

9 Conclusions

This concluding chapter consists of two parts. I will first present a summary of the most important results of the research undertaken, and thereby answer the questions asked in the introduction (section 9.1 and subsections). Thus, I clarify the relevance of the study for scholarship on Nietzsche. After that, I will reflect on the implications of the results for further research on the emotional dimensions of secularization (section 9.2 and subsections).

9.1 The big picture: Nietzsche on the death of God and the moods of the future

The evidence examined and the interpretations presented in the preceding chapters support the contention, which was an important provisional starting point of this study, that Nietzsche is at least as critical of the idea that the recognition that God is dead necessarily results in a melancholy mood as he is critical of philosophies that either explicitly or inadvertently replace religion with new convictions such as a faith in the idea of an inevitable progress of humanity or in the idea that a natural morality must be a morality of equal human rights. His most important philosophical works are rather characterized by a sceptical play with such ideas, suggesting a genuine openness towards the future.¹ Consequently, his thinking cannot, without either abandoning or doing violence to the spirit that defines it, be used to support narratives of modernization in general and of secularization in particular that exaggerate loss just as it cannot be used to bolster optimistic narratives of progress. While the general openness that defines his vision of the moods of the future thus works against any rigid interpretations, his works also allow one to reconstruct more specific objections. Most importantly, Nietzsche dissects ideas of a need for God and seeks to move beyond the kind of doubt and atheism that leaves desire for God intact, and thus rejects the central premises of interpretations that contend that lack of faith implies dwelling in a melancholy mood. For Nietzsche, the rejection of both the idea of an ineradicable need for God and of the desirability of God necessarily also means rejecting the need for and desirability of “secular” equivalents, i.e. replacements for lost faith, “shadows of God” (cf. GS 108, KSA 3, 467). This is the case, be-

¹ Put simply, I have argued that neither Nietzsche’s visions of desirable futures nor his visions of catastrophe should be read as statements about what will inevitably come to pass. A few more words about progress seem called for, since I have not paid much attention to the issue. Already in *HH*, Nietzsche rejects the idea that any kind of progress would be inevitable (*HH* I 24, KSA 2, 45). However, more typical expressions of Nietzsche’s play with the idea of progress and the related idea of natural morality are to be found in the late works, where he mockingly reclaims the term “progress” and the motto “return to nature” for his own immoralist project. (KSA 6, 150; cf. A 4, KSA 6, 171)

cause Nietzsche's criticism of religion and his criticism of secular convictions both have their roots, besides in historical criticism and language criticism, in his psychological thinking, which is arguably the most important force in his mature criticism. Specifically, they both stem from the same psychological revaluation; namely a distrust of the value of having "faith" and an associated vision of a greater health and a greater joy in a greater scepticism; i.e. in an eminently desirable mood.

9.1.1 A reconstruction of Nietzsche's psychology of faith

Nietzsche's psychology of religion culminates in opposing religious faith, which he diagnoses as a sign of weakness, to freedom from binding convictions, which he diagnoses as a sign of strength and associates with the psychological type that Zarathustra represents (cf. A 54, KSA 6, 236–237, cf. GS 347, KSA 3, 581–583). This intuition that is clearly articulated in his late work is operative in all of the writings following *HH*, in which he began his attack on faith. Although one can cautiously surmise that it seems ultimately to rest on his own experience and self-interpretation,² and that his writings from *HH* onward can be read as attempts to communicate this experience, one should not overlook that philosophical argumentation is essential to his communication. After all, he can only through argument transmit a sense of why he does what he does. Thus, Nietzsche argues for his view throughout his works, e.g. by trying to show that binding convictions can be harmful to science and to life (e.g. D 19, KSA 3, 32) and that freeing oneself from such convictions opens up possibilities of heightening life. Against this background, one can begin to see why Nietzsche besides questioning religion and religious believers also, though not as frequently, questions atheism and those who understand themselves as having moved beyond religion. Instead of merely assuming that the joy of those who deem themselves free spirits is a strong joy he questions it. In other words,

2 As might be claimed of what is most important in Nietzsche's psychological thinking in general, namely his revaluations. Although defending Nietzsche is not my task, it needs to be explicitly pointed out that his critical reflection on the nature of experience is best interpreted as more than an "appeal to experience" that has no value other than for the understanding of Nietzsche's eccentric character. In other words, at least some of his claims can be intersubjectively verified, and the logic behind them can be clarified. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Wilhelm Dilthey, whose philosophical thinking differs markedly from that of Nietzsche yet was also above all a continuous reflection on experience, came to similar conclusions about the potentials of freeing oneself from convictions in a work originally published in 1910: "*Das historische Bewusstsein von der Endlichkeit jeder geschichtlichen Erscheinung, jedes menschlichen oder gesellschaftlichen Zustandes, von der Relativität jeder Art von Glauben ist der letzte Schritt zur Befreiung des Menschen. Mit ihm erreicht der Mensch die Souveränität, jedem Erlebnis seinen Gehalt abzugewinnen, sich ihm ganz hinzugeben, unbefangen, als wäre kein System von Philosophie oder Glauben, das Menschen binden könnte.*" (Dilthey 1979, 290) Needless to say, Dilthey did not see that such a view could have the kind of moral implications Nietzsche associated with it.

