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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2014.881123>

The ‘Great Doctrine of Transcendent Disdain’: History, Politics and the Self in Renan’s *Life of Jesus**

His glory does not consist in being relegated outside of history; we render him a truer devotion in showing that all history is incomprehensible without him.¹

(Renan, *Life of Jesus*)

In 1863, the historian and philologist Ernest Renan published his most successful and controversial book: *Vie de Jésus (Life of Jesus)*. This 450-page historical biography claimed to have reconciled the founder of Christianity’s incontestable greatness with nineteenth-century scholarship’s critical advances. Renan had been raised by a devout Catholic mother in Brittany and initially trained as a priest, but left the seminary in 1845 when he found it impossible to reconcile Catholic faith with the findings of biblical criticism. Two decades later, *Life of Jesus* sought to treat the New Testament as if it were any other historical source and to ‘banish’ the supernatural from historical writing.² Jesus was not God and did not perform miracles; he was rather the human architect of a ‘moral revolution’, whose ideas and personality had shaped the course of world history.³ The book was an instant sensation; it was swiftly translated into every major European language, provoked hundreds of hostile

pamphlets and newspaper reviews, and intrigued thousands of individual readers across the later nineteenth century.⁴

Renan was not primarily a biblical critic. Along with contemporaries such as Hippolyte Taine and the Goncourt brothers, he practised a particular form of cultural history that tried to situate ideas and individuals in their formative contexts.⁵ While Renan took from recent Protestant theology the view that the foundation of the Kingdom of God on earth was the signature idea in Jesus' thinking, *Life of Jesus* explained this idea historically.⁶ Jesus' dream of the Kingdom was a product of his upbringing in the particular context of first-century Galilee and a response to the messianic hopes and beliefs of the Jewish people. Renan was also, however, an admirer of Christianity. This lent the Kingdom an additional importance because, by distinguishing precisely what kind of world Jesus sought to establish, we could grasp the originality and moral character of his message. In a provocative summary of Jesus' ideology, Renan declared: 'Contemptuous of the worldly and convinced that the present world was not worth his concern, [Jesus] took refuge in his ideal kingdom; he founded that great doctrine of transcendent disdain (*dédain transcendant*), the true doctrine of spiritual liberty (*la liberté des âmes*) that alone gives peace.'⁷

This article uses Renan's notion of 'transcendent disdain' as a point of entry into the biographical origins and contemporary politics of his ideas about early Christianity. *Life of Jesus* was a work of imaginative historical reconstruction rather than an explicitly political tract; but if we wish to take seriously the author's repeated assurances that he saw Jesus as the greatest moralist in human history, we need to ask what kind of politics this entailed. I contend that Renan's interpretation of Jesus shared the broad contours of nineteenth-century liberalism: it celebrated the sovereignty of individual conscience while remaining sceptical towards state power and mass democracy. Much as Renan sought to situate Jesus' ideas in the context of his biography, I show how the young historian's own interpretation was rooted in

particular ideas about politics and selfhood that he had developed in the aftermath of the revolutionary events of 1848.

In its attention to biography and subjectivity, this article develops the insights provided by Jan Goldstein's recent analysis of Renan's spiritual crisis.⁸ Goldstein has shown how Renan's loss of faith hinged on a passage from one model of selfhood to another. As a student at the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, the young Renan had been trained to abnegate himself through meditating on God's will and seeking identification with Christ. After reading the philosophy of Victor Cousin around 1845, however, Renan began to assert the sovereignty of his interior observations and individual will; a process which ultimately resulted in his decision to leave the seminary. But the following two decades of life in Paris presented unexpected challenges to Renan's conception of selfhood that remain to be explored. Revolution and regime change posed urgent questions of academic solidarity and political responsibility. Ironically, Renan's resolutions to these dilemmas returned, through *Life of Jesus*, to a strategy that bore some resemblance to seminarian models of selfhood: namely, personal identification with Jesus Christ.

More fundamentally, my analysis contributes to the ongoing reassessment of Christianity's place in nineteenth-century French thought. Many scholars have noted early socialism's preoccupation with religion, from the Christological imagery of Étienne Cabet to the 'new churches' founded by the Saint-Simonians (and those, like Auguste Comte, who shared many of their concerns).⁹ Recent scholarship has paid similar attention to the spiritual concerns of nineteenth-century liberals. Paul Bénichou described Restoration liberals as being 'torn between the recent experience of free enquiry' and the established conviction 'that social cohesion requires common, uncontested beliefs'.¹⁰ The cultural elite often resolved this conflict by acts of 'self-consecration': they declared artists and writers to be the privileged custodians of modern transcendence.¹¹ In his essay on Heinrich Heine, for

example, Edgar Quinet celebrated the poet as a latter-day Columbus, risking the ‘ocean of thought’ to steer humanity towards a ‘new ideal world’.¹² George Armstrong Kelly has spoken of the ‘respiritualisation’ of liberal values across a broader period extending through the Second Empire, while Sudhir Hazareesingh has suggested that the even the Third Republic’s founding élite syncretised these enduring moral concerns with their democratic and positivist values.¹³

French liberalism is best seen as a continuum, whose representatives defined themselves in opposition to, on the one hand, the oppressive alliance of absolute monarchy and the reactionary clergy and, on the other, the supposedly anarchic excesses of democracy. These poles were generally resolved by a belief in constitutional monarchy. Liberals under the Second Empire tended to cluster around the Orléanist monarchists, who favoured a restoration under Louis Philippe’s grandson Prince Philippe, the Comte de Paris.¹⁴ But liberals with greater faith in democracy could also be found among the republican opposition, while the more conciliatory took part in the Bonapartist government itself, especially during the ‘Liberal Empire’ of the 1860s. These included, most notably, the Minister of Public Instruction (1863-9) Victor Duruy and Émile Ollivier, who led the Empire’s last civilian government in 1870.

