Hegel's concept of religion

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Contents

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Abstract

In this dissertation I explore how Hegel conceives of the practice of religion. Religion for Hegel cannot be the relationship between humans and a transcendent being, since, as I argue, Hegel's God is not a being of the transcendent sort, but reason as Idea and spirit. Nor does Hegel primarily understand religion as feeling or immediate experience of the divine. According to Hegel, religion involves knowledge of the truth in the form of representation, and I discuss the truths that in his view are common to all religions, as well as the principle that he thinks guides the development of the various determinate religions that culminate in Christianity. But, first and foremost, religion for Hegel is cultus or practice in which a person overcomes her own particularity in a radical manner and identifies completely with the universal, objective standpoint. By overcoming her particularity, the person recognizes that her own interests lack absolute value, and she is willing to abandon them entirely for the sake of what the universal requires of her. The highest form of the cultus for Hegel is full participation in *Sittlichkeit*, or the social and cultural life of modern Protestant Europe.

In the cultus, a person achieves freedom, the goal of religion and the highest value in Hegel's philosophy. I argue that freedom for Hegel is independence vis-à-vis the world in both an active and a passive sense. As active, freedom is the autonomy that a person possesses when she acts rationally or follows the ethical norms that are a necessary moment of being free. As passive, freedom is the independence that a person gains when she is no longer attached to her particular interests and is accepting of circumstances in which her desires are not met. But for Hegel the norms of freedom also allow and require that a person continue to engage fully in the world and actively pursue her own particular interests, since such activities play a necessary role in being free. In my final chapter, I demonstrate that Christianity in Hegel's mind promotes this type of concrete freedom.

Résumé

J'explore dans cette thèse la manière dont Hegel conçoit la pratique religieuse. Pour Hegel, la religion ne saurait être une relation entre un être transcendant et les humains puisque, ainsi que je le démontre, le dieu hégélien n'est pas un tel être transcendant mais plutôt la raison en tant qu'Idée et esprit. Il n'est pas non plus question pour Hegel de comprendre la religion comme le sentiment ou l'expérience immédiate du divin. Selon lui, la religion implique une connaissance de la vérité sous la forme d'une représentation. Mon propos à cet égard est de cerner les vérités qui, de son point de vue, sont communes à toutes les religions, et d'identifier le principe qui, selon lui, préside au développement des diverses religions déterminées qui culminent dans le christianisme. Mais, d'abord et avant tout, la religion est pour

Hegel un culte ou une pratique par laquelle une personne surmonte de manière radicale sa propre particularité et s'identifie complètement au point de vue universel et objectif. En surmontant sa particularité, cette personne reconnaît que ses intérêts sont dépourvus de valeur absolue et accepte de les abandonner entièrement pour se soumettre aux exigences de l'universel. Selon Hegel, la forme la plus élevée du culte est une participation pleine et entière à la Sittlichkeit*, ou à la vie sociale et culturelle de l'Europe protestante moderne.*

Le culte permet à celui qui y participe de parvenir à la liberté, but de la religion et valeur ultime dans la philosophie hégélienne. J'argumente que la liberté est pour Hegel une indépendance, tant active que passive, vis-à-vis du monde externe. En tant qu'elle est active, la liberté est l'autonomie qu'une personne possède lorsqu'elle agit rationnellement ou qu'elle se conforme aux normes éthiques qui constituent un moment nécessaire de son être-libre. En tant qu'elle est passive, la liberté est l'indépendance qu'une personne atteint lorsqu'elle s'est détachée de ses intérêts particuliers et qu'elle accepte les circonstances où elle voit ses désirs frustrés. Par contre, les normes de la liberté permettent et même requièrent qu'une personne ne cesse de s'engager totalement dans le monde et poursuive activement ses propres intérêts particuliers puisque, pour Hegel, ces activités jouent un rôle nécessaire dans l'accomplissement de la liberté. Dans mon dernier chapitre, je démontre que le Christianisme promeut, selon lui, ce type de liberté concrète.

Abbreviations

In my citations, German pagination is given first, followed by English pagination, which is separated from the German by an oblique (/). Translations of German passages into English are taken, whenever possible, from a published translation. Unless otherwise stated, the English translation is taken from the text that I have listed below along with the German original. If no published translation is available, the English translation is my own.

Collections of Works by G.W.F. Hegel

GW — *Gesammelte Werke*. Hamburg: Meiner, 1968-. Cited by volume.

Vorlesungen — *Vorlesungen: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*. Hamburg: Meiner, 1983-. Cited by volume.

Werke — *Werke*, edited by E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970. Cited by volume.

Works by G.W.F. Hegel

Br — *Briefe von und an Hegel*, edited by Johannes Hoffmeister. 4 vols. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952. Cited by volume and page number.

Hegel: The Letters, translated by Clark Butler and Christine Seiler. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. Cited by page number.

BS — *Berliner Schriften: 1818-1831*, edited by Johannes Hoffmeister. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1956. Cited by page number.

E_{17} — *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (Heidelberg, 1817), *GW* 13. Cited by page number.

EG — *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften 3*, *Werke* 10.

Hegel's Philosophy of Mind, translated by William Wallace and A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971. Cited by paragraph (§) number, except for references from very long remarks which are cited instead by page number. Remarks are indicated by an "R" and additions are indicated by an "A".

EL — *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften 1*, *Werke* 8.

The Encyclopedia Logic: Part 1 of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze, translated by T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991. Cited by paragraph (§) number, except for references from the prefaces which are cited instead by page number. Remarks are indicated by an "R" and additions are indicated by an "A". When the "A" is followed by a number, this indicates the number of the addition.

EN *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften 2*, *Werke* 9.

Hegel's Philosophy of Nature, translated by Michael J. Petry. 3 vols. New York: Humanities, 1970. Cited by paragraph (§) number. Additions are indicated by an "A".

ETW *Early Theological Writings*, translated by T.M. Knox. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975. Cited by page number.

FS *Frühe Schriften*. *Werke 1*. Cited by page number.

Hin "Foreward to Hinrichs' *Religion in Its Inner Relation to Science*" in *Miscellaneous Writings of G.W.F. Hegel*, edited by Jon Stewart and translated by A.V. Miller. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002. Cited by page number.

NHS *Nürnberger und Heidelberger Schriften: 1808-1817*, *Werke* 4. Cited by page number.

PhG *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, *Werke* 3.

Phenomenology of Spirit, translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. Cited by page number.

PR *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, *Werke* 7.

Elements of the Philosophy of Right, edited by Allen Wood and translated by H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Cited by paragraph (§) number. Remarks are indicated by an "R".

VBG "*Vorlesungen über die Beweise vom Daseyn Gottes*" in *Werke* 17.

Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God, translated by Peter C. Hodgson. Oxford: Clarendon, 2007. Cited by page number.

VG — *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, edited by J. Hoffmeister. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1955.

Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction, translated by H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975. Cited by page number.

VGP — *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*. 4 vols. *Vorlesungen* 6-9.

Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6. Vol. 2: *Greek Philosophy*, edited by Robert F. Brown and translated by R.F. Brown and J.M. Stewart. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006.

Lectures on the History of Philosophy: The Lectures of 1825-1826. Vol. 3: *Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, edited by Robert F. Brown and translated by R.F. Brown and J.M. Stewart. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. Cited by volume and page number.

VL — *Vorlesungen über die Logik*: (Berlin 1831), *Vorlesungen* 10. Cited by page number.

VPG — *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes* (Berlin 1827/1828), *Vorlesungen* 13. Cited by page number.

VPK — *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst* (Berlin 1823), *Vorlesungen* 2. Cited by page number

VPN — *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Natur* (Berlin 1819/20), *Vorlesungen* 16. Cited by page number.

VPR — *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Rechts* (Berlin 1819/1820), *Vorlesungen* 14. Cited by page number.

VPW — *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* (Berlin 1822/1823), *Vorlesungen* 12. Cited by page number.

VR — *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, edited by Walter Jaeschke. 3 vols. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1993.

Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, edited by Peter C. Hodgson and translated by R.F. Brown, Peter C. Hodgson and J.M. Stewart. 3 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. Cited by volume and page number. The two digit subscript following the "*VR*" (e.g., VR_{27}) indicates the last two digits of the lecture year from which the citation is taken.

WL *Wissenschaft der Logik*. 2 vols. *Werke* 5-6. Cited by volume and page number.

Hegel's Science of Logic, translated by A.V. Miller. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1969. Cited by page number.

Works by René Descartes

M *Méditations métaphysiques*. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1979.

Meditations on First Philosophy, translated by Donald A. Cress. 3rd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993. Cited by page number, first according to the standard Latin pagination and then from the English translation.

Works by Immanuel Kant

GMS *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, edited by Theodor Valentiner. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984.

Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, translated by James W. Ellington. 3rd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993. Cited by page number.

KpV *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, edited by Joachim Kopper. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1961.

Critique of Practical Reason, translated by Lewis White Beck. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993. Cited by page number.

Works by Friedrich Schleiermacher

CG *Der Christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt* (1821/22), edited by Hermann Peiter. 2 vols. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. Cited by volume and paragraph (§) number.

ÜR *Über die Religion: Reden an Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799), edited by Andreas Arndt. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2004.

On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers, edited and translated by Richard Crouter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Cited by page number.

Introduction

Hegel's philosophy of religion is at the centre of the oldest and most divisive debate in the history of Hegel interpretation. In the years immediately succeeding Hegel's death, the debate focussed on the issue of whether his philosophy is in harmony with traditional Christian beliefs. David Friedrich Strauss famously divided the positions in the debate into three camps: those on the right who held that Hegel's philosophy is consistent with all Christian beliefs, those on the left maintaining that none of these beliefs can be accommodated by Hegel's philosophy, and those in the centre who declared that some Christian beliefs could be so accommodated and others not.[1] Since the first half of the nineteenth century, interest in Hegel's philosophy has waned and waxed again, and with this renewed attention in recent decades the debate involving Hegel's philosophy of religion has reappeared in a different form. Much of the contemporary commentary has focussed less on the issue of whether Hegel's philosophy is Christian and more on the question of whether Hegel is making strong metaphysical claims, and in particular whether Hegel asserts that a transcendent God exists. The two sides in this more recent debate are what I refer to in chapter 1 as the transcendent and non-transcendent interpretations of Hegel's concept of God. Those defending the transcendent interpretation maintain that a transcendent God is indeed a part of Hegel's system, whereas those in the non-transcendent camp are sympathetic to a reading of Hegel in which one either takes no account of the role of a transcendent God in Hegel's philosophy or one questions whether Hegel system even contains such a God in the first place. The issue that divides the two sides in this

[1] See Strauss, *In Defense of My Life of Jesus*, 38-66.

debate is far from resolved: both positions are defended by a significant number of scholars, and both continue to attract new scholarly interest.

One challenge facing the non-transcendent reading is how it should interpret the numerous references that Hegel makes to God in his writings and lectures, especially during the Berlin period, and how it should account for the central importance that Hegel gives to God in his system. If Hegel means by God what we would ordinarily take him to mean, then this textual evidence clearly contradicts the view of those who defend a non-transcendent reading of Hegel. Those in the non-transcendent camp have often responded to this evidence by overlooking it or by addressing it in passing without giving it the careful attention and analysis that it deserves. This explains perhaps in part why recent Hegel scholarship has focussed more on texts like the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where Hegel's talk of God is more muted, and less on Hegel's Berlin material in which his theological claims are too strong and conspicuous to be ignored.

A second task that a non-transcendent interpretation must ultimately accomplish is to make sense of Hegel's views on religion. Religion is commonly taken to be some form of relationship between humans and a transcendent deity or transcendent deities. If Hegel's God is not a transcendent being, then religion for Hegel does not fit with this common conception. Some other explanation of Hegel's concept of religion is required.

My objective in this dissertation is to offer an interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of religion that takes as its starting point a non-transcendent interpretation of Hegel's theology. In other words, I try to show that it is possible to make good

sense of Hegel's philosophy of religion even if we assume that Hegel's system does not include a transcendent God. I intend in the following chapters to explore Hegel's understanding of religion as a human practice, by considering the activities that it involves, the view of the good life that it promotes, and the relationship that it maintains with other facets of human existence like philosophy and political life. I argue, in a nutshell, that God for Hegel is reason or the universal truth, and that religion in his mind is one form of humanity's relationship to the universal. In my interpretation, religion for Hegel is a form of both self-transcendence and self-actualization. In all its forms religion requires that we make some sort of break with our natural selves – with our particularity and all its desires – and that we become or identify with some form of the universal. The fruit of religion is ultimately freedom, understood as the peace that comes from being reconciled with the world and having achieved some degree of liberation from the suffering that it causes.

Until now, scholars in the non-transcendent camp have made little effort to interpret Hegel's later writings on religion (the one exception is Stephen Houlgate). However, a non-transcendent reading of Hegel should not ignore his religious thought for at least three reasons. The first reason is philological: religion is a subject that strongly interested Hegel, and any reading of Hegel that aims to be complete must offer an interpretation of what religion means for him and how it plays a role in his thinking as a whole. Second, unlike philosophers that neatly divide and isolate the various branches of philosophical inquiry from each other, Hegel tends to break down the division between these areas of inquiry. This tendency is perhaps most obvious if we consider the way that Hegel's philosophy of religion overlaps with his social and

political philosophy. For Hegel the religious is ultimately political and the political ultimately religious. The religious is political for Hegel in so far as the highest form of religious cultus or practice is ethical life. For a Protestant in his day, to be religious is to participate in a particular form of social existence, i.e., it is to take part in the life of the family, civil society, and the state; to act morally; to own property, etc. But the political is ultimately religious for Hegel because the end of ethical life is freedom, and, as I argue in chapter 4, freedom, as a form of transcendence of the natural, can be viewed as possessing a religious character. The particular form of social and political life that Hegel advocates has its justification for Hegel because it promotes a religious ideal. The consequence of all this is that any complete understanding of Hegel's political philosophy must take account of what Hegel says about religion.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the non-transcendent approach should not neglect Hegel's philosophy of religion because, as I hope to show, a non-transcendent reading of the philosophy of religion is not only feasible, but leaves us with an interesting account of what religion involves. It is common knowledge that, unlike its French counterpart, the German Enlightenment made an effort to reconcile the practice of religion with the new worldview that was transforming European culture and society at the time. Although Hegel is not, strictly speaking, a part of the Enlightenment, his philosophy of religion, along with Schleiermacher's, constitutes a late attempt to reconcile religion with the new, more secular world view. After these thinkers, the split between faith and reason widens and this split remains a part of popular thinking to this day. As a descendent of this Enlightenment tradition of religious thinking, Hegel's philosophy offers one possible way of understanding

religion for those who are drawn to it, but for whom belief in a transcendent deity is – to borrow an expression from William James – no longer a live option. For Hegel religion is first and foremost practical: it involves a sustained effort on the part of the will to rise above our identity as self-seeking individuals and to identify with the good. But what is particularly modern about Hegel's approach is that it is not ascetic or monastic. It maintains that this transcendence of our natural selves is ultimately best achieved not by eliminating our desires but by participating in society as individuals with our own personal interests. Interpretations of religion like this one and other such interpretations from the same time period can serve as an interesting source of ideas for those today trying to bridge the divide between the religious and the secular.