he challenges it, for instance with imagery familiar from narratives of loss (cf. GS 125, KSA 3, 480–482), to test their mood. His questioning is not meant to deny that living a joyful life without religion is possible, as might be assumed. To the contrary, it is meant to point to the possibility of heightening life. The logic behind this procedure can be reconstructed thus: because life is full of uncertainty, only a joy that needs no convictions, that plays with convictions and finds joy in doubt and uncertainty, is a sure sign of a truly life-affirming spirit.³ The consequences for the understanding of atheism might sound paradoxical: for atheism to be viable and to rest on a secure foundation, it must be of a radical kind that can deal with ambiguity that thrives in uncertainty. Yet it is arguably precisely this intuition, which makes Nietzsche such a perceptive diagnostician not only of religion but also of atheism. For it provokes the questions: Is this the kind of atheism that we know from history and experience? If not, might that not be problematic as one can hardly think of a more atheistic position than such a radical scepticism toward belief?⁴ While I already noted that Nietzsche's work is characterized by a general openness toward the future, a specific kind of openness is thus essential to his vision of the moods of the future in an even more significant sense. His reflections on what would most heighten experience, and especially on what moods are most desirable, thus circle around fostering and maintaining a life-affirming scepticism. Above all, Nietzsche seeks to present this specific kind of atheism in his writings, perhaps even to prove that such an atheism is possible, and this can be established through paying attention to Nietzsche's communication of mood.

9.1.2 Nietzsche's communication of a mood of joyful doubt

Nietzsche's writings are rich in affects but the results of this study suggests that a vision of a specific mood plays a central role for him. From *HH* onward, Nietzsche seeks to communicate a philosophical mood, a mood conducive to living a philosophical life that unites scepticism and joy. While his emphasis shifts from the one to the other, both aspects are present in all of his mature writings. So while

³ In this spirit, Nietzsche at times positively suggests the free spirits should seek out danger and challenges in order to become stronger and to reach a higher joy. An extreme example is to be found in *GS*: "The secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is – to live dangerously! Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas!" (Kaufmann 1974, 228; *GS* 283, KSA 3, 526–527)

⁴ In other words, the question is how atheistic the most common forms of atheism are, in comparison with Nietzsche's vision. In a recent article, Simon During asks whether absolute secularity is conceivable, and ends up with the view that it is to be found only in a position which "appeals to limitless enquiry, limitless questioning openness to future contingencies" and therefore has no fixed identity, i.e. it "can never secure its own endpoint" (During 2017, 166). During mentions Nietzsche as a possible example of such absolute secularity, but also notes that this is contested by some scholars who view him as a religious thinker (During 2017, 159).

some scholars have emphasized the mood of doubt in *HH*, and the mood of joy in *GS*, both works are best read as seeking to communicate both doubt and joy, i. e. of joyful doubt.⁵ From the nature of this mood it follows that Nietzsche's communication of mood, from *HH* onward, is best not grasped in terms suggesting manipulation, e. g. as "use of mood". Following my interpretation, what Nietzsche demands of his readers (e. g. in *EH*, cf. KSA 6, 303 and 304), is not to have precisely the same particular experiences as he has, nor to have the same ideas, but instead to have a similar independence (as what he claims to have). This independence can of course be put in terms of experience; as the experience of doubt as a joyful state instead of as a negative condition. Nietzsche is well aware that he cannot simply transmit this experience to the reader (e. g. *GS* 286, KSA 3, 528),⁶ but can communicate it by showing it in his writings. With this in mind, we can return to Stefan Zweig's contention that if Nietzsche "teaches" anything he teaches freedom (Zweig 1925, 322), and conclude that Zweig's judgement hits the spot; it is not only intriguing but also basically correct. Such a teaching cannot be direct, it cannot be uttered as a command to do this or that, for such an approach would be contrary to the spirit out of which the teaching grows and would therefore undermine its own credibility. It can also not be forced on the recipient through manipulation of mood for the same reason. So against Friederike Reents' suggestion that Nietzsche's "privileging" [*Fundamentierung*] of mood might explain his adoption by the National Socialists (Reents 2015, 242–243), one must note that while Nietzsche recognized the power of mood and the possibility to manipulate mood, the mood that Nietzsche sought to communicate was one that would rather make the recipient more instead of less sceptical of authority.⁷ This understanding of Nietzsche's communication of mood also allows us to see why Karl Jaspers is wrong to conclude from the observation that Nietzsche does not directly show the way toward an ideal mood that he does not have such an ideal at all and does not intend to communicate any such ideal (cf. Jaspers

5 One can of course ask, in what work this mood is best expressed or when this mood finds its most mature expression, but answering such questions would require a different kind of evaluative study (cf. Stegmaier 2012).

6 See also Nietzsche's contention that nothing is as misunderstood in his time than philosophical states of mind (BGE 213, KSA 5, 147). Nietzsche specifically targets the view that the philosophical experience of thinking must be heavy, slow and utterly serious, to which he opposes the joyful doubt that is more akin to dancing.

7 It is also worth reminding that the one and only comment by Nietzsche on the manipulation of mood by power-hungry men was highly critical (D 29, KSA 3, 38–39). In other words, I think that the appropriation of Nietzsche by the National Socialists is still best explained by referring to what use could be made of certain citations from his texts and notes. There is certainly no lack of passages that can be used in service of certain ideologies, which is evident in the original German e. g. "*Die Schwachen und Missrathnen sollen zu Grunde gehen*" (A 2, KSA 6, 170) or in *EH*: "*Jene neue Partei des Lebens, welche die grösste aller Aufgaben, die Höherzüchtung der Menschheit in die Hände nimmt, eingerechnet die schonungslose Vernichtung alles Entartenden und Parasitischen...*" (KSA 6, 313)

1981, 336–338). For Nietzsche's communication is in this regard out of necessity primarily an example of what he himself termed *exhortatio indirecta*, i.e. indirect persuasion.