The religious spectrum of liberalism was if anything even more diverse than the political. The label has been attributed to devout Protestants (François Guizot) and Catholics (Charles de Montalembert) as much as to free-thinkers (Charles-Augustin de Sainte-Beuve), while also incorporating a great many whose own religious beliefs were minimal but who saw faith as a social good.¹⁵ Liberals were generally less keen than socialists to experiment with new religions but this also meant that, beyond near-universal opposition to Catholic Ultramontanism, they struggled to find consensus on religious issues. Should politics take a position totally independent of religious questions, or should it be explicitly grounded in a

certain religious institution or morality? Was religion an important guarantor of social order and bulwark against extremism, or in fact a dangerous competing source of authority? With their varying religious and philosophical persuasions, liberals offered conflicting and often incomplete answers to these questions.¹⁶

Yet liberals under the Second Empire felt the moral and spiritual direction of the French nation was crucially important. After the upheavals and disillusionment of 1848-52, prominent figures such as Gustave Flaubert and Alexis de Tocqueville retreated from frontline politics into the supposedly pure and uncompromised realms of culture and criticism.¹⁷ This ‘inward turning’ engendered a preoccupation with morality that can be seen in, for example, the liberal republican Étienne Vacherot’s *La Démocratie* (*Democracy*, 1859), which tried to ground democracy in a metaphysics of free will and moral duty.¹⁸

Life of Jesus has special significance here, firstly because it was extremely widely read, and secondly because it treated religion directly and politics obliquely, rather than vice versa. Renan used Jesus to consider many of the core problems in liberal philosophy: the scope of individual agency, man’s political responsibility under an oppressive regime, and the relationship between church and state. At the heart of this effort was the same tension between the right to free enquiry and the need for common customs that Bénichou diagnosed at the heart of earlier liberal thought. How could Renan resolve this contradiction between his wish to grant moral authority to the Gospels while, at the same time, seeking to assault the historical veracity and theological meaning of the New Testament texts? I argue that *Life of Jesus* replaced divine authority with a philosophy of history that retained Jesus as a world-historical singularity. In Renan’s book, Jesus’ teachings took on special authority because their originality could not be fully explained by a deterministic interpretation of history. In their condemnation of the worldly these teachings could, moreover, provide a critique of materialist political ideologies. Through these historiographical and political manoeuvres,

Life of Jesus offered a secular interpretation of Christianity that retained something of the religion's transcendent authority.

Renan and 1848

In February 1848, Renan was a twenty-five-year-old student in Paris, though his passage to the University had been more complicated than most. Born in Tréguier in Brittany, the young Renan had moved to the capital in 1840 to take up a scholarship at the prestigious Seminary of Saint-Sulpice. After a harrowing period of doubt and epistolary dialogue with his free-thinking sister Henriette, Renan had conclusively lost faith in the literal truth of much of the Bible and, no longer able to reconcile his critical ideas with Catholic orthodoxy, left the seminary in 1845 to pursue a career as a secular academic.¹⁹ He studied for a doctorate at the University while also following lectures on comparative philology at the Collège de France.

Philology excited nineteenth-century thinkers like Renan because it promised to reveal the deep structures of human history. By the close examination of linguistic evolution, a philologist could reconstruct historical relationships between disparate cultures, as well as date texts, monuments, artefacts and cultural developments with ever-increasing precision. While philology itself was not new – Renan went so far as to argue that philologists were behind ‘all of the most important revolutions in thought’ since the fifteenth century – powerful new methods had revolutionised the discipline since the Enlightenment.²⁰ Chief among these methods was comparative grammar, an approach whereby the philologist reduced two languages to their basic grammatical roots in order to establish the existence and/or nature of ‘family’ relationships between them.²¹ Comparative grammar produced new systems of linguistic classification. Most notably, the recognition of similarities between

Latin and Vedic Sanskrit established an enduring division between ‘Indo-European’ and ‘Semitic’ languages. Once it was refined, the technique could even be employed to reconstruct theoretical parent languages, such as in August Schleicher’s reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European in 1861-2.²²

Renan was entranced by the power of this new scientific approach to the history of language. He fell under the spell of Eugène Burnouf, Professor of Sanskrit at the Collège de France and renowned expert on Indian languages.²³ On 25 February, as the nation’s monarchy collapsed and the Second Republic formed in the shadow of Parisian insurrection, Renan crossed a barricade to get to one of Burnouf’s lectures. He was incensed when the lecture was swiftly brought to a close by angry guardsmen:

That day, I asked myself more seriously than ever if there was anything better to do than dedicate all the moments of one’s life to study and thought; and, after having consulted my conscience and reaffirmed my faith in the human mind (*esprit humain*), I responded with a resounding: “No.”²⁴

Rather than taking on the mantle of a student radical, Renan instead began to develop a conception of selfhood that cleaved apart ‘intellectual’ activities from ‘political’ ones. He contributed to the republican and Cousinian journal *Liberté de penser* over the course of 1848-9. This was primarily a way for Renan to get closer to Victor Cousin, an enormously powerful philosopher who had been a dominant figure the outgoing regime’s educational establishment.²⁵ Renan was careful to avoid political topics and grew nervous about even submitting his ‘entirely scientific’ articles to be printed alongside the strident republican propaganda in the journal.²⁶ Shortly after Louis-Napoléon’s election as president, he laid responsibility for the new government’s conservative turn squarely at the feet of the revolutionary republican youth, whom he believed more interested in celebrity than reason. Renan believed it was young republicans’ excess that had brought chaos to the streets of Paris

during the ‘June Insurrection’ of 1848, when the National Guard repressed urban workers protesting against the closure of the National Workshops.²⁷ ‘Certainly’, wrote Renan to Henriette, ‘I can completely wash my hands of this; for I have always found such petty actions undignified for intellectual men.’²⁸

Insofar as Renan still perceived himself to have a political role, it was in the ‘higher mission’ of the ‘true thinker’ who ‘addresses himself to ideas, seeks to modify the general turn of imagination; but has contempt for such miserable personal questions.’²⁹ Indeed his most famous production of the revolutionary period, 1849’s unpublished manifesto *L’Avenir de la Science* (*The Future of Science*), did not daydream of a socialist utopia but rather asserted the inevitability of inequality within any society.³⁰ Renan imagined a technocratic future where France was ruled by ‘experts and specialists’ who would ‘treat governmental questions like scientific ones, and search for rational solutions.’³¹ This was a vision of government that owed something to Saint-Simonian preoccupations, particularly the belief that the nation needed to foster a new meritocratic elite to cope with the changes of modernity.³² Passages in Renan’s essay also evoked broader socialist concerns with universal education and improving the material conditions of life. But *The Future of Science* rejected socialists’ pursuit of an equal society: the state’s role was not to ensure universal happiness, but rather to guarantee a minimum level of material comfort from which the individual could strive for self-perfection.³³ Renan also stridently opposed extending suffrage to the working classes, on the grounds that they were insufficiently educated to make rational choices.³⁴