In my analysis of Hegel's concept of religion, I draw primarily upon Hegel's writings and lectures from the Berlin period (1818-1831). I have relied heavily on the critically edited volumes of Hegel's lecture notes that have appeared gradually over the past twenty-five years and I have drawn much less upon the previous editions of Hegel's lecture notes that were compiled by Hegel's students and that appeared in the years immediately following his death. As one might expect, the lecture notes that I refer to most often are the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* edited by Walter Jaeschke. This edition includes material from three courses that Hegel gave on the philosophy of religion is 1821, 1824 and 1827 (it contains much shorter notes from the last version of the lectures in 1831). Of these three, each set of notes has its own interpretive merits. The exact wording of the 1821 lectures is more reliable than that of the other lectures in as much as these lectures are a transcription of Hegel's own

lecture manuscript and so were written by Hegel himself. The 1824 lecture series is compiled from the largest selection of student notes and is the most detailed of the three, while the 1827 notes are the most recent and the most mature of the three series. As is common practice, I take the 1827 version of the *Lectures* as the most authoritative version, and, as a result, when I examine the development of determinate religion is chapter 2 and the presentation of Christianity in chapter 5, my analysis follows the 1827 version of these topics. However, when giving evidence for a particular point that I think is the same in other versions of the *Lectures*, I draw references freely from these other versions.

Chapter 1: Hegel's concept of God

As I have indicated, my goal in this dissertation is to examine Hegel's concept of religion. It is not to undertake the large and arduous task of providing an in-depth investigation of Hegel's theology and metaphysics. However, when one is explaining Hegel's concept of religion, an interpretation of Hegel's concept of God cannot be avoided. The most basic definition of religion for Hegel is, as one might expect, "the relation of human consciousness to God" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 61/150), and his understanding of religion or of humanity's relationship to God is certainly one that is determined by his understanding of what God is. To grasp what religion means for Hegel, one must also grasp what he means by 'God'. Thus, if I am to present a clear and complete account of Hegel's concept of religion, it is essential that I first address Hegel's theology. This is the topic of my first chapter.

Hegel's theology, however, is a topic that has been greatly disputed and that cannot be easily and quickly disposed of. Getting to the bottom of the issue and the long dispute surrounding it is a book-length project. Because I must limit my discussion of Hegel's theology to one chapter, my goals in this chapter are more modest than they would be if Hegel's theology were the topic of my whole dissertation. My objectives are (a) to give a brief presentation of the main positions in the debate over Hegel's concept of God, and (b) to present and justify the interpretation of Hegel's concept of God that I am presupposing in the rest of my dissertation. I argue that God for Hegel is reason as both Idea and spirit. We will see in more detail what this means at the end of the chapter. I do not pretend to have

demonstrated unequivocally that my interpretation is *the* correct one, but I do attempt to show that there are good reasons and strong textual evidence for adopting the interpretation that I am proposing. I believe that this is adequate for my purposes, given the complexity and intractability of the debate. My interpretation of Hegel's concept of God then determines the direction for the rest of my dissertation. For if God for Hegel is reason, then religion for Hegel cannot be the relationship between humans and some form of transcendent being, and it will be the task of my other chapters to determine what Hegel does indeed take religion to be.

1A. Preliminaries

In the secondary literature, there are two different though related debates over Hegel's philosophy of religion, the first theological and the second philosophical.[1] The issue addressed by the theological debate is the one disputed by the right and left Hegelians, namely whether Hegel's philosophy is in fact Christian, i.e., whether it is consistent with the basic tenets of Christian faith like belief in a personal, transcendent God, immortality of the soul and the divinity of Christ. In this form the debate over the religious significance of Hegel's philosophy involves two separate issues. If one is to determine whether Hegel's philosophy is Christian, one must first ascertain what Hegel's philosophy really means and, second, one must then apply to it an interpretation of what it means for something to be Christian, a topic which is itself open to much dispute. The issue of whether Hegel's philosophy and his concept of God are Christian is still the issue that tends to occupy interpreters approaching

Hegel's thought from within the discipline of theology or those who read Hegel with strong theological interest. In recent scholarship most of these interpreters maintain that Hegel's philosophy is indeed able to accommodate Christian belief, although some dispute this.[2] Moreover, among those who believe that Hegel's philosophy is properly Christian, there is still room for debate over the specifics of Hegel's religious views, and over the particular strain(s) of Christianity that Hegel subscribes to. Here debate tends to focus on the issue of whether Hegel's philosophy of religion is orthodox or heterodox.[3]

In this chapter I focus not on the theological debate over Hegel's philosophy of religion, but on the philosophical debate. When philosophical commentators address the religious significance of Hegel's thought, they generally concern themselves much less with the issue of whether Hegel's philosophy is specifically Christian, and focus primarily on trying to understand the metaphysical implications of his system. The axis of debate in the philosophical literature can be expressed in terms of Hegel's relationship to the philosophy of his great predecessor Kant. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argued that traditional metaphysical claims about transcendent objects, such as claims about the existence and nature of God and the soul, were spurious, and that humans cannot have knowledge of objects such as these

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[1] Walter Jaeschke makes this distinction between theological and philosophical interpretations of Hegel's philosophy of religion. See Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion*, 286-92; and Jaeschke, "Philosophical Theology", 14.

[2] For example, William Desmond in *Hegel's God* has argued recently that God for Hegel lacks the strong transcendence normally associated with Biblical monotheism.

[3] For example, see Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God*; Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*; O'Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*; and Magee, *Hegel and Hermeticism*. Lauer and Hodgson tend to emphasize the orthodoxy of Hegel's theology. Lauer holds that Hegel's absolute should be identified with the God of Christianity (19), while for Hodgson Hegel "retrieves the truth of orthodoxy by drawing upon the resources of heterodoxy" (259). In contrast, O'Regan and Magee place Hegel's theological position squarely within the heterodox Christian tradition.

that are beyond possible experience. When addressing Hegel's metaphysics in general and his concept of God in particular, a central task for philosophical commentators is to determine how Hegel's theology and metaphysics responds to Kant's famous critique. The central issue in the debate over Hegel's theology is whether or not God for Hegel is transcendent, and what God's transcendence or lack of transcendence really means. A bit later in this chapter I examine two positions in the debate which I refer to as the transcendent and non-transcendent interpretations of Hegel's concept of God. The transcendent reading is one often adopted by those who are interested specifically in Hegel's theology and philosophy of religion, while the non-transcendent reading is generally held by those who play down the theological dimension of Hegel's thought. As will become clear, the term 'transcendent' can have several meanings and in labelling these two positions as "transcendent" and "non-transcendent", I have a specific meaning of transcendence in mind. It is important to note that proponents of the transcendent interpretation will likely also deny that Hegel's God is transcendent if this term is understood in a different and stronger sense. Moreover, those who argue for the non-transcendent interpretation of Hegel's concept of God may also claim that God is transcendent for Hegel in a weaker sense than the one I am employing.

Before I address the difficult task of trying to decide between these two interpretations, I want first to establish a couple of more obvious points about Hegel's concept of God. The first point is that God in Hegel's philosophy cannot be radically transcendent. The second point is that, contrary to the claims of some interpreters, we should not view Hegel as an atheist in disguise. In other words, however Hegel's

concept of God is ultimately interpreted, we should take seriously the philosophical claims that he makes about God.

To claim that God for Hegel is not radically transcendent is to claim that his conception of God is distinct from the usual conception of the God of Christianity. The common understanding of Christianity and its God is the popular understanding, the one that is most often presupposed and expressed, not necessarily by theologians, but by ordinary members of today's society, including both those who practice Christianity and those who do not.[4] According to the common view, God existed prior to the world, and God created a world existing outside of himself. As such, God is fully transcendent. God may intervene in the world, but this picture nevertheless assumes that God's creation is something completely distinct from the God that created it: the world is not God and God is not the world, such that God would continue to exist without the world. In this picture, the world that we inhabit is the sphere of finitude and God is the infinite being that is beyond this world.