9.1.3 Nietzsche's communication of mood is anti-religious

Furthermore, the mood that Nietzsche sought to communicate can – following this line of reasoning – hardly be described as religious. I have accordingly argued that Nietzsche's atheism is expressed in the style of his writings, in the mood he seeks to communicate. Nietzsche himself provides the foundation for such an interpretation when he in his early work describes the style of the religious person. He insists that the style of communication that the priest employs should directly allow one to identify the author or speaker as a religious person (HH II, WS 79, KSA 2, 588). In this regard, it is telling that his own writings exhibit precisely those affects that he forbids the style of the religious person, namely irony, arrogance, mischievousness, hate, as well as rapid changes in emotional tone. Does not such a style provoke doubt? Arguably it does, and precisely in this sense, I have suggested that the playful mood, that sceptical joy in the destruction of convictions that characterizes Nietzsche's writings, is profoundly irreligious. It effectively provides resistance to any discourse that claims eternal and transcendent authority; a defining feature of religious discourse (cf. Lincoln 2012, 1). In this regard, it is finally worth noting that since Nietzsche started using the metaphor of mountain air to characterize his philosophy in the period around the publication of *HH*, i.e. in the late 1870s, he regularly opposes it to the stink of Churches, Christianity and Wagnerianism. This is of course most apparent in *Z* but one finds such statements scattered throughout his texts.⁸ It is precisely the idea that style is an expression of mood that similarly leads Nietzsche to call for an architecture that reflects the inner life of the free spirit (GS 280, KSA 3, 524–525).⁹ Although Nietzsche's attack is primarily directed against Christianity, the evidence reviewed in chapter 7 strongly suggests that his criticism is directed against religion more generally, and that he only plays with that which is considered holy. Without acknowledging that such play is an expression of a sceptical mood, as an expression of freedom over and against religious interpretations, one easily misreads Nietzsche's use of religious terminology, and especially his "Dionysian" statements in the late works.

⁸ Zarathustra is presented as an incarnation of the fresh air of the heights (e.g. KSA 4, 375). Unsurprisingly, he therefore bemoans the "air" of priestly architecture: "Churches they call their sweet-smelling caves. 'Oh what falsified light, what musty air! Here the soul to its heights may -- not fly up!'" (Parkes 2005, 78; KSA 4, 118; cf. BGE 30, KSA 5, 49)

⁹ In *EH*, Nietzsche goes as far as to talk about founding a city that would reflect his nature, and compares this plan to the efforts of the supposedly atheistic and therefore intimately related Emperor Frederick II to build the city of Aquila as a bulwark against the Church (KSA 6, 340).

The examination of Nietzsche's statements about extraordinary states and desirable moods has shown that his ideal mood is evidently not an ecstatic state that extinguishes individual, temporal consciousness. The high mood that he has in sight is an individual, philosophical state, reached through living an experimental, philosophical life. Put differently, Nietzsche's scepticism is not provisional; it is not a tool abandoned when a higher state is reached, but informs his thinking about what an ideal mood is like. Nietzsche explicitly voices his disgust at collective intoxication (e.g. GS 86, KSA 3, 443–444), which means that he can also hardly be thought of as intending a renewal of Dionysian religion when he invokes the name of Dionysus. Instead, my reading has provided further support for the thesis that the name Dionysus signifies Nietzsche's own philosophy, considered as a philosophy that affirms life as uncertain, as problem, as a question mark. In this specific way, the study has been a contribution to reinstating Nietzsche as a disciple of a philosophical Dionysus (cf. Hödl 2009).

9.1.4 Concluding remarks on the role of mood in Nietzsche's thinking

Whatever one might think of the finer details of the interpretation presented here, one should at least admit that the study has proven that Nietzsche was preoccupied with questions concerning mood, not least concerning moods of the future, and that the study has therefore shown mood to be a significant issue in Nietzsche-scholarship. Indeed, my study strongly suggests that mood is of such importance to the philosopher that he should be counted among those few thinkers (e.g. Emerson and Heidegger), for whom mood is a key to understanding existence. Consequently, interpretations that seek to clarify Nietzsche's thinking but wholly ignore the question of mood must be deemed incomplete if not outright problematic. I have thus repeatedly suggested that there are limits to what purely historical-critical scholarship on sources can reveal, and that clarification must be aided by other strategies of reading. To put it bluntly: if the sources were so important for determining Nietzsche's philosophical intention, he himself would have given transparent citations and added detailed bibliographies to his works. In this sense, what is truly new and valuable about this work for scholarship on Nietzsche is not to be found primarily in the finer details concerning historical-critical evidence about sources but rather in the attempt to recognize the role of mood in a rigorous manner and then to re-examine traditions of scholarship. I have argued that such a procedure is especially important when it comes to Nietzsche's philosophy of religion and nowhere more so than when it comes to the interpretation of the words that God is dead. In this regard, to reiterate, the results of my study support the argument of Hödl that Nietzsche's manner of presenting the message that God is dead is meant to point to possibilities of being human (Hödl 2009, 361–362), and specifies that what concerned Nietzsche most were the possibilities of dwelling in the world that different moods open up. Even more specifically, my study strongly suggests that one can conclude that Nietzsche's

challenge to the coming generations is the call for a radical atheism that bears a life-affirming mood.

9.2 On the significance of the study for research on secularization

Now that the most important results of the work done here have been discussed, I will finally present the case that the significance of this study is not limited to Nietzsche-scholarship, nor even to philosophy in a strict sense. Specifically, I argue that the clarification of Nietzsche's criticism of religion, and above all of the psychological vision that guides it, might yet contribute to the interdisciplinary discourse on secularization. That the discourse on secularization itself is quite important hardly needs to be defended. Indeed, it is a massive understatement to say that the discussion is important. The narrative of the decline of religion in modernity, the narrative that explains why it might be said that we live in a secular age (cf. Taylor 2007), is central to the self-understanding of the modern West, and therefore unsurprisingly also in the academic study of religion. What then could a specialized study about the philosopher Nietzsche, even if focused on his thinking about the crisis of faith, possibly contribute to the academic discussion on secularization that was until recently mostly associated with historical and empirical research in sociology?¹⁰

It is precisely what might be termed the crisis of sociological theories of secularization, and the philosophical interventions that have followed in its wake, which justify a turn to the resources that can be found in Nietzsche's thinking. Next I will provide a brief sketch of the crisis in question, and then I will clear up a misunderstanding that has hitherto prevented the wider reception of Nietzsche's ideas among non-philosophers doing research on religion and secularization. After that, I will through a discussion of some vexing problems in the new dialogue between sociology and philosophy, demonstrated by the work of Charles Taylor, move on to show how Nietzsche's psychological intuitions can be made fruitful. I can of course here only suggest avenues that might be worth pursuing further, but I will provide reasons for the pursuit.