Despite his rejection of their views on equality, Renan shared with many mid-century socialists a belief that the emerging society required new moral and quasi-religious foundations. Michael C. Behrent has highlighted how a seam of nineteenth-century social thought was preoccupied with the question of how society might replicate the transcendent communal bonds of Catholicism, now that these had been forever broken by the rupture of

the French Revolution.³⁵ From the Saint-Simonian Pierre Leroux in the 1840s to the godfather of sociology Émile Durkheim in the 1900s, many writers believed that abstract notions of the social contract and individual rights were not sufficient to bind citizens to the nation and guarantee social order. Though he would later stress the importance of the national community, Renan did not at this stage eulogise the transcendent unity of society as an alternative to religion. Nor, as is discussed below, did he endorse the socialist Christ associated with personalities like Étienne Cabet.³⁶ But he shared such thinkers' scepticism towards the material world's ability to satisfy human needs and cited the Gospel's reminder that 'man shall not live by bread alone'.³⁷

Even in his fantasies of the state as an 'engine of progress', Renan felt it important to celebrate the immaterial dimensions of human history.³⁸ In language that almost recalled the early nineteenth-century philosophical theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher, he argued that man was a religious animal who innately strived for the infinite.³⁹ This 'aspiration to the ideal' took the name of religion.⁴⁰ While Renan was at pains to claim that no particular religion, and not even monotheism, provided the ultimate expression of man's religious need, Jesus Christ was a constant reference point for his arguments.⁴¹ Much of Renan's early writing had been concerned with the figure of Jesus. While on retreat from the seminary in 1845 he had written an *Essai psychologique sur Jésus-Christ (Psychological Essay on Jesus Christ)* in which he struggled to explain the historical singularity of Jesus' appearance.⁴² This was followed by a more orthodox historiographical review of the major recent work on Jesus' life, which he serialised in *Liberté de penser* during spring 1849.⁴³

Using Christ as an example, *L'Avenir de la Science (The Future of Science)* evoked those 'great crises of the human spirit', during which 'exalted human nature, pushed to the limit' produced 'great revelations'. If the revolutionary ferment of first-century Galilee were somehow recreated, he anticipated that 'we would see a new Christ, probably not represented

by individuals but by a new spirit which will spring forth spontaneously without perhaps being so exclusively personified.⁴⁴ Some passages evoked Christ to startling effect. Renan condemned French liberalism's preoccupation with free speech on the basis that, like Christianity under Roman and Jewish repression, 'the truth always finds enough freedom to present itself (*pour se faire jour*)'.⁴⁵ Revealing the more conservative side of his thinking, Renan awkwardly argued that while freedom of thought was sacred, statutory freedom of association and expression threw the public sphere open to demagogues and frauds.⁴⁶

In sum, Renan emerged from the ferment of 1848-52 with the kind of antidemocratic, antiegalitarian and anticlerical views typical of many in France's liberal cultural élite, as well as their distaste for, or disillusionment with, conventional politics. These ideas represented a common bourgeois reaction to the Second Republic, which had introduced extensive freedom of expression and universal manhood suffrage but ended in calamity when both were ultimately exploited by the authoritarian Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (later Napoleon III).⁴⁷ Like many liberals, Renan greeted the arrival of the Second Empire with muted revulsion. Yet alongside Gustave Flaubert or the Goncourt brothers he was happy to engage with the channels of exclusive sociability and patronage it had revived, such as the salons around Princess Mathilde and Marie d'Agoult.⁴⁸ In the same vein as Flaubert, who retreated to 'a sort of aesthetic mysticism' in defiance of the 'bourgeois' political squabbling of the 1850s, Renan spent the decade pursuing fulfilment through the pursuit of knowledge and intellectual creation, rather than contesting or fleeing from the new regime.⁴⁹ In fact the young academic profited greatly from the Bonapartist government, winning academic positions and patronage, and later recalled it fondly.⁵⁰

The summit of Renan's achievements under the Empire was his election to the Professorship of Semitic Languages at the Collège de France in December 1861, though this appointment also produced his most open confrontation with the government. It tested

Renan's views on free speech and challenged his self-definition as an aloof and apolitical scholar.

The furore began when, in his inaugural lecture on 21 February 1862, Renan appeared to refute the divinity of Jesus Christ by calling him only 'an incomparable man'.⁵¹ This lecture rapidly became a focal point for opposition between clericalists and young republicans, who brawled in the Latin Quarter. Wary of further upsetting the government's fragile relationship with , the government suspended Renan from his position. A decade and a half after condemning the republican youth for sabotaging, Renan was the toast of Parisian students, who chanted his name alongside those Jules Michelet and Edgar Quinet, both republican academics opposed to the regime.⁵² The Emperor wrote to Renan that though he regretted 'this setback', it was not possible for the state to endorse 'the denial of one of the fundamental bases of the Christian religion.'⁵³

Despite his professions of scholarly independence and political detachment, Renan suddenly found himself in the midst of a partisan dispute. His response attempted to refine the position of aloofness he had cultivated since 1848. In a move which would typify his later reaction to the *Life of Jesus* debates, Renan refused to respond to 'slanders' in the press and limited his interventions to grand gestures.⁵⁴ He published an open letter to his colleagues at the Collège de France explaining his actions.⁵⁵ Here, the suspended professor described his passion for bringing modern philology to backward France, reiterated the independence of the Collège as an institution and cited the inevitability of stepping on religious toes given the remit of the chair. Renan was nonetheless sensitive to the importance of emphasising his affection for religion. Indeed, when he first published the inaugural lecture, Renan specifically asked his publishers the Lévy brothers to foreground the complimentary phrases about Jesus which followed the notorious 'incomparable man'.⁵⁶

In the wake of this controversy, the act of publishing *Life of Jesus* in 1863 was implicitly political. The book proclaimed the academic's right to interrogate and make authoritative claims about even the most sacred figures and periods. As such it encapsulated the twin ideals of individuality and liberty that the Second Empire's liberals sought to idealise against what they saw as the group-think and slavery inherent in democracy. Since the book's publication, biographers and historians have often been tempted to give it a further political significance. They have either viewed *Life of Jesus* as a coded expression of Renan's views on the contemporary government, or seen its subject, Jesus, as a narcissistic cipher for the author.⁵⁷ This analysis has been especially attractive since historians have long associated the illiberal Second Empire period with forms of 'symbolic resistance' and indirect criticism, and because historians have often viewed nineteenth-century historical writing as 'politics by other means'.⁵⁸