This view of the relationship between God and the world or between the infinite and the finite is one that Hegel explicitly rejects, and any adequate account of Hegel's concept of God must take account of this fact. He denies this view because it presupposes a false interpretation of what it means to be finite and to be infinite, and it makes these assumptions ultimately because it employs the concepts of finite and infinite without having first carefully scrutinized what they involve or mean. According to Hegel, the philosophy of religion, just like all other philosophical

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[4] What I am labelling the common conception of Christianity needs to be distinguished from orthodox interpretations of this religion. The common conception is a loose description of how Christianity is generally conceived in the popular imagination, while orthodoxy is the account of Christianity and its central tenets that has been established and sanctioned by the church throughout its history. The

thinking about a concrete subject matter, can only be carried out effectively if it is founded upon the results of an adequate conceptual logic. Referring specifically to categories like the finite and the infinite, Hegel tells us that:

> They must of course occur in our science, for they are moments of the essential relationship that lies at the basis of religion. But the main thing is that their nature must have been investigated and cognized long beforehand. If we are dealing with religion scientifically, this primarily logical cognition must lie behind us. We must long since have finished with such categories. (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 80/171)

Our most basic concepts, the subject matter of Hegel's logic, are not mere tools that we employ at our convenience, but ultimately structure and shape the way that we think about things. If our understanding of these concepts is inadequate, i.e., if our thinking about them contains unresolved contradictions, then instead of grasping the truth of its subject matter, our thinking will distort it. Thus, for Hegel our understanding of the relationship between God and the world will depend upon our comprehension of the concepts of the finite and infinite. If our comprehension of these concepts is faulty, then our interpretation of the relationship between God and the world will also be faulty.

Any view that claims that the finite and the infinite are absolutely distinct is one that Hegel attributes to the way of thinking of the understanding or reflection (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 187/283), and so Hegel also sees the common Christian interpretation of God as belonging to the understanding. The distinction that Hegel draws between the thinking of the understanding and the thinking of speculative reason is of fundamental importance in Hegel's work. The thinking of the understanding is primarily responsible for distorting our grasp of the truth, and it is the common element in the

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common conception of Christianity and the orthodox interpretation may overlap on certain points, but

two currents that Hegel criticizes in his own day: the abstract or reflective thinking of the Enlightenment and the more Romantic approach with its emphasis on feeling.[5] Unlike speculative thinking that "apprehends the unity of the determinations in their opposition" (*EL* §82), the understanding is thinking's capacity to separate and abstract from its determinations (*EL* §80). It interprets its object as existing or subsisting on its own account, and investigates it accordingly. In short, the understanding has an approach to thinking its objects that could be described as atomistic: determinations are finite things and are viewed by it as having being in isolation from other determinations. The understanding does not question whether there is some relationship of logical or ontological dependence between such determinations. For Hegel the understanding plays an important role in thinking, since without this capacity to distinguish an object or a characteristic from its surroundings, thinking would not be possible at all (*EL* §80A). The problem with the standpoint of the understanding, however, is that it takes this distinction between objects as the last word. Unlike the speculative standpoint, it fails to see that its subject matter must ultimately also be understood as part of a relationship that involves identity with the other.

Hegel's most complete argument against the understanding's interpretation of the finite and infinite appears in the *Science of Logic*, where he is able to supply us with detailed analysis of these logical concepts,[6] but Hegel also presents a simplified form of this analysis in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 197-

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the two are not identical.

[5] Hegel addresses these two different strands both in his "Preface to Hinrichs" and in the EL (§§ 26-78).

[6] See *WL* 1: 149-66 /137-50.

8/293-4; *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 189-90/263-4). Hegel's point here is that if we consider the concept of the infinite as it is interpreted by the understanding, we see that it is ultimately a concept that is untrue, or one that contradicts itself. In other words, the infinite as interpreted by the understanding is ultimately not infinite. The infinite by its very nature is what is without limit, but the understanding views the infinite as what is strictly other than the finite. If the infinite has an other in the finite, then it finds a limit in the finite or is limited by the finite; it is not without limit. Thus, the infinite of the understanding is not what it initially appears to be or claims to be. It is what Hegel refers to as the "spurious infinite" (*Schlecht-Unendliche*) (*WL* 1: 152/139) or the "finite infinite" (*WL* 1: 157-8/144). For Hegel the infinite can only be grasped properly if its relationship with the finite is understood speculatively as one of identity-in-difference. The finite and the infinite are neither purely other nor simply the same. Rather the finite is in one sense distinct from the infinite in so far as they belong essentially to different orders of reality (*WL* 1: 164-5/149): the finite has no veritable being or is ideal, while the infinite is the absolute, that which *is* without another.[7] But in another sense finite and infinite are identical in so far as the finite has its place within the same totality that the infinite is, or in so far as it is a moment of the infinite (*WL* 1: 165/149-50). If the infinite is to be truly the infinite – if it is to be truly without limit – then it must be the whole and the finite must find its place within this whole.

The implications of this reasoning for Hegel's conception of God are easy to see. If God is the infinite, and if the infinite in its truth can have no other that is strictly other, then God cannot be strictly other than the finite, the world or

[7] See chapter 2, pp. 61-74 for a discussion of substance and idealism.

humankind. Instead there is some sense in which God and the world must be identical. This means that Hegel cannot subscribe to the view that I have referred to as the common view of the relationship between God and the world. God for Hegel cannot be a transcendent entity that is completely other than the world, since such a God is not infinite but finite. Hegel's point is that by definition such a God is not God at all.[8]

> When we view the characteristic of finitude as something contradictory to God, then we take the finite as something fixed, independent – not as something transitional, but rather as something essentially independent, a limitation that remains utterly such – and then we have not properly recognized the nature of the finite and the infinite … If God has the finite only over against himself, then he himself is finite and limited. (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 190/264)

My second preliminary task is to reject the view expressed by Robert Solomon that Hegel's philosophy does not contain God at all, at least not in a form that Hegel himself felt justified in labelling as 'God'.[9] The question of whether Hegel's philosophy is atheistic is similar to the question of whether this philosophy is Christian. It requires, on the one hand, a proper understanding of what Hegel's system involves, and, on the other hand, it presupposes a normative interpretation of religious terminology, in this case an interpretation of what it means to be an atheist, or, more specifically, what it means for something to be God. For example, an interpretation might assume that God is by definition a transcendent, personal being and that Hegel's philosophy is atheistic because his concept of God does not involve such a being. At first glance, it is surprising to suggest that Hegel's philosophy is atheistic, since, as is well known, Hegel's own philosophical claims seem to strongly

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[8] See Beiser, *Hegel*, 142; and Houlgate, "Hegel and God's Transcendence," 146, where these two authors express the same point.
[9] Solomon, *From Hegel to Existentialism*, 57.

support a theistic reading of his thought.[10] Those who believe that his philosophy is atheistic bear the burden of proof. They must explain why and how this is the case, and must account somehow for all of Hegel's claims that seem to contradict their interpretation.

When an interpreter claims that Hegel is an atheist, she can mean one of two things. In the first instance, she takes Hegel's claims about God at face value, accepting that Hegel himself believes that his philosophy is consistent with theism, but arguing that Hegel's belief is in fact mistaken, since his concept of God does not meet the necessary criteria for being God. In other words, the interpreter's claim here is that Hegel thinks that he is a theist, but in reality he is an atheist. Depending upon how one defines atheism, it certainly may be possible to label Hegel an atheist. He would be an atheist, for example, if one assumes that any genuine God is a fully transcendent God, and if Hegel's philosophical system contains in fact no such God. However, the claim that Hegel is an atheist in this sense is not what really interests us here.

However, when the interpreter claims that Hegel is an atheist, she might mean something else. She might mean that in spite of his claims to the contrary, *Hegel himself* does not think that his system includes any God worthy of the name. Not only is Hegel's philosophy atheistic when judged objectively, but Hegel himself believed that it was atheistic. This approach can imply that there is some degree of misrepresentation or deception in Hegel's philosophy: Hegel used theistic language to express and present his philosophy even though he believed that his philosophy is inconsistent with theism's central tenets. The interpreter who holds this view must

[10] See pp. 24-6 of this chapter.

then explain why Hegel would use Christian terminology so heavily and speak of God in his system, if in fact Hegel intended his system to refute Christianity and to exclude God altogether. Since disguising one's true meaning in this manner is not usually considered conducive to good philosophy, or, to put it another way, since a philosopher will usually, wherever possible, say what he means as clearly as possible, the explanation for this kind of disguising of Hegel's theological views must likely be sought in circumstances external to Hegel's philosophy itself. Hegel's misrepresentation of his views likely occurs not for philosophical reasons but for non-philosophical reasons stemming from his particular, concrete historical circumstances.