10 From the 1960s to the early 2000s, sociological research on secularization was without a doubt dominant. One might even claim that secularization was first and foremost a topic of the sociology of religion. Thus, to give but one prominent example, the intellectual historian Owen Chadwick felt the need to provide a thorough justification why one should at all pay any attention to intellectuals and their ideas when narrating secularization, instead of simply focusing on more general social changes (cf. Chadwick 1975, 11–14).

9.2.1 The crisis in the discourse on secularization

The crisis of the sociological discourse can be illustrated by the example of Peter Berger, who used to be known as one of the foremost proponents of secularization theory (cf. Norris and Inglehart 2004, 4) due to his early work (Berger 1967), in which he argued that modernization inevitably leads to a marked decline of both institutional religion, due to the differentiation of social spheres, and individual religiosity, due to the rationalization of worldviews. In the 1990s, Berger became convinced that the empirical evidence, not least about the vibrant religiosity of the USA,¹¹ did not match the basic assumptions of his theory nor his predictions about the future and therefore recanted much of his earlier work. Berger has now reverted to the speculative idea that there is such a thing as a “religious impulse”, which “has been a perennial feature of humanity”, and on account of this he has even suggested that there is something to the critique of resurgent religious movements that claim life without reference to transcendence is necessarily shallow and impoverished (cf. Berger 1999, 13). It is indeed noteworthy that the idea of a metaphysical need has returned to the scholarly discussion on religion through the discourse on secularization, as an explanation of why religiosity persists even in the modern West, since theories of secularization once played no small role in marginalizing that idea within academia.¹²

This return is apt to draw attention to what is at stake in current discussions; such is the extent of the crisis of secularization theory that the most basic foundations of earlier research are questioned. This questioning is concerned with nothing less than the nature of religiosity, the nature of rationality and the self-understanding of modernity. It is in this context that the discussion has become more philosophical, and open to philosophical interventions: for whenever an academic discipline doubts its own basic theoretical assumptions philosophy has its feast. Notably, however, the question about need is at the centre of the discussion. Arguably, adopting

11 I am not suggesting that the debate would have focused solely on the USA, e.g. the resurgence of fundamentalist Islam and the spread of evangelicalism in Africa and Latin America certainly contributed to a change in scholarly perceptions. But pointing to these cases is not really a challenge to classical theories of secularization that focus on the West, i.e. on countries whose modernity does not stand in question. The religiosity of the USA has therefore been the most serious objection to the idea that modernization and secularization go hand in hand (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 83), and this justifies granting it a special place as example.

12 While the idea that the human being is by its nature *homo religiosus* was influential in the early development of the study of religion (cf. Lang 1993, 164–172), the sociology of religion and particularly theories of secularization showed that research could do better without it. The most cited classic works on secularization either paid no heed to the assumption (Berger 1967) or explicitly rejected it (Wilson 1966, xv–xvii), on the grounds that it is hardly helpful for understanding the very real changes in religiosity that they were concerned with. Thus, the idea fell out of favour among serious scholars of religion during the latter part of the 20th century, only to return to the centre of the debate at the onset of the 21st as critics attacked the fundamental premises of secularization theory.

the idea of a universal and perennial need for religion is as problematic as not to speak of religious needs at all, for one is then confronted with the task of taking account of the reality of atheism and all that secularization that has in fact taken place. In other words, it is hardly helpful to replace one crude theory with another that is just as crude. In the following, I will therefore argue that Nietzsche's thinking about the matter is still relevant precisely because of his dissection of the metaphysical need and because of the richness of the resulting understanding of the emotional dimension of secularization. First of all, however, one can and must correct a rather trivial yet fatal misconception, which has more recently hindered the reception of Nietzsche in non-philosophical research on religion.

9.2.2 Nietzsche in contemporary research on religiosity

There is this idea among a number of contemporary researchers that Nietzsche was a proponent of a simplistic story of the inevitable and total disappearance of religion, and that since such narratives of secularization have been refuted, Nietzsche would have been refuted. The argument can be presented thus: Nietzsche said that God is dead, but globally religious belief is as strong if not stronger than ever; so therefore Nietzsche was wrong. Irritatingly, even some of the brightest researchers on contemporary religiosity repeat this nonsense (cf. Norris and Inglehart 2004, 240 and 2011, 281; cf. Vail et al. 2010, 84). As I already suggested in the introduction, mentioning Nietzsche and quoting the words that God is dead does not say much about the influence of the philosopher, since it can evidently be done without ever acquainting oneself with his writings. In fact, Nietzsche noted that even most Europeans of his time still needed religion or some functional equivalent (e.g. GS 347, KSA 3, 581–582), and that this was unlikely to change much for quite some time if ever (cf. GS 108, KSA 3, 468), as not everyone would be up to the required emotional change. My study has furthermore strongly suggested that Nietzsche thinks the future is genuinely open, and that his criticism of religion is meant to point to possibilities of change.¹³ Consequently, what Nietzsche actually thought about religion and atheism might still be relevant to the discussion on secularization. I do not mean to deny that much of what Nietzsche wrote rests on outdated 19th-century scholarship and science, but rather to point out that some of his psychological intuitions might yet be of value and give new impetus for research. If Nietzsche is the pre-eminent diagnostician of 19th-century unbelief, and this study has contributed to making that case, it of course follows that his writings are at least valuable for research on the

¹³ In this regard, the results of my study are fully compatible with the conclusions of Johann Figl and Michael Skowron, who mostly on the basis of *Nachlass*-notes argue that Nietzsche thinks it is very well possible that new gods will be born, and that even the old God might be reborn (Figl 2000, 101 and Skowron 2002, 3 and 37). What I cannot emphasize enough, however, is the fact that if Nietzsche holds such a thing possible, it does not mean that he thinks it is desirable.