Certainly it is not difficult to draw analogies between, say, Renan's description of the dogmatic Pharisees suppressing religious freedom and his own view of the period's Ultramontane Catholicism. One might also see his sympathetic depiction of Pontius Pilate, the well-intentioned servant of the Roman Empire, who had been brutal in his early reign but later focused on public works, as a critical nod to Napoleon III.⁵⁹ But Renan evidently did not intend *Life of Jesus* to be such a straightforward coded critique of the government. He had been transfixed by the figure of Jesus for decades, researching and working on the life of Christ ever since he had left the seminary, testing out his emerging ideas on the subject in multiple formats and arenas.⁶⁰

In what follows I will draw a subtler connection between *Life of Jesus* and the politics of the Second Empire. In his examination of Jesus' life, Renan was drawn to create a figure who might reconcile the strands of his post-revolutionary ideas about politics and society in a coherent moral vision. By embodying these values in the figure of Jesus, he also sought to

imbue them with a transcendent character that exceeded mere ideology. Because Jesus was no longer divine, however, Renan had to replace his theological significance with a new form of transcendence that was rooted in a philosophy of history.

Jesus and Ideology

Renan's distinctive approach to Jesus as a political and social thinker can be illustrated by comparison with prevailing trends in nineteenth-century French representations of Christ. In the decades leading before 1848, socialists such as Étienne Cabet, historians like Edgar Quinet and activists like the 'worker-poets' had evoked a figure of Jesus who was simultaneously a Romantic hero and an icon of social progress.⁶¹ From the 1830s, French socialist thought took a marked turn to Christological imagery.⁶² In the socialist view (which was also later Proudhon's), Christianity was an essentially egalitarian movement that modern revolutionaries had a duty to pursue and complete.⁶³ Socialists viewed Jesus a messenger of fraternity. This core ideal was realised through the formation of communities, in the form of churches. The inverse of Christianity was thus individualism, or particularly 'egotism'.⁶⁴ This interpretation could be traced back to the Fall, which was a prime example of God punishing man's egotistical impulses. It also helped democratic socialists to forge connections with a popular audience. Berenson has shown that the image of Christ as an ordinary worker fighting for social justice was a prominent feature of revolutionary efforts in the countryside during 1848, providing a common symbolic vocabulary for communication between revolutionaries and peasants.⁶⁵

The socialist Christ was spread through modern political campaign methods and rooted in post-revolutionary social thought; particularly, the problem of how to forge social solidarity without an organic system of hierarchy. But it was not dependent on a modern

historiographical consciousness. In his pamphlet *Le vrai christianisme suivant Jésus-Christ* (*True Christianity according to Jesus Christ*), published in 1846 and reprinted in 1848, Cabet absolutely rejected the possibility that Jesus might be only ‘the greatest of men’ and unambiguously asserted that he believed in Christ’s divinity.⁶⁶ With a couple of gestures to historical context, Cabet’s narrative of Jesus’ life was essentially based on a naive reading of the New Testament and gladly accepted miracle narratives as communist acts. Was the healing of Lazarus not ‘an inspiration of Reform and Progress,’ healing ‘the unfortunate proletarian, abandoned by the whole world?’⁶⁷ While the republican historian Edgar Quinet was more in touch with recent German efforts to historicise the Bible, he rejected such work on the basis that it neglected the magnetism of Jesus’ personality. As he asserted in an 1857 preface to his review of David Friedrich Strauss’s path-breaking *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* (*The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*), such work drowned the transformative agency of powerful individuals in an undistinguished ‘ocean of humanity’.⁶⁸

Life of Jesus utterly rejected the socialist interpretation of Jesus’ life. While Renan acknowledged that Jesus had given special attention to the poor and marginalised in a corrupt society, he viewed the communistic elements of early Christianity as the naive dreams of simple country people. Renan despaired of Jesus’ parable that it was harder for a rich man to enter heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.⁶⁹ This ‘singular political economy’ had to be abandoned when the religion began to reach beyond its provincial origins and target a broader social base.⁷⁰ The enduring legacy of such ideas was simply their anti-materialism: the idea that ‘man does not live by bread alone’, as Renan reiterated.⁷¹ In one of very few passages where Renan broke from historical examples to discuss present concerns, he admitted that ‘all humanity’s social revolutions’ will be founded on Jesus’ aspiration to realise the Kingdom of God on earth. But he pointedly refused to see revolutionary socialism as a legitimate inheritor of this idea:

[T]ainted by a coarse materialism and aspiring to the impossible, which is to say founding universal happiness on economic and political measures, our era's "socialist" attempts will remain fruitless until they take as their rule the true spirit of Jesus. By this I mean absolute idealism: the principle that to own the earth you must renounce it.⁷²

Christianity's revolutionary idealism did not involve the inversion of social relations but rather consisted in individuals who strived to embody Gospel morality, chafing against humanity's limits to achieve a superior ideal.⁷³ To Renan, Jesus was exceptional because he had very nearly realised it.

'Transcendent disdain' defined the attitude necessary to pursue this ideal. In essence, it meant holding the material world in contempt and turning away from the petty questions of politics and statecraft. This was 'transcendent' because, by implying that one could live inside the Kingdom of God within one's own soul, regardless of external material conditions, it allowed the individual to transcend the temporal realm rather than merely rejecting it. The suggestion that this was a form of 'disdain' was more provocative, but consistent with Renan's general characterisation of Jesus' personality. It encompassed his scoffing approach to contemporary social prejudices, manifested through his association with prostitutes and publicans; his blithe ignorance of contemporary politics, immortalised in the phrase about giving to Caesar what was Caesar's; and his ultimate scorn for Pharisaic justice during the trial⁷⁴ The most prominent symbol of Jesus' transcendent disdain was, finally, his martyrdom, which Renan depicted as the ultimate contemptuous rejection of the material world.⁷⁵ Rather than lament the regime that brutally oppressed a man's freedom of conscience, Renan was moved to apostrophic excess by the epic self-sacrifice of the Crucifixion: 'For the price of a few hours of suffering, which did not even strike your great soul, you have bought the most complete immortality. For thousands of years, the world will pardon you!'⁷⁶