This second interpretive approach has been adopted by Robert Solomon, who argues that Hegel in fact saw himself as an atheist and that he only couched his philosophy in theological language to avoid persecution for his views and to protect his academic career.

> I believe that Hegel really did have a secret, and that it has been well kept. The secret, abruptly stated, is that *Hegel was an atheist*. His "Christianity" is nothing but nominal, an elaborate subterfuge to protect his professional ambitions in the most religiously conservative country in northern Europe. Hegel had seen Spinoza's *Ethics* condemned in Germany. He had seen Kant, whom he considered to be unquestioningly orthodox, censured and censored by the narrow-minded regime of Frederick Wilhelm II. He had seen Fichte dismissed from the University at Jena for views that were (incorrectly) construed as atheistic… Hegel may have been a champion of the truth, but he knew how to look out for himself. He may have stuck to the letter of Christianity, but in "spirit" he was anything but a Christian.[11]

Thus, according to Solomon, Hegel employs theological language to present his ideas, not because he thinks that it enhances his philosophy, but because he lacks the academic freedom to express himself in the way that he would have liked.

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[11] Solomon, *From Hegel to Existentialism*, 57.

There is perhaps some truth to Solomon's claim. Hegel's career would have been jeopardized if he had defended atheism in an obvious and blatant manner, and as a result Hegel was undoubtedly not entirely free to present just any philosophy as he saw fit. Employing Christian theological language to describe aspects of his philosophy would have helped to associate his position with more traditional interpretations of Christianity, and Hegel would have certainly been aware of this. But even if we were to assume that Hegel intentionally employed some degree of obfuscation in his philosophy to protect himself, this would not entail that Hegel was an atheist and that all his talk of God is simply empty. Hegel would have been persecuted not only if he were an atheist, but if he had held a religious position that was deemed heterodox. If Hegel was disguising some of his theological views, he could just as easily have been trying to hide an unorthodox religious position as an atheistic one. Hegel's dissembling would not be, in and of itself, evidence for atheism in the sense that Solomon intends.

Solomon's claim, the claim that Hegel is an atheist in disguise, is difficult to either prove or disprove. On the one hand, Solomon advances no strong direct evidence to indicate that Hegel is in fact being disingenuous when he speaks of God in his philosophy and when he claims to be an orthodox Lutheran, and I believe that no such evidence actually exists. Solomon seems to derive his position from the fact that Hegel is not a Christian of the standard variety, but, as I have indicated, Hegel could have distanced himself from a common or orthodox understanding of Christianity while embracing other heterodox interpretations of Christian doctrine. On the other hand, Solomon's theory is also very difficult to disprove, since virtually

any religious claim that Hegel makes, and hence any claim that seems to count against Solomon's thesis, can be discounted or interpreted as part of Hegel's elaborate subterfuge.

Although we may not be in a position to prove that Solomon's thesis is false, we do have strong methodological reasons for rejecting it. When interpreting a philosophical position, one should take the claims of the philosopher at face value whenever possible, i.e., unless one has good reason to do otherwise. Since Solomon's interpretation suggests that in a large part of his philosophy Hegel does not really mean what he says, and since there is no concrete evidence to support the claim that Hegel was an atheist in disguise, this view should be at most a final interpretive option, one that we should adopt only if we are unable to make any philosophical sense of Hegel's concept of God and his allegiance to Christianity. As the rest of this chapter and the rest of the dissertation show, I believe that we *are* able to make sense of Hegel's religious claims without assuming that Hegel is being disingenuous in any of these claims. Appealing to Solomon's theory should be a last resort, and, as I hope to show, it is a last resort that can be avoided.[12]

1B. Hegel's God: transcendent vs. non-transcendent

Having addressed the two preliminary points, let us now turn to the transcendent and non-transcendent interpretations of Hegel's concept of God. Both accept the preliminary points. First, neither position claims that God is fully transcendent. In other words, both positions are able to accommodate the claim that

[12] For other replies to Solomon, see Houlgate, *Introduction to Hegel*, 254; and O'Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*, 4-5.

Hegel has a conception of God distinct from the common Christian conception that I have outlined. Second, both accept that Hegel does not view himself as an atheist. In other words, both agree that Hegel's system involves God in some form, and that Hegel himself thinks that he has good philosophical reasons here for using the term 'God'. As their names indicate, the two positions are divided over the issue of God's transcendence. The transcendent interpretation maintains that Hegel's God is in some sense identical with the finite world, but holds that this God also exists in some sense as a being that is not the world or that exceeds the world. In contrast, the non-transcendent view denies that God is transcendent even in this more limited sense.

The transcendent interpretation of Hegel's concept of God can perhaps best be described as involving some form of *panentheism*.[13] This approach contrasts with the usual version of pantheism in so far as God is not simply the finite world itself. Instead the world has its being within God, which gives Hegel conceptual room to claim that God also exceeds the world or is a being that is more than the world. This approach avoids finitizing God, i.e., does not make God the absolute other of the world, but at the same time it succeeds in preserving a conception of God in which God is in some sense still a supernatural being.

Lauer gives a clear contemporary example of this interpretation in his book *Hegel's Concept of God*, providing a detailed analysis not only of what God involves for Hegel but also of why Hegel is philosophically motivated to adopt this conception of God.[14] The starting point of his explanation is a dualistic account of reality that he

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[13] See Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 68; O'Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*, 297; and Plant, *Hegel*, 51-2.

[14] Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God*, 128-9. There are a number of other scholars who adopt a transcendent interpretation of Hegel's concept of God. Where there is a slash (/) in the following

assumes Hegel shares. According to Lauer, Hegel proposes God's existence as the solution to the metaphysical problems posed by the existence of two basic realities in our universe: matter and spirit.[15] Since spirit and matter are completely distinct, an adequate metaphysical theory needs to be able to explain how spirit and matter relate to each other or interact with each other. As Lauer explains, the interaction between spirit and matter is ultimately possible for Hegel because this interaction or communication takes place as the activity of a greater spirit that transcends both spirit and matter, knower and known, and encompasses them within itself.[16] This greater spirit in Hegel's philosophy is God. In so far as finite spirits and finite objects participate in this connectedness that is made possible by absolute spirit, they are not just distinct from God, but share in God's being or are identical with God in some way.

Those who oppose the transcendent interpretation often charge that it reduces Hegel's philosophy to a form of pre-Kantian metaphysics.[17] Proponents of the transcendent interpretation will generally resist this charge, but there is a sense in which their opponents are correct. These proponents of the transcendent interpretation have claimed that Hegel gets beyond pre-Kantian metaphysics for at least a couple of reasons. First, Hegel's method is different than that of the metaphysicians criticized by Kant. Previously, metaphysicians like Wolff and

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references, page numbers before the slash state where the author indicates that Hegel's God is transcendent or exceeds the world, while page numbers after the slash indicate where he establishes the identity of God and the world. See Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 16, 19, 21/7, 12, 68, 106; Magee, *Hegel and Hermeticism*, 14-17/8-9, 13; O'Regan *Heterodox Hegel*, 86-7/142; Plant, *Hegel*, 32/34, 36, 51; Stirling, *Secret of Hegel*, 128; Taylor, *Hegel*, 44-5; and Wallace, "Hegel's Refutation," 156-7/149.

[15] Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God*, 128-9.

[16] Ibid. 129-30.

[17] See, for example, Redding, "Hegel"; and Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 7.