19th century. However, one need not accept Taylor's exaggerated claim that the "deeper, more anchored forms of unbelief arising in the nineteenth century are basically the same as those which are held today" (Taylor 2007, 369) in order to assume that Nietzsche's diagnosis might be of relevance to the discussion about the contemporary situation as well. It is enough to note that the idea of a universal need for religion, viz. a metaphysical need, is back; for the return of that idea certainly suggests that it might be profitable to reconsider the philosopher who more than any other questioned such ideas. At this point it is necessary to mention that the introduction of philosophical speculation into the discussion has not gone unquestioned; i.e. that the new dialogue between sociology and philosophy has caused some unease among sociologists, who used to dominate the discussion. Therefore, for fairness sake, I will consider what can be gained from the sociological critique of philosophy before moving on.

9.2.3 The dialogue between philosophy and sociology

The sociologist Bryan S. Turner has noted that philosophers, not sociologists of religion, have in recent years set the terms of the debates about secularization and the future of religion (Turner 2010, 649). This is obviously true in the sense that philosophers, above all Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor, have profoundly influenced the direction of both historical and empirical research,¹⁴ but Turner goes further by claiming that the voice of philosophy has overpowered that of the sociology of religion in the public debate. One is tempted to add that there are other disciplines that are relevant to the debate but receive even less attention, e.g. anthropology and psychology. A sense of why the dominance of philosophy might be problematic can be drawn from Turner's pointed formulation: "Philosophical discussions of the crisis of religious belief and authority all too frequently ignore social science empirical investigations and findings. Their abstract speculations rarely refer to any actual findings of social science." (Turner 2010, 650) While the philosopher might in turn point out that the sociological discourse on secularization has been philosophically naive, as illustrated above by the recent eagerness to "refute" Nietzsche's words that God is dead, and has traditionally rested on problematic assumptions about rationality, religiosity and modernity,¹⁵ and that only because of such deficits have philosophers

¹⁴ Habermas is often credited with having made the term post-secular common (see Calhoun, Mendieta and VanAntwerpen 2013). The influence of his own thinking is nevertheless far overshadowed by that of Charles Taylor, whose work (Taylor 2007) has spawned an entire industry of interdisciplinary commentary that is vibrant to this day (for an exemplary work that contains a detailed bibliography, see: Zemmin, Jager and Vanheeswijck 2016). Put simply, Taylor's work cannot be ignored, if one values intellectual integrity.

¹⁵ Typically, rationality is associated with modernity, and religiosity with irrationality, and thus one ends up with the view of the incompatibility of any form of religiosity with modernity (e.g. Berger

been able to take the role they now have in the interdisciplinary discussion, there is still more than a grain of truth in Turner's polemic. His statement should nevertheless be qualified or one needs to note that he himself already qualifies it ("all too frequently", "rarely"). Firstly, it is not philosophy per se, which is problematic, but a kind of philosophy that does not take specialized research seriously and instead escapes into abstractions. Secondly, it is of course not the case that sociology or other relevant disciplines would be entirely absent from the philosophical discourse, but it certainly seems as if a few classics were cited only in order to allow a retreat into abstract speculation (cf. Turner 2010, 650). Insofar as the philosophical debate ignores more recent empirical and historical research, it must necessarily rest on a questionable foundation, especially as there have been advances relevant to the understanding of secularization.¹⁶ In this regard, Turner specifically criticizes the neglect of the body and emotions in the philosophical debate.¹⁷ While this criticism certainly hits the target in Habermas, in whose work feeling plays a subordinate role compared to a very problematic ideal of rationality,¹⁸ it might seem particularly

1967). It needs explicitly to be pointed out that more recent sociological research has abandoned the idea that rationalization is the driving force of secularization (e.g. Norris and Inglehart 2004, 8–9).

16 E.g. if the story of secularization is told as a story of loss, one should take account of empirical research on responses to loss (e.g. Bonanno 2004). Relying solely on outdated theories of loss, such as can be found in the classic works of Freud, is problematic to say the least. Arguably, one then bases one's philosophical thought on a perspective that not only necessarily distorts the historical record, but also clouds one's vision of the future.

17 Having referred to the general disregard of the body and feelings, Turner specifically mentions that the "sociology of the emotions has in recent years developed as an important field of contemporary research" and adds "but it has not played a significant part in recent philosophical debate" (Turner 2010, 650). The same could be said about the history of emotions (cf. Plamper 2015) and the increased interest in emotions and moods by scholars of literature (cf. Reents 2015). A common denominator is that all of these disciplines promote and provide evidence for a view of emotional life as to a great extent historically constructed and malleable, instead of thinking of it as an expression of perennial and unchanging impulses of human nature. It is finally worth noting that an aversion towards research on emotions can not only be found in philosophy, but that certain currents within the study of religion also explicitly rule out taking emotions seriously other than as "discourse" (e.g. Stuckrad 2003; cf. Turner 2010, 650).