Through contempt for the worldly, Jesus opened an internal space of intellectual and spiritual freedom. In an argument that recalled Benjamin Constant's post-revolutionary fusion of the ideals of 'ancient' and 'modern' liberty, Renan argued that Christian freedom was more profound than the merely civic and political concept of liberty developed by the ancient world.⁷⁷ The liberty of the 'true Christian' was not just something 'foreign to politics' but made him into 'an exile on earth'.⁷⁸ Because it meant abstaining from serious political engagement, Renan acknowledged that the Christian's aloof posture bore the risk of tacitly endorsing despotism.⁷⁹ Unlike Constant, however, who had warned against the dangers of abdicating from political participation in favour of individual happiness, Renan celebrated the virtue of this purely interior conception of liberty: the Christian man's 'indifference' to 'social and political questions' prevented him from falling into the 'partisan quarrels' of the political man.⁸⁰ It thus left him free to think about higher questions and guide the 'general morality of our species'.⁸¹ Jesus' legitimate heirs were those oppressed Christians who martyred themselves for 'freedom of conscience' over the next three hundred years, as their Messiah had in his own life. Christianity had declined since by trying to become a source of 'power' rather than of 'freedom', but Renan affirmed: 'To renew itself, it needs only return to the Gospel.'⁸²

Life of Jesus thus represented the coalescence of its author's views on politics and selfhood since the personal and political upheavals of the 1840s. By privileging Christian 'freedom of conscience' over Antiquity's civic conception of liberty, Renan rearticulated the distinction between different varieties of freedom that he had articulated in *The Future of Science*, but with a renewed moral charge. Where before Christ had stood as an example of how truth would triumph without legal freedom, he now represented the virtuous and wholesale rejection of political life in favour of the pursuit of truth. As concerned Jesus' public life, there was a clear analogy between Renan's vision of the great religious founder

who guided ‘the general morality of our species’ and his idealisation of the intellectual man who steered ‘the general turn of the imagination’ back in the winter of 1848. Against those who had seen in Jesus a model for proletarian rebellion or viewed early Christianity as an archetype of an associative republican society, Renan had made Jesus into a model for the politically aloof and intellectually sovereign individual. It was a vision of heroism that at once reflected and justified the idealised, righteous self-image of a Second Empire liberal.

Jesus and History

The problem with Renan’s injunction that humanity should return to the Gospel was that it implied that Christianity had a singularly powerful claim to authority over human morality. And yet, by rejecting Jesus’ divinity, denying his supernatural acts and claiming to have explained the origins of his ideas, Renan had stripped away the traditional theological bases of Christianity’s authority. The book’s analogies to his mentor Burnouf’s work on Buddha and Aloys Sprenger’s work on the life of Muhammad seemed to imply equivalence between religious founders, while comparisons with Socrates and the revolutionaries of 1789 seemed to bring Jesus into a canon of secular human heroes.⁸³ Renan nonetheless asserted that he did not want to reduce Jesus to being simply a source of good moral maxims or a type of the ‘great religious founder’ alongside Moses, Buddha and Muhammad. The founder of Christianity had a unique significance that exceeded such generalities.⁸⁴

The tension inherent in this effort was evident in Renan’s resort to religious vocabulary when he sought to express the essence of his idea. He wrote that Gospel morality was ‘a living argument for the divine forces which exist in mankind, a monument raised to the power of the will’, and that ‘we are permitted to call [Jesus] divine, not in the sense that he was immersed in the divine ... but in the sense that Jesus is the individual who has made

his species take the greatest step towards divinity.’⁸⁵ No longer able to root Christianity’s moral authority in the divine origins of its founder, Renan made Jesus quasi-divine by virtue of his singularity in universal history.

The process of Jesus’ resacralisation emerged in two stages from the narrative of *Life of Jesus*. In the first part of the book, Renan focused on the effort to root Jesus in historical context. Renan and his mid-century peers such as the the Goncourts, Sainte-Beuve and Taine, were concerned to demonstrate how individuals were formed by what Jonathan Dewald has called ‘the continual flux of exterior impressions’.⁸⁶ Renan accordingly described the formation of Jesus’ character and ideas through a range of interlocking deterministic forces, most notably race, religion and environment. Jesus initially emerged as the implied product of historical circumstances rather than a fully-fledged human agent.

For example, Renan was keen to underline how the specific conditions of first-century Jewish culture provided the preconditions for the appearance of a Messianic figure like Jesus. As he narrated it, the early nomadic Jews had combined an organised priesthood with a belief in the importance of prophecy and inspiration to develop a law, moral system and religious scripture. From this, Judaism derived impressive imperial gains; but nevertheless remained an essentially parochial and tribal religion. In the face of Roman oppression and disappointment, apocalyptic dreams and messianic prophecies peaked. Renan made particular use of the Books of Daniel and Henoah to argue that the Jewish people increasingly imagined the Messiah as a ‘son of man’ rather than a divine king in the Davidic mould.⁸⁷ Jesus was like his peers: he read the same books, witnessed the same upheavals and heard the same ideas about messiahs and resurrections. Renan summarised this by declaring that ‘these ideas were not taught in any school; but they were in the air, and his soul was soaked in them from an early stage.’⁸⁸ The same went for Jesus’ actions. For example, Renan argued that since popular

culture associated Messianic behaviour with the performance of miracles, Jesus performed them ‘despite himself’ in order to win approval.⁸⁹

In the second stage of his explanation, Renan moderated his insistence on the formative influence of context by incorporating an account of individual agency. As Jesus attained adulthood and began his ministry, he took control over his context. Though Jesus was steeped in the Jewish messianic traditions Renan had described, he did not simply absorb his culture’s beliefs and seek to emulate them. Although, for instance, he was content to ‘let’ people call him the ‘Son of David’ for the sake of spreading his message, Jesus never called himself by this title and had a very clear and specific conception of his own role.⁹⁰ Renan argued that Jesus saw himself primarily as the ‘Son of Man’, and as the ‘Son of God’ only in the sense that all men were capable of sensing a filial bond to the divine.