Leibniz drew their conclusions by using processes of inference governed by the understanding, a limited form of thinking that Hegel criticizes and that he replaces with thinking governed by reason.[18] Second, Hegel abandons the radical transcendence of pre-Kantian conceptions of God, and replaces it with a God who is present in the world and accessible to reason.[19] In these ways, argue defenders of the transcendent reading, Hegel's metaphysics overcomes the limitations of its predecessors. However, if the transcendent interpretation is correct, then Hegel is still doing pre-Kantian metaphysics in so far as he is claiming to have knowledge of that which exists beyond possible experience. God is not fully transcendent, but to the extent that God's being exceeds the world, God is still partially transcendent, and Hegel is still doing pre-Kantian metaphysics in that he claims to know of this transcendence. In this sense, Hegel's theology is still like the metaphysics that Kant criticized. For defenders of the transcendent reading, Hegel has overcome pre-Kantian metaphysics, not because he has entirely abandoned a metaphysics of transcendent existence, but because he has found a way to pursue this metaphysics in spite of Kant's critique. Hegel gets beyond Kant's critique by lifting the ban on metaphysics,[20] or by "setting aside the Kantian moratorium upon metaphysical speculation."[21]

Unlike the transcendent interpretation, the non-transcendent interpretation of Hegel's concept of God comes in two variations. The first view claims that Hegel's God is not a transcendent being or in no way exceeds possible experience, since

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[18] See Collins, *Emergence*, 259, 260; Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 58-9; O'Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*, 78, 87.
[19] See Collins, *Emergence*, 258.
[20] Ibid.

Hegel is in fact a type of pantheist: God is not beyond the world because God is the world itself.[22] The term 'pantheist' can mean a lot of different things, but in this context I take it to mean that Hegel identifies God with the universe of particular existence taken as a whole.[23] Here the universe is to be understood first as a physical whole, the whole of nature, but within the whole of nature spirit also develops and thrives in the thinking activity of particular human beings. Thus God is not just nature but also spirit, the domain of human society, and we see God's self-manifestation not only in the works of nature but also in human history and culture. The second variation of the non-transcendent position claims that God for Hegel is

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[21] Ibid. 254.

[22] In his discussion of Hegel's religious views, McCarney suggests that, in spite of his protests to the contrary, Hegel is a pantheist in so far as he claims that "God is identical with the universe, conceived not as a mere aggregate of particulars but as an impersonal, unified totality". See McCarney, *Hegel on History*, 40. In *Hegel*, Beiser also appears to belong in this camp, although his interpretation is more difficult to categorize. Beiser clearly rejects a transcendent interpretation of Hegel's God (142), and claims that God is "inseparable from its embodiment in nature and history" (143). But Beiser also claims here that God is the substance or foundation of the world, and it is not clear here what he means by substance (he cannot mean some sort of metaphysical substratum, since this would mean Hegel is doing the kind of transcendent metaphysics that Beiser claims he rejects). Elsewhere, Beiser's interpretation of Hegel's concept of God looks a lot like the spirit monism that interpreters such as Lauer and Stirling attribute to Hegel. Hegel's God is the absolute ego that includes both subject and object, and in which the finite ego necessarily participates. See Beiser, "Introduction", 14-5.

[23] There are a number of other definitions of pantheism that are relevant when discussing Hegel's theology. In his later Berlin writings Hegel repeatedly addresses the issue of pantheism and denies that his philosophy is pantheistic (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 246-7/346; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 273-5/375-8, 322-3/432; *VR*$_{27}$ 2: 469-71/572-5; *VBG* 490-4/135-8; *BS* 141-2; *EG* §573R). In these instances Hegel is defending himself primarily against the charge of what he identifies as a modern form of pantheism. In this form God is not the universe of particular existence *as a whole* (as we see in the definition in the main text above). Rather, according to this pantheism, God is every single thing in the universe, *qua* finite thing (i.e., this pinch of snuff is God, this snuff box is God, etc.). The deficiency of this form of pantheism for Hegel is that it does not take account of the ideality of the finite. Hegel's philosophy is certainly not pantheism in this sense, and, as Hegel himself indicates, it is a position that no one really holds (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 273/375, 322/432). But Hegel also uses the term 'pantheism' to describe a particular stage in the development of religion, one that he associates with the Oriental religions (*VPG* 4: 19). According to this definition, pantheism is the view that God is the one substance and that all finite things have their being in this universal substance. Although Hegel agrees with this view so far, Oriental pantheism is only an early form of the truth, one that must be superseded. Thus, Hegel is not a pantheist in this sense either. There is, however, a fourth, very general sense in which Hegel could perhaps be called a pantheist. Hegel does say that God is the totality or the one substance, and that there is nothing strictly outside of God that is opposed to God (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 269/369; *VR*$_{21}$ 3: 1/62, 5/66; *VR*$_{24}$ 3: 132/199). In this general sense at least, all is God for Hegel and Hegel's philosophy is pantheistic.

reason.[24] Unlike both the transcendent view and the non-transcendent view that claims that Hegel is a pantheist, this interpretation does not identify God as *existing*. God does not have being in the same way that the natural world has being or in the way that a supernatural being has being. God is first and foremost a logical object and can only be said to be in the ordinary, unobjectionable way that the conceptual domain and its members are said to be (here there is no suggestion that the concepts of reason exist as metaphysical entities like Platonic forms or Ideas). Just as proponents of the transcendent view hold that there is a sense in which God is not transcendent, a proponent of the non-transcendent view may want to claim also that there is a sense in which God for Hegel is transcendent. For example, she might argue that God as the universal truth is distinct from humanity in its concrete particular existence and in this sense transcends the human. As such, God's transcendence is a weak form of transcendence; it is what one might call an immanent transcendence since in this conception God remains entirely within human experience broadly construed.

What textual evidence is available to help us decide between the transcendent and the non-transcendent interpretations of Hegel's concept of God? If we take Hegel's theological claims at face value, the evidence appears to strongly favour the transcendent interpretation, since Hegel makes plenty of statements which seem to indicate that a transcendent God is an important part of his philosophy. His most forceful and poetic theological language appears in the prefaces to the various

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[24] See Findlay, *Hegel*, 143; Houlgate *Introduction to Hegel,* 243, 248; Houlgate, "Hegel and God's Transcendence", 141; Houlgate, "Religion, Morality and Forgiveness", 98, 105; Pinkard, *Hegel*, 580; Stace, *Philosophy of Hegel*, 26-30; Stern, "Comment," 171; and Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 10.

versions of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. In the 1821 manuscript he writes, for example:

> All that proceeds from thought – all the distinctions of the arts and sciences and of the endless interweavings of human relationships, habits and customs, activities, skills, and enjoyments – find their ultimate center in the *one* thought of *God*. God is the beginning of all things and the end of all things; [everything] starts from God and returns to God. (*VR*$_{21}$ 1: 3/84)

He then goes on to tell us that God is the only object of philosophy, and, as a result, that philosophy is theology and that the practice of philosophy is the service of God (*Gottesdienst*) (*VR*$_{21}$ 1: 3-4/84; *BS* 189). The theological character of his philosophy appears to be further reinforced by his account of the relationship between philosophy and religion, and more particularly by his account of the relationship between speculative philosophy and Christianity. Hegel's philosophy and Christianity vary only in form, but both have as their object the same content, namely God, and both grasp the full truth of this object (*EL* 23-4/11; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 292/396-7). Thus for Hegel the God that is the concern of philosophy is also the God that is the concern of Christianity. Hegel formulates his account of God in trinitarian terms (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 43/126; *VR*$_{24}$ 3: 125/191-2; *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 201/275-6), associates his philosophical position with Christian orthodoxy (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 188/262), and tells us that his philosophy preserves the content of church dogma that recent forms of theology have dispensed with (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 69/159, 78/168; *VG* 41/37). Hegel indicates that humans have immediate knowledge of God, not only in feeling but also in thinking (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 168/261; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 70-1/159-161; *NHS* 436-7; *VL* 74). God is at work in the domain of spirit: history is "the unfolding of God's nature in a particular, determinate element" (*VG* 48/42). Hegel also comes out in favour of the proofs of God's existence, indicating that the

speculative content of these proofs should be preserved and that they need only be freed of their traditional form of the understanding (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 58/144-5; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 87-8/179, 310/416-7; *EL* §68R). And last but not least, Hegel confirms on more than one occasion that he is a Lutheran (*Br* 4: 29/520; *BS* 572, 573). All of this evidence indicates that God plays a central role in Hegel's thought, and when Hegel refers to God it seems natural to assume that he means what a Christian would ordinarily mean by this term, namely, at the very least, some sort of transcendent being.