18 Habermas built much of his work on a simplifying narrative of modernization as rationalization = secularization, in which rationality replaces religion and thus functions as a "substitute for lost faith" (cf. Milbank 2013, 322). Having understood that anything like that does not seem to be happening, he has more recently developed an "awareness of what is missing", i.e. a respect for emotional resources that he now thinks have only been preserved in religious practice (cf. Milbank 2013, 324). That notwithstanding, he still thinks that rationality can and should transcend not only religious feeling but all feeling in general, as if feeling were a primitive rest to be overcome by pure reason. In other words, he still holds on to an untenable, unrealistic ideal of rationality. I therefore fully agree with the general thrust of John Milbank's scathing critique of Habermas' idea of translating the archaic impulses of religion into rational language, in the sense that the idea is based on an erroneous dichotomy between feeling and rational thought that does not acknowledge that feeling mediates thought (cf. Milbank 2013, 332). The title of Milbank's article hits the spot: "What Lacks is Feeling" (Milbank 2013). Needless to say, there is also much that can be questioned in Milbank's critique, not least as it is

odd when directed at Taylor. After all, Taylor has contributed to a shift in the discussion away from the theme of rationalization to that of lived experience (cf. Taylor 2007, 4–5). Nevertheless, I do think that one can charge Taylor with a neglect of a wealth of more recent historical and empirical research that bears on the matter, not to mention a neglect of philosophical objections, which make his most fundamental anthropological assumptions untenable. Taylor's work is worth questioning, since it is symptomatic of the return to notions of religion as an expression of a fundamental impulse in human nature, and since his articulation of the idea has been widely influential.

9.2.4 Charles Taylor, metaphysical need, and the nature of experience

Despite his talk of subtle languages, the model that Taylor bases his discussion of experience on is anything but subtle; in fact, it is irritatingly unsubtle. A very traditional prejudice, namely the idea that all desire stems from a fundamental lack, shapes his entire work and allows him to fit all experience into a preconceived scheme. The most problematic thing about Taylor's assumption that it is this lack which leads all of us to strive for some kind of fullness, is how he conceives of fullness as a place. While he himself is well aware that this might be considered problematic, and a particularly Christian understanding of fullness, he seeks to justify it through a "structural analogy" (cf. Taylor 2007, 6–7). To simplify, his argument runs thus: Just as the believer strives for heaven, the atheist, the "unbeliever", wants to find his or her life fully satisfying. In other words, the atheist is also always striving toward a place of fullness, but thinks that the place can be here on earth. The main problem with this analogy is of course the spatial metaphor and particularly the static picture that it evokes. Needless to say, Taylor does not draw on any evidence to support his understanding of the direction of the unbeliever's striving, nor does he provide any reasons for the conspicuous absence of time in his picture. The atheist who supposedly hasn't reached the place of fullness and always strives onwards might for example be interpreted as not striving for a place at all but for (experiences in) time (cf. Hägglund 2008). A full recognition of the temporality of all experience, that time both animates and haunts all striving, would of course break Taylor's framework, since fullness could then not be thought of as a place. This preliminary conclusion suggests that Taylor's image serves a specific purpose. Indeed, Taylor frames his discussion the way he does in order to keep open the possibility that the unbeliever really strives towards something else than what he thinks he strives for; namely transcendence. So even as there are atheists and might always have been, they are on the same path as the believer and only fail to recognize the true

premised on the idea that religion grows naturally as a response to a fundamental human lack and that it is this lack that prevents secularization.

nature of their striving. Unsurprisingly, this is precisely what Taylor suggests in his final chapter detailing examples of conversions where one “recognizes” desire as desire for transcendence (Taylor 2007, 728). Thus, Taylor’s narrative of secularization seeks to identify the “conditions” that in the modern world prevent people from recognizing their desire for what it really is. The specifics of Taylor’s narrative are of no concern here, since however strong these conditions might be, human nature will in his view nevertheless prevent anyone from becoming fully secular. To conclude, this is yet another formulation of the idea of a metaphysical need. As Simon During puts it:

his notion of an elemental spiritual lack belongs to philosophical anthropology not to history, and it is this a-historical condition of human nature that means that secularization will always meet resistance. Of course, this is not a new idea: the notion that human nature longs for fullness is traditional to Christian apologetics. (During 2017, 155)

It is of course not enough to point out that the idea has certain theological uses to discredit it. That it does not do justice to the self-understanding of the non-religious is rather obvious, but that should in itself not be considered an objection.¹⁹ As Peter Berger also states, it should be accepted that the idea itself is not a theological one, in the sense of requiring faith, but an anthropological one (Berger 1999, 13) that might play a constructive role in scholarship. In other words, it should be criticized on philosophical and evidential grounds. Arguably, such an understanding of experience as Taylor’s covers up far more than it reveals about the emotional dimension of religion and atheism. One can especially question whether it does justice to what the historical record as well as empirical research tell about secularization. It is precisely what During terms the a-historical that is problematic about most articulations of a religious or metaphysical need, and this is where Nietzsche with his emphasis on historical philosophizing comes into play. In the following concluding sections, I 1) briefly present a Nietzschean interpretation of empirical research that can be used to challenge Taylor’s anthropological assumptions and 2) present the case that accept-

19 Just as the self-understanding of the religious need not be allowed to have the last word in the study of religions. It is, however, worth mentioning that Phil Zuckerman’s qualitative research among non-religious Scandinavians suggests to the author that he is concerned with genuine existential positions instead of a denial of a fundamental aspect of being human (i.e. an ontological lack or a perennial need for religion, cf. Zuckerman 2010, 5). Far from supporting ideas of *homo religiosus*, the fact that those of his research subjects who explicitly affirmed that life is ultimately meaningless lived satisfying lives (Zuckerman 2010, 5) leads the author to conclude that the rest of the world might learn something about contentment by getting to know more about secular Scandinavian culture. Of course, one might question whether Zuckerman’s method of conducting 150 in-depth interviews (Zuckerman 2010, 3) can in itself provide any decisive answers as his results ultimately rest on what his subjects report. In other words, the philosophical interpretation of the results is decisive. Needless to say, more comparative empirical research into existential positions and interpretations of desire is called for, both among members of different religions and among those who adhere to no religion, to provide a more solid foundation for philosophical interpretation.

ing Taylor's perspective leads to a distorted view of history, which can be corrected by a perspective inspired by Nietzsche.