Renan did not thus conceive Jesus as a passive cipher for his culture’s fantasies; the founder of Christianity had his own ideas and, most importantly, he had an effect on people which inspired them to ascribe him with messianic properties. Jesus was, after all, not the first Jew of his era to claim to be the Messiah, but he was the only one to have generated a religious movement that had spread across the known world. In this, Renan departed from the Romantic idea of ‘great men’ simply embodying and expressing the spirit of their age.⁹¹ Like his contemporary Burckhardt, Renan instead implied that at certain periods of crisis, history could have taken multiple directions. At these times, as Burckhardt had put it in his study of Constantine, the great man had a ‘heavy burden of historical responsibility’ to step in and ‘impress his will on the world’.⁹² The greatness of men like Constantine – or Jesus – resided in their ability to harness a period of crisis into order. As Renan put it: ‘On the one hand, the great man receives everything from his age; on the other, he dominates it.’⁹³

Jesus therefore took on a historical meaning that displaced his Christian theological significance. He had invented a religion of unique moral purity and hitherto unprecedented

universalism that allowed it to spread far beyond its origins ‘[among] a different race, under a different sky, in the midst of different social needs’.⁹⁴ Crucially, the broad dissemination of Christianity rested on the universal attraction of Jesus as a figure: the essence of his character was simply so beautiful that it echoed through the very imperfect and tendentious accounts of his life in the Gospels.⁹⁵ What this procedure gave with one hand it took away with the other; for if Jesus was a historically active individual, he was also a historically contingent one. It was possible for a historian to understand him in secular and human terms: to master him, in a sense. But though bringing Jesus into the remit of historiography humanised and secularised him, it also granted Jesus a new form of transcendent significance. Jesus had been determined by the same social forces as any other individual yet acted on them in a way that echoed across alien times and places: this world-historical singularity underpinned the unique and universal value of his moral teaching.

Conclusion

In its rejection of social revolution and religious dogmatism, as well as by its defence of liberty of conscience, celebration of the autonomy of the individual and resignation from the perceived demagogy of politics, Renan’s *Life of Jesus* encapsulated the fundamental concerns and contradictions of French liberal thought in the wake of 1848. Though the book was not primarily a political intervention, it nonetheless offered an implicit statement of political principles that synthesised the developments in Renan’s ideological outlook since his loss of faith. Indeed the fact that *Life of Jesus* treated politics largely indirectly was in itself a statement of precisely the patrician aloofness that the book personified in its hero, the historical Jesus.

Most significantly, Renan offered an alternative solution to what Kelly labelled the ‘liberal problem of faith’: the pervasive anxiety and disagreement over the role of religion in a modern, educated nation.⁹⁶ The reader of *Vie de Jésus* could admire Jesus and strive to attain his superior moral vision without deferring to any church or theology, while also insisting, against those who sought to constrain individual liberties on religious grounds, that freedom of conscience was the core Christian value. Unlike writers who had attempted to develop a secularised replacement for Christian morality by reducing the Gospel to a series of moral maxims or by creating holistic new religious systems, Renan attempted to transport Jesus into the sphere of secular history without sacrificing his transcendent meaning.

In a sense, Renan was part of a broader international tendency towards representations of Jesus as a foundational figure of modern liberalism. Albert Schweitzer memorably condemned the German theologian Daniel Schenkel for offering, in a book published the year after Renan’s, a ‘bourgeois Messiah’ who preached ‘reform’ and retreated from political confrontation.⁹⁷ In his initially anonymous *Ecce Homo* of 1865, the English historian J. R. Seeley treated Christ as a moral innovator preaching the ‘Enthusiasm of Humanity’.⁹⁸ By attending to Renan’s biography, this article has drawn out how the particularly (though not always uniquely) French context of *Life of Jesus* shaped Renan’s position on these subjects. The combination of revolutionary violence and elective dictatorship that characterised France’s mid-century crisis had bred deep scepticism of democracy and socialism among the nation’s liberals. Despite its free-thinking traditions, France’s Catholic heritage led many thinkers to feel sympathetic towards popular faith or, at the very least, envious of the Church’s social bonds and hierarchical authority. On the other hand, the rise of intransigent political Catholicism made educated elites fearful of illiberal theocracy.

Renan’s particular trajectory through this context resulted, most notably, in a marked attention to the self that was expressed in historiographical terms through faith in the

transformative role of the individual. Renan's path out of Catholicism had convinced him of the simultaneous mutability and autonomy of the self. *The Future of Science* ended with a concession to his own cultural contingency that Renan would repeat in various forms throughout his life: 'I was formed by the Church, I owe it what I am, and I will never forget it.'⁹⁹ But, as Goldstein has shown, the seminary also provided the workshop for the new rational and reflective self that underpinned Renan's academic career and notorious critical independence. Accordingly, the ex-seminarian would not go as far as Taine in viewing the self as an infinitely mutable product of exterior influences.¹⁰⁰ *Life of Jesus* blended the late nineteenth century's historical determinism with a Romantic faith in the individual: Jesus was both determined and determinant.

Historians have perhaps underestimated the distinctiveness and originality of Renan's representation of Jesus as a tragically human liberal idealist who proclaimed a moral revolution based on individual liberties and political indifference. In this it truly offered, as contemporaries such as Sainte-Beuve suggested, a new image of Jesus for the later nineteenth century.¹⁰¹ Whether Renan's politics of 'transcendent disdain' ever really held the power to transcend their own very particular historical and biographical origins must remain doubtful.

* I am grateful to Ruth Harris and Émile Chabal for their generous commentary on earlier versions of this article.

¹ Renan, *OC*, iv, 83 [*Vie de Jésus*].

² Renan, *OC*, iv, 78 [*Vie de Jésus*].

³ Renan, *OC*, iv, 160, 250 [*Vie de Jésus*].

⁴ See Robert D. Priest, 'Reading, Writing, and Religion in Nineteenth-Century France: The Popular Reception of Renan's *Life of Jesus*', *Journal of Modern History* (forthcoming, 2014).

⁵ Jonathan Dewald, *Lost Worlds: The Emergence of French Social History, 1815-1970* (University Park, PA, 2006), 17-54.

⁶ Renan's most important influence here was the Strasbourgeois Lutheran theologian Édouard Reuss, whose ideas on the Kingdom are elaborated in *Histoire de la théologie chrétienne au siècle apostolique*, 2nd ed. (2 vols., Strasbourg, Paris and Geneva, 1860), I, 133, more generally 160-3, 172-183.

⁷ Renan, *OC*, iv, 160 [*Vie de Jésus*]. One other notable usage comes from one of the few works Karl Marx first published in French, *Misère de la philosophie* (*The Poverty of Philosophy*). Marx uses the term to ridicule a certain type of bourgeois aloofness, condemning the 'dédain *transcendantal*' (emphasis in original) with which left-wing intellectuals had hitherto treated proletarian self-organisation and strike action. Karl Marx, *Misère de la philosophie: Réponse à La Philosophie de la Misère de M. Proudhon* (Paris and Brussels, 1847), p. 176.

⁸ Jan Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750-1850* (London, 2005), 233-68.