Furthermore, there is no obvious textual evidence indicating that Hegel is opposed to the type of philosophy that claims knowledge of transcendent entities like God or the soul. For example, in the discussion of metaphysics in the *Encyclopedia* (§§26-36), Hegel, unlike Kant, does not chastise metaphysics specifically for its transcendent use of reason, but criticizes it instead for engaging in the thinking of the understanding and for employing its concepts without first submitting them to adequate critique (*EL* §28). And in his discussion of Kant's critical philosophy in the same volume (*EL* §§37-60), he neither praises Kant for discrediting transcendent metaphysics, nor does he critique Kant for this. If Hegel does indeed oppose all philosophy that claims to have knowledge of transcendent objects, one would expect him to pipe up and to make his views clear in these two sections. But on this issue Hegel is silent. He gives us no clear reason here to think that his philosophy rejects the pre-Kantian metaphysical project.

The debate between the transcendent and the non-transcendent interpretations turns upon the following key point. As I have indicated, the transcendent position presupposes that we can take Hegel's claims about God at face value. In other words,

when Hegel talks about God and spirit, we can assume that he has in mind the most obvious meanings of these terms, the meanings that we would expect all other things being equal, i.e., that when used by Hegel 'God' and 'spirit' refer as they traditionally do to a transcendent being. It is precisely this assumption or presupposition that the non-transcendent approach wants to challenge, since its view presupposes that Hegel is not using the terms 'God' and 'spirit' in the standard sense at all. Since the transcendent position appeals to the default meanings or the meanings that are generally associated with these terms, the burden of proof lies with the non-transcendent position. If it is to demonstrate that its interpretation of Hegel's concept of God is even plausible, it must first show that we have good reason to at least doubt that Hegel is using his religious terminology in a standard way.

I believe that the non-transcendent approach *can* show that the significance of the terms 'God' and 'spirit' for Hegel cannot simply be assumed. For if we look closely at the way in which Hegel uses his religious terminology, we see that the meaning of these terms for Hegel is often unconventional and unexpected. Perhaps the strongest example of unusual usage is to be found in the way that Hegel conceives of immortality. When Hegel talks about immortality in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, one would expect him to mean what is normally meant by the term: the continued life of the individual or the individual's soul after death. But this is not what Hegel appears to mean at all.[25] For Hegel immortality is not something that occurs at a later time but is a present quality or a quality of this lifetime (*VR*$_{24}$ 3: 140/208), one that Hegel associates with the freedom of the individual (*VR*$_{27}$ 2:

465/569). This condition of immortality is one that can be described either negatively or positively. Viewed negatively, it involves being "elevated above finitude, dependence, and external conditions" (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 140/208), or the ability to abstract from "the temporality, change, and vicissitude of the world, from evil and estrangement" (*VR*$_{21}$ 1: 105/196). Viewed positively, immortality is the "subsisting with self" or 'being-within-self" that occurs in thinking (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 466/569). "The fact of the matter is that humanity is immortal only through cognitive knowledge, for only in the activity of thinking is its soul pure and free rather than mortal and animallike" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 227/304).[26] In another instance Hegel tells us that immortality involves having an eternal purpose, one that is distinct from finite temporal purposes (*VPW* 302). Hegel suggests that talk in religion of life after death should not be taken literally and that immortality is simply a figurative way of expressing the freedom of being at home with oneself in thinking that I have described above. In his discussion of the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis, Hegel refers to the tree of life that gives immortality as being "only a childlike representation", and states that the human being as "a single living thing, its singular life, its natural life, must die" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 227/303). Moreover, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel declares that spirit is eternal, adding that "life after death does not belong here" and "the living as such does not endure" (*VPN* 22, 23).

When Hegel associates the immortality of spirit with its eternity, he may appear to contradict the interpretation of immortality that I have just given. If spirit is

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[25] The following commentators accept that immortality for Hegel is not the survival of the soul after death: McCarney, *Hegel on History*, 203-4; Beiser, *Hegel*, 43; and Houlgate, *Introduction to Hegel*, 265-6.

[26] See also *VR*$_{24}$ 2: 212/309; *VGP* 3: 16/2: 190-1.

eternal, as Hegel suggests above and in other instances,[27] then it would seem, in spite of everything else he says, that Hegel is in fact claiming that the individual has life after death. For to be eternal, as the term is commonly understood, is to exist forever in time. But once again Hegel does not mean what he may initially appear to mean. On more than one occasion Hegel distinguishes eternity (*Ewigkeit*) from what he refers to as duration (*Dauer*).[28] Duration is "a relative sublation of time" (*EN* §258A); it is what occurs when things persist in time without end; it is what comes after time, which makes it a moment of time itself. When we think of eternity – in the context, for example, of eternal life – what we commonly have in mind is duration: life is eternal because it continues in time without end. For Hegel, the most imperfect of things endure in this fashion, e.g., the sun, the elements, the mountains, while that which perishes in time, life itself, is to be regarded more highly (*EN* §258A). In contrast, the eternal for Hegel is outside of time altogether or is a pure present, "absolute timelessness" (*EN* §258A); it "will not be, nor has it been, it *is*" (*EN* §258A). Hegel attributes eternity to what is most perfect: the law, the universal, the idea, in short the domain of the conceptual (*EN* §258A). The eternity of thinking beings is "their unaltering, unchanging inner being, which is thought, the consciousness of thought" (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 212/309). Here the term "eternity" can be interpreted as what we mean when we say, for example, that the Pythagorean theorem is eternally true, i.e., not true (or not just true) at all moments in time, but true independently of whatever does or does not happen in time, true even if the world in time never existed at all. When Hegel claims that spirit is eternal, he is not claiming

[27] See also *VR*$_{24}$ 2: 212/309; *VR*$_{24}$ 3: 140/209.
[28] See *VR*$_{24}$ 3: 140-1/209; *VPN* 22-3; *EN* §258A.

that it persists indefinitely in time but that it has the universal as its object (*VR*$_{24}$ 3: 140/209).

It is worth considering a third example of Hegel's unconventional use of religious terminology. When examining the evidence for the transcendent interpretation, we saw that Hegel presents himself as a proponent of the proofs of God's existence, arguing that the form of the understanding associated with the traditional form of the proofs must be abandoned, but that proofs of God's existence are in some sense legitimate.[29] When Hegel discusses these proofs, he uses the term 'proof' in at least a couple of ways. First, Hegel uses the term 'proof' in the way that we would normally expect: a proof is a formal demonstration that a particular statement is true, e.g., the kind of proof that is employed in mathematics. It is this type of proof that Hegel has in mind when he talks about the proofs of God's existence offered by pre-Kantian metaphysical philosophers like Wolff and Leibniz. But when Hegel speaks of the proofs of God's existence he generally has something very different in mind. In this second sense a proof for Hegel is not an instance of formal deduction but the process of reasoning implicitly at work in religious culture. The proofs are "not inventions of an artificial reflection" (*EL* §68R), but "*descriptions* and analyses of the inward *journey of the spirit*" (*EL* §50R). In other words, the various proofs of God's existence – Hegel identifies three or four of them – make explicit the course of thinking that leads humans to a knowledge of God.[30] It is for this reason that in most versions of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* Hegel discusses the various proofs in the section on determinate religion, and associates

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[29] See p. 25-6 of this chapter.
[30] See *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 88/179, 312/419, 324/434; *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 189/263; *VL* 55.

each major stage in the development of religion with a particular "proof". When Hegel relates a specific religion with a specific proof (e.g. the cosmological proof), he is not claiming that the followers of this religion ever explicitly perform such a proof (*VR*$_{31}$ 2: 616/726), but simply that religious thinking at this stage is governed by a certain pattern of inference, which in turn plays a role in determining the conception of God proper to this stage.