9.2.5 The existential security thesis and the need for religion

Empirical scholarship can in itself perhaps not disprove such a fundamental philosophical framework as guides Charles Taylor's notion of experience, but with a little help from a Nietzschean perspective, it can certainly cast doubt on it. The main problem that one faces if one assumes that there is a perennial need for religion, or a desire for transcendence that grows out of a fundamental lack, is that one has to provide an explanation for the very real variation in the intensity of religiosity that can be observed historically between periods, geographically between societies such as the USA and the UK, and between different groups (e.g. gender, class etc.) within any given society.²⁰ Research on secularization has therefore traditionally suggested that there is no such thing as a single need for religion, nor an ineradicable desire for transcendence, and that whatever needs are met by religion vary and change over time, but this has been more of a presupposition taken for granted than the main focus of investigation. Due to the shifts in the discussion alluded to in section 9.2.1, empirical research has more and more turned to explain variations in demand for religion. Psychological research has long suggested that religion grows out of fear. Put more diplomatically, it has been argued that the main function of religion is to allay anxiety in the face of the troubling aspects of life; above all in the face of death. A number of studies in psychology, i.e. a "large body of research", tends to support the idea that religious worldviews can provide a sense of existential security (Vail et al. 2010, 85). All this fits very well with Nietzsche's basic assumptions about the role of fear in producing religious interpretations, but this research has most often been used to support the notion of a perennial need for religion, not least since death and destruction are not about to disappear from our world (cf. Vail et al. 2010, 84 and 91). Building on yet modifying such research, the existential security thesis (Norris and Inglehart 2004 and 2011) suggests that most of the variation in religiosity worldwide can be explained by differences in felt security. To put it simply, religion can strengthen the sense of existential security, but this presupposes that the basic conditions of life are sufficiently insecure. While this idea is not unproblematic if read as a theory of religion,²¹ it is particularly interesting that the empirical evi-

²⁰ Taylor's own historical narrative, which focuses on changes in understandings of the self, is particularly unhelpful to understand the divergence between Western Europe and the USA, as they are culturally very similar when it comes to conceptions of the modern self. As Taylor himself admits "a fully satisfactory account of this difference, which is in a sense the crucial question for secularization theory, escapes me" (Taylor 2007, 530).

²¹ The theory would have to be considered extremely reductionistic. The crude yet elegantly simple idea is that experiences of danger, of the risk of not surviving and of not having one's basic needs

dence suggests there is a strong correlation between societal development and decreasing demand for religion (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 219–220 and 2011, 281). It would certainly seem to be the case, as Norris and Inglehart suggest, that increased basic security also translates into felt existential security, which in its turn increases acceptance of risk, ambiguity and all the troubling aspects of life (cf. Norris and Inglehart 2004, 19), and therefore has a negative impact on demand for both rigid moral rules and religious promises of otherworldly rewards.

It is important to note, however, that taken as such these findings presents no challenge to Taylor's model, as they can easily be reinterpreted into a language less reductionistic than that of Norris and Inglehart.²² Besides, nowhere do these researchers suggest that it would be possible for an individual to be completely untouched by those forces that create the need for religious faith, not to speak of suggesting that societal developments strengthening existential security could completely eradicate demand for religion in society as a whole. Nevertheless, one can interpret the results as suggesting that not feeling a need for religion, or a need for binding convictions, might be a sign of a heightened feeling of existential security. This proposition can in its turn be disconnected from any assumptions about societal development; there might after all be individuals, in any time and place, who for one reason or another have a particularly strong feeling of existential security. Here we enter the territory of Nietzsche's philosophy, and his idea that a certain form of atheism that does without binding convictions, that is free to play with convictions, is an instinctive expression of health. One need not accept Nietzsche's polemical association of faith with disease, in order to acknowledge that there

met, especially when growing up, produce stress, and the experience of stress in its turn leads to a demand for rigid moral rules and strict predictability (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 19). Such are best provided by religions that can invoke a transcendent authority, wherefore religiosity should thrive in adverse circumstances, such as in the "developing world". Indeed, this happens to be the case (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 220). Importantly, the existential security thesis also predicts much of the variation within developed societies, e.g. the poor are generally almost twice as religious as the rich and even in the USA the poor are significantly more religious than the rich (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 108). Still, the theory is best not read as a comprehensive theory of religion, but as a strong critique of the idea that there is a perennial religious need and that demand for religion does not change. For example, the theory is incapable of fully explaining the vibrant religiosity of the USA: even the authors admit it is not possible to explain the case simply by referring to the fact that the country lacks functioning social security as in Europe (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 226 and 240). An approach more sensitive to historical factors could certainly provide a more complete picture.