⁹ Recent works include Pamela Pilbeam, *French Socialists Before Marx: Workers, Women and the Social Question in France* (Teddington, 2000), pp. 39-53; John Tresch, *The Romantic Machine: Utopian Science and Technology after Napoleon* (London, 2012), pp. 191-286. On

Comte, the definitive account is now Mary Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1993-2009), especially ii, 453-580; iii, 526-79.

¹⁰ Paul Bénichou, *Le Temps des prophètes: Doctrines de l'âge romantique* (Paris, 1977), pp. 8-9.

¹¹ Bénichou, *Le Temps des prophètes*, p. 11.

¹² Edgar Quinet, 'Poètes allemands. I. Henri Heine', *Revue des Deux Mondes* (15 February 1834), pp. 367-9, quoted in Bénichou, *Le Temps des prophètes*, p. 489.

¹³ George Armstrong Kelly, *The Humane Comedy: Constant, Tocqueville, and French Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 2; Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Republican Political Thought* (Oxford, 2001). A recent synthesis is Jeremy Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2011), on nineteenth-century liberalism pp. 148-96, on religion and positivism, pp. 298-387.

¹⁴ A comprehensive summary of the liberal opposition is given by Roger Price, *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 291-317.

¹⁵ On the latter, see Paul Seeley, 'O Sainte Mère: Liberalism and the Socialization of Catholic Men in Nineteenth-Century France', *Journal of Modern History*, 70 (1998), 862-91.

¹⁶ For a synoptic treatment see Kelly, *Humane Comedy*, pp. 85-133; on the Second Empire, see Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders*, pp. 4-5, 285-6; idem, *From Subject to Citizen: The Second Empire and the Emergence of Modern French Democracy* (Princeton, NJ, 1998), pp. 186-8, 252-5.

¹⁷ The aloofness of prominent liberals made them an unthreatening political opposition. Imperial administrators privately ridiculed the Orleanists as 'chiefs without soldiers'. Price, *The Second Empire*, p. 296.

¹⁸ Kelly, *Humane Comedy*, p. 221, more generally pp. 221-255; on Vacherot see Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders*, pp. 147-8, and on his changing religious views pp. 164-5.

¹⁹ The best account of this period remains Renan's own memoir, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*, in *OC*, II, 711-931.

²⁰ Renan, *OC*, iii, 844 [*L'Avenir de la science* (1891)]; for a broad interpretation of these developments, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, 2002), pp. 305-27.

²¹ One of the method's clearest expositors was Max Müller, for example in *Lectures on the Science of Language* (2 vols., London, 1994). On the seduction of philological methods, see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Chicago, IL, 2003).

²² August Schleicher, *Compendium der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen* (Cambridge, 2010). Schleicher also popularised the 'family tree' (*Stammbaum*) model of linguistic evolution. See See Liba Taub, 'Evolutionary Ideas and "Empirical" Methods: The Analogy between Language and Species in Works by Lyell and Schleicher', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 26 (1993), 171-193.

²³ There has been remarkably little work on Burnouf; for a brief analysis of his effect on Renan see Laplanche, *La Bible en France entre mythe et critique (XVI^e-XIX^e siècle)* (Paris, 1994), pp. 149-52.

²⁴ Renan, *OC*, iii, 729 [*L'Avenir de la science*].

²⁵ See Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self*, pp. 182-232 (and *passim*).

²⁶ Renan to Henriette Renan, 24 November 1848, in *Correspondance Générale* (Paris, 1995-2008), ii, 640.

²⁷ The debate on motivations for the June Insurrection still continues. For a recent summary see Mark Traugott, *Armies of the Poor: Determinants of Working-Class Participation in the Parisian Insurrection of June 1848*, revised ed. (New Brunswick, NJ, 2000) pp. xiii-xxxvi.

²⁸ Renan to Henriette Renan, 16 December 1848, in *ibid.* 646.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Renan, *OC*, iii, 1030-1 [*L'Avenir de la science*].

³¹ Renan, *OC*, iii, 1007 [*L'Avenir de la science*].

³² Robert B. Carlisle, 'The Birth of Technocracy: Science, Society, and Saint-Simonians', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 35 (1974), pp. 445-464; more recently Antoine Picon, *Les Saint-Simoniens: Raison, imaginaire et utopie* (Paris, 2002); Tresch, *The Romantic Machine*, pp. 191-222.

³³ Renan, *OC*, iii, 793, 1029-30 [*L'Avenir de la science*]. Indeed society needed to guard against creating a materialistic working class, 794.

³⁴ Renan, *OC*, iii, 1000-2 [*L'Avenir de la science*]. Zeev Sternhell has focused on the aristocratic and conservative elements of Renan's thought in *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, trans. David Maisel (London, 2010).

³⁵ Michael C. Behrent, 'The Mystical Body of Society: Religion and Association in Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 69 (2008), 219-43.

³⁶ Renan, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation? (Conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882)', in Renan, *OC*, i, 887-906 [*Discours et conférences*].

³⁷ Renan, *OC*, iii, 791 [*L'Avenir de la science*]. Originally Deuteronomy 8:3, cited in Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4.

³⁸ Renan, *OC*, iii, 1030.

³⁹ Renan, *OC*, iii, 1111. Schleiermacher argued that as soon as we attain self-consciousness, we have a sense of the finite and the infinite, and recognise our dependence on the latter. In Christian self-consciousness, we recognise this as our ‘absolute dependence’ on God. *The Christian Faith*, tr. H. R. MacKintosh, ed. J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh, 1999).

⁴⁰ Renan, *OC*, iii, 796 [*L’Avenir de la science*].

⁴¹ Renan, *OC*, iii, 1111-2.

⁴² *Essai psychologique sur Jésus Christ* (Paris, 1921).

⁴³ Reprinted as ‘Les historiens critiques de Jésus’ (1849), in *OC*, vii, 116-67.

⁴⁴ Renan, *OC*, iii, 1067 [*L’Avenir de la science*].

⁴⁵ Renan, *OC*, iii, 1014-5, 1012.

⁴⁶ Renan, *OC*, iii, 1015-7.

⁴⁷ On the reaction against universal suffrage in 1849-50 and its aftermath into the 1870s, see Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le Sacre du citoyen: Histoire du suffrage universel en France* (Paris, 1992), 299-340.

⁴⁸ For an exploration of two major salons, see Antonietta Angelica Zucconi, ‘Les salons de Mathilde et Julie Bonaparte sous le second empire’, *Napoleonica*, 11 (2011), pp. 151-182; for a critical perspective on the Empire’s salon system see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (London, 1996), pp. 48-54.

