudem ist das Christentum – obgleich wie der Islam eine Buchreligion – wesentlich vielschichtiger und unterschiedlicher auslegbar.”
This alliance of Christianity, Judaism and Germanic Neopaganism is often found in radical Islamophobic circles as well, and has reached its most violent expression in Anders Behring Breivik’s ideology. In his “Manifesto,” the Norwegian, who killed 77 people (mostly youths) in Oslo and Utøya on July 22, 2011, stylized himself as a Christian crusader while voicing strong sympathies for Odinists, whom he saw as allies in his attempts to extinguish Islam and its supporters. This argument is reminiscent of similar attitudes held by German Christians who perceived Christianity not as a universal religion, but as a German (or European) cultural force based on ethnic Pagan foundations.

We can thus identify two means of culturalizing religion and sacralizing culture in Asatru: an anti-modern one, which rejects enlightenment and secularism as ultimately foreign (and Jewish-Christian) and propagates an ethno-pluralist model of different and separate rooted cultures and tribal religions; and a secularist one, which associates itself with modernity and projects its values and ideals onto a deep past. Nevertheless, both assume that such a cultural or ethnic religion is not only more rooted in a deep past than Christianity, but is also closer to the natural world. This central figure of a Heathen religion of nature will be discussed in the next chapter.