22 I am explicitly referring to Taylor's understanding of experience here, not to Taylor's historical narrative. In other words, I am not disputing that the results of Norris and Inglehart provide the most serious challenge to Taylor's narrative as a whole, as they clearly show that there are factors that influence demand for religion that he does not take account of at all. It would certainly seem, contra Taylor, that the philosophical idea of the autonomous self is rather insignificant in comparison with actual experiences of self-sufficiency, i.e. of existential security. My point is rather that challenging Taylor's most basic assumptions requires a philosophical interpretation of the empirical evidence in question.

might be some truth in his idea that atheism (too), or at least a certain kind of atheism, can be a sign of a strong affirmation of life. It is enough to note that such an atheism can be conceived. Crucially, even acknowledging this possibility contradicts the most fundamental assumptions of Taylor's thinking on experience, in which the atheist's life is defined as lacking in an even more significant sense than the life of the believer. The atheist is in this vision driven by the same fundamental lack as the believer, but can only strive onward toward a place he or she can never fully reach, whereas the believer at least has some hope of contact with a transcendent source of fullness. If, on the other hand, human experience, and specifically the experience of the atheist, need not be thought of as fundamentally shaped by an ontological lack, the picture is shattered. To simplify, the thought of radical atheism is a direct challenge to the logic of lack (cf. Hägglund 2008).²³ While Nietzsche's psychological dissection of the metaphysical need uncovers this potential union of existential health and scepticism, which parallels the findings of empirical research on religiosity, one can of course ask if any free spirit ever, Nietzsche included, fully experienced life as such an overflow of power as Nietzsche speaks of. This question is certainly worth asking, but it is of no concern to us here, because even an approximation of such self-sufficiency, just as the mere possibility that such a supremely healthy type can in due time emerge, is enough to cast doubt on Taylor's most basic assumptions about human nature. Whereas Taylor's assumption about a fundamental lack is a-historical, a historically sensitive view would suggest that under certain conditions human experience can be more fundamentally shaped by feelings of power than of lack. Minimally, Taylor's model would have to be corrected to acknowledge that a sole focus on lack as fundamentally defining the experience of being human is inadequate. Any more definitive answers would naturally require a thorough philosophical study of its own, wherefore I will now focus on how a Taylorian perspective approaches the historical experience of the 19th-century crisis of faith, and contrast it with a more Nietzschean perspective.

9.2.6 The 19th-century crisis of faith and the question of mood revisited

Charles Taylor's understanding of experience necessarily leads to an emphasis on the loss in loss of faith (cf. Taylor 2007, 307). Although Taylor himself seeks to emphasize that modernity does not make faith impossible, and that melancholy is only one part of the story of our time, he nevertheless cannot avoid thinking of a secular age as an age defined by the possibility (and reality) of a malaise or melancholy unknown in earlier times: the experience of total meaninglessness (Taylor 2007, 302–

²³ If a life-affirming religion or interpretation of Christianity is truly possible (cf. Figl 2002, 160), then this might also be considered a challenge to Taylor's model, as such a religion could hardly be bound to the idea of a fundamental lack that requires salvation and would perhaps rather be an expression of gratitude for life.

303). Unfortunately, it is precisely this aspect of his work that has been influential in historical scholarship. How this might be problematic can be illustrated by the work of the literary theorist Colin Jager. Just like Taylor, Jager is convinced that understanding the 19th-century situation is essential to understanding our own time (Jager 2014, 4–7). Jager conceives of the “modern secular” as a kind of background mood shaping experience. Following Taylor, he associates it with a shallow “celebration of ordinary life” (Jager 2014, 9) to which he contrasts the disquiet of romantic authors. While Jager is to be commended for paying attention to mood in his discussion of secularization, and while it is certainly the case that a melancholy mood was widespread among intellectuals in the Romantic era, his take on the issue is deeply problematic insofar as he suggests the romantic criticism revealed the truth about “the secular”, i.e. that “its characteristic mood is melancholy” (Jager 2014, 23). Jager is decent enough to admit that in this regard his work aligns to a great extent with a tradition of histories that “tend to construe the secular as a form of loss” (Jager 2014, 182), but his stated intention to expand on this view is half-hearted to say the least, since his definition of “the secular” as melancholic leads him to treat any non-melancholic way of dwelling in the modern world as some kind of breakthrough to a position “after the secular”, “after atheism” (cf. Jager 2014, 179 and 224), that has first had to overcome melancholy.²⁴ This is not merely a conceptual matter, because the language chosen by Jager would make no sense if the consciousness that God is dead were not essentially melancholic. This, however, is exactly what Nietzsche’s criticism suggests is nothing more than a specific interpretation. Instead, Nietzsche counts with a variety of possible responses to modernity in general and secularization in particular; with a variety of moods of dwelling in the world. Nietzsche does, however, recognize the power of historical forces over most of us, such as the emotional legacy of Christianity, and therefore a perspective inspired by his philosophy would also pay careful attention to expressions of melancholy. In this regard, the distinction between traditional and radical atheism is extremely valuable, since it provides the grounding for a more fitting language than that which by necessity must associate atheism with lack. A study of 19th-century literature and intellectual culture that would take the striving for such a language as a starting point, might thus provide quite a different perspective on the emotional culture of the time, since not only the focus might be less exclusively on laments and loss, but the texts that do speak of loss might be read in a different light. Above

24 Though I focus here on Jager’s work, he is by no means alone in this interpretation. To mention another example, Theodore Ziolkowski similarly links secular modernity with melancholy, noting about the 19th-century crisis of faith that “the poets were among the first to sense the mood of the age” (Ziolkowski 2007, 10). However, Ziolkowski focuses on what he takes to be secular surrogates of lost faith (in the 1920s), attempts to overcome the melancholy of secular life; and explicitly affirms that they grow out of a perennial need for faith (cf. Ziolkowski 2007). Here one can again witness the connection between the idea of a perennial need for religion/faith/God and the idea that life that seeks to do without religion is necessarily melancholic.

all, they would not be used to derive perennial truths, as if generalizing from the experience of a few rather morbid poets were unproblematic. While one can without reservation agree with Taylor's view about modernity insofar as modernity arguably makes new forms of melancholy possible, the question is whether a specific form of melancholy should be taken to define secular modernity, or whether it is not rather the case that modernity also makes joyful moods possible that were unknown and unfelt in earlier times, and that this is of no small significance. In this sense, a perspective closer to that of Nietzsche is a precondition for more fruitful historical research on secularization and moods. Needless to say, it is also a precondition for more constructive thought about the moods of the future.