⁴⁹ Gustave Flaubert to Louise Colet, 4 September 1852, in *Correspondance*, ed. Jean Bruneau (6 vols., Paris, 1984-2007), ii, 151.

⁵⁰ Renan had been suspended from the Collège de France after his inaugural lecture in 1862 had generated Catholic protest for describing Jesus as ‘an incomparable man’. Renan’s subsequent nostalgia for the Second Empire is most evident in his ‘Souvenirs du *Journal des Débats*’, in *OC* ii, 1023-35 [*Feuilles détachées*].

⁵¹ Renan, *OC*, ii, 329 [*Mélanges d’histoire et de voyages*].

⁵² Blandine Olivier to Athénaïs Michelet, 23 February 1862. Jules Michelet, *Correspondance générale*, ed. Louis Le Guillou (12 vols., Paris, 1994-2001), x, 63-4. For a full account, see Alfred Maury, *Souvenirs d'un homme de lettres* (Cahiers Ernest-Renan, i, 1971).

⁵³ NAF 11493, f. 15: Napoleon III to Renan, 26 February 1862.

⁵⁴ Renan, *OC*, i, 155 [*Questions contemporaines*].

⁵⁵ Originally published as *La Chaire d'Hébreu au Collège de France. Explications à mes collègues* (Paris, 1862). Renan supplemented the letter with some comments in July 1862; references are to the final version published in *Questions contemporaines* (1868), *OC*, i, 143-172.

⁵⁶ Renan to Michel Lévy, 11 March 1862, in Jean-Yves Mollier (ed.), *Lettres inédites de Ernest Renan à ses éditeurs Michel et Calmann Lévy* (Paris, 1986), p. 44.

⁵⁷ H. W. Wardman, *Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography* (London, 1964), p. 86; David C.J. Lee, *Ernest Renan: In the Shadow of Faith* (London, 1996), pp. 197-8; a similar tone seems to underpin Laudyce Rétat's perceptive comment that 'What Renan passionately adored was, perhaps, not so much Jesus as his own relationship with Jesus', 'Renan et Jésus', *Œuvres et Critiques* 26, 2 (2001) 31.

⁵⁸ Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (London, 1985); Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (London, 1995).

⁵⁹ Renan, *OC*, iv, 334-41 [*Vie de Jésus*].

⁶⁰ In addition to the *Essai psychologique* and 'Les historiens critiques', see Prosper Alfaric, *Les Manuscrits de la « Vie de Jésus » d'Ernest Renan* (Paris, 1939).

⁶¹ The key work on literary representations is Frank Paul Bowman, *Le Christ des barricades 1789-1848* (Paris, 1987), pp. 208-9 (on Cabet), 223-6 (on Quinet), 259-64 (on the worker-poets); on Quinet, see also Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes*, pp. 492-5.

⁶² Socialists' turn to Christ partly represented an attempt to assert the morality of socialism in the face of criticism over issues such as sexual liberation within experimental communities.

Pilbeam, *French Socialists*, p. 42.

⁶³ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Jésus et les origines du Christianisme*, ed. Clément Rochel (Paris, 1896).

⁶⁴ See Étienne Cabet, *Le vrai christianisme suivant Jésus-Christ* (Paris, 1846), pp. 55-7, 64.

⁶⁵ Edward Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France, 1830-1852* (Princeton, NJ, 1984), esp. pp. 158-68.

⁶⁶ Cabet, *Le vrai christianisme*, pp. 64-5.

⁶⁷ Cabet, *Le vrai christianisme*, p. 446.

⁶⁸ Edgar Quinet, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1857), 285 [*Examen de la Vie de Jésus*].

⁶⁹ Renan, *OC*, iv, 195 [*Vie de Jésus*].

⁷⁰ Renan, *OC*, iv, 194, more generally 192-5.

⁷¹ Renan, *OC*, iv, 200.

⁷² Renan, *OC*, iv, 264.

⁷³ Renan, *OC*, iv, 281-2.

⁷⁴ Renan, *OC*, iv, 292-3, 302-3, 330-2.

⁷⁵ Renan characteristically cites the Fourth Gospel: 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36). Renan, *OC*, iv, 337.

⁷⁶ Renan, *OC*, iv, 351

⁷⁷ Benjamin Constant, 'The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns', in *Political Writings*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 308-28.

⁷⁸ Renan, *OC*, iv, 161-2.

⁷⁹ Renan, *OC*, iv, 161.

⁸⁰ Renan, *OC*, iv, 162.

⁸¹ Renan, *OC*, iv, 162.

⁸² Renan, *OC*, iv, 362-3.

⁸³ Renan, *OC*, iv, 77 (Muhammad), 133 (Buddha), 68 (Socrates), 289 (the French Revolution), 82-3, 114 (on religious founders) among other examples.

⁸⁴ Renan, *OC*, iv, 114, 370.

⁸⁵ Renan, *OC*, iv, 281-2, 370.

⁸⁶ Dewald, *Lost Worlds*, p. 41.

⁸⁷ Renan, *OC*, iv, 93-4 [*Vie de Jésus*].

⁸⁸ Renan, *OC*, iv, 120.

⁸⁹ Renan, *OC*, iv, 251.

⁹⁰ Renan, *OC*, iv, 232, 234.

⁹¹ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*, eds. Michael K. Goldberg, Joel J. Brattin and Mark Engel (Oxford, 1993). Carlyle referred to Jesus as the ‘greatest of all Heroes’ but respectfully shied from naming him (p. 12).

⁹² Jacob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, trans. Moses Hadas (London, 1949), esp. p. 336. Quotations from Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas* (London, 2000), p. 271.

⁹³ Renan, *OC*, iv, 368 [*Vie de Jésus*].

⁹⁴ Renan, *OC*, iv, 366.

⁹⁵ Renan, *OC*, iv, 362, 364.

⁹⁶ George Armstrong Kelly, *The Humane Comedy: Tocqueville, Constant and French Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 89.

⁹⁷ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (London, 1948), p. 206, referring to Daniel Schenkel, *Das Charakterbild Jesu* (Wiesbaden, 1864).

⁹⁸ A good summary is Deborah Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 22-9.

⁹⁹ Renan, *OC*, iii, 1121 [*L'Avenir de la science*].

¹⁰⁰ Dewald, *Lost Worlds*, pp. 41-2.

¹⁰¹ Charles-Augustin de Sainte-Beuve, 'Vie de Jésus, par M. E. Renan', in idem, *Nouveaux Lundis* (Paris, 1883), vi, 1-23; originally appeared in the *Constitutionnel*, 7 September 1863