My point here is simply that once again we see Hegel employing religious terminology in a way that we would not normally expect. Hegel's interpretation of the proofs of God's existence, along with the interpretation of immortality and eternity, all indicate that Hegel has a habit of construing the meaning of his religious concepts in highly unusual ways.[31] In these cases, the meaning of Hegel's terms simply cannot be assumed or taken at face value. Thus, there is significant evidence to suggest that the non-transcendent interpretation of Hegel's concept of God is possible, i.e., there is good reason to think that Hegel might not be using the term 'God' to refer to a transcendent being or, for that matter, any existent being whatsoever. For if Hegel has a marked tendency to use his religious terminology in an unconventional manner, then we cannot just assume that Hegel is not using the term 'God' in an uncharacteristic way. The transcendent approach is simply not justified in automatically taking the meaning of Hegel's term 'God' at face value. It cannot presume that when Hegel talks about God, he is referring to a transcendent being. Moreover, nothing that Hegel says about immortality or creation necessarily commits us to the view that Hegel's philosophy involves a supernatural order, a realm that lies

[31] For another example of Hegel's unconventional use of religious terminology, see my discussion of his use of the term "mysticism" in chapter 3, pp. 109-11.

beyond the limits of experience and that could include a transcendent God. Like the non-transcendent view, the transcendent approach is obliged to prove that its point of view is the correct one.[32]

In this dissertation I adopt the second strain of the non-transcendent interpretation, the one that claims that God for Hegel is reason. As I indicated at the outset of the chapter, my objective is to show that this non-transcendent interpretation is plausible and that there is significant textual evidence to support it. In what follows I examine this evidence and I explain what this interpretation involves.[33]

1C. Hegel's concept of God as reason

There is no shortage of textual evidence to support the view that Hegel identifies God with reason itself. First, there are the passages in which Hegel claims explicitly that God is reason.

> Here in the philosophy of religion it is more precisely God, or reason in principle, that is the object. God is essentially rational, is rationality that is alive and, as spirit, is in and for itself. When we philosophize about religion, we are in fact investigating reason, intelligence, and cognition; only we do so without the supposition that we will get this over first, apart from our [real] object; instead the cognition of reason *is* exactly the object, is what it is all about. (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 139)[34]

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[32] Thus it is incorrect for advocates of a transcendent reading to simply write off the views of those favouring a non-transcendent approach by claiming that such interpretations are revisionist, or that their proponents are ignoring the real Hegel and simply reading into Hegel whatever they want to see in him. For examples of this rebuke, see Magee, *Hegel and Hermeticism*, 14-17; and Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 250-1. As I have argued, by taking such a position the advocate for a transcendent reading ignores an important issue that must be taken seriously. He assumes that Hegel's God is transcendent when this in fact must be shown.

[33] Given how important and divisive the issue of Hegel's concept of God has been in Hegel scholarship, it is surprising how few commentators have tried to solve the debate by looking carefully at the evidence for both sides (the only such investigation of which I am aware is McCarney, *Hegel on History*, 39-64). Those who hold a transcendent reading generally take the transcendent nature of Hegel's God as a given. Proponents of the non-transcendent reading also tend to offer little argument in favour of their interpretations, and give little explanation of why Hegel employs such strong theological language and what he means by it.

[34] See also *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 79/170; *VR*$_{27}$ 2: 422/524.

That God is reason follows also when Hegel claims, on the one hand, that the *Science of Logic* is the system of pure reason and then states, on the other hand, that this content is "the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite spirit" (*WL* 1: 43-4/49-50). Hegel confirms that God is not a being but a logical object when he tells us that God is the truth.[35] Here Hegel's claim should be understood literally: God is not the truth in so far as God's message is what is true or the way of God is the true way. Rather God *is truth itself*, and truth is not a member of the world of existing things but belongs to the sphere of meaning, the world of thinking. Finally, Hegel tells us repeatedly that God is for thought, and that God only has being for thought.

> For *thinking* is the source, the very ground upon which God, or the universal in general, *is*: the universal is in thought, *only* in thought, and for thought. (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 216/312).
> [T]hought is the element, the absolute and original mode of activity or state to which the consciousness of the divine pertains: God *is* only in and for thought. (*VR*$_{21}$ 1: 118/209)[36]

These quotes appear to rule out the possibility that God for Hegel is a transcendent being. For if God *is* only in thought, then it would seem that God does not exist at all. God is not a being that is simply known in thought but is reason itself, the universal content of thought.

Ultimately God is reason for Hegel in two fundamental ways: as the Idea and as spirit. The Idea appears at the end of Hegel's system of logic. Synonymous with reason (*EL* §214), the Idea is "what is *true in and for itself, the absolute unity of Concept and objectivity*" (*EL* §213). For Hegel, the Concept, as a moment of the

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[35] See *VR*$_{21}$ 1: 7/88, 131/222, 141/232; *VPW* 31; *VGP* 1: 296; *BS* 324.

Idea, is not just *a* concept, a conception, but is the domain of the conceptual as a whole. The relationship between the conceptual and the objective that is expressed by the Idea is ultimately a speculative identity or an identity in difference. The conceptual and objectivity are in one sense distinct. To take a banal example, we all know that the concept of a tree is not the same thing as a real tree. But this distinction is not absolute, since the domain of the conceptual also overreaches, informs and structures our experience of the object, and, in so doing, it makes the object of experience what it is. With his concept of the Idea Hegel expresses his agreement with Kant's view that all experience of an object is determined by the concepts that we employ, and that there is no such thing as experience of an object that is purely immediate or that is not mediated by the conceptual. But with the Idea Hegel also registers his most basic objection to Kant's philosophy: it is a rejection of the claim that it makes sense to speak of a thing-in-itself that completely transcends the conceptual or that cannot be grasped in thinking. For Hegel, reason as the Idea is the totality of the conceptual that also overreaches all objectivity and thus makes accessible to us, in principle at least, the whole truth about the world. To borrow from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, reason or the Idea is "the certainty of being all truth" (*PG* 178/139) or "the certainty of consciousness that it is all reality" (*PG* 179/140).

God is reason as the Idea in a number of different ways. First, God is pure reason or the content of the logic. This is implied by the claim that the content of the logic is the presentation of God in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and

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[36] See also *VR*$_{21}$ 1: 117/208; *VR*$_{24}$ 1: 179/273; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 270-1/372, 281/384-5, 290/394, 336/448; *VR*$_{24}$ 2: 375-6/475; *EL* §19A2; *VPK* 34.

finite spirit. Second, God as reason cannot be restricted to the logic, but is present in the two other areas of philosophy: nature and spirit. This must be the case since, as we saw earlier, Hegel claims that philosophy is theology and that God is the only subject matter of philosophy.[37] In the philosophies of nature and spirit, Hegel attempts to show that the basic concepts that we employ in thinking about nature and spirit ultimately form a conceptual whole and are related to each other in a necessary way. In so far as these concepts structure our understanding of nature and spirit and allow us to know these domains, they are a part of reason or a part of God. Third, God is the Idea at work not only in the philosophy of nature and spirit but also in reality itself. For Hegel God is present as reason in the development of human society. In his philosophy of world history Hegel argues that human history is not the result of mere contingency but is governed broadly by a rational and necessary progress towards freedom (*VG* 30/29). History is the unfolding of God's nature because God for Hegel is the rationality that governs this historical progression.

> So we need to consider world history and what its final purpose may be. This final purpose is what God has wanted with the world … From it we know that it is most perfect, and God wants what is most perfect; and what he wants he can only be himself and it can only be what is equal to him, i.e., his will. His will is not distinct from him, and this we refer to philosophically as the Idea. (*VPW* 24)

However, reason appears in Hegel's system not only at the end of the logic as the Idea but also in the third and final part of the system, the philosophy of spirit (§§437-9). As the Idea, reason is what Hegel refers to as 'in itself': it is the domain of the conceptual as an *object* of investigation or study, as that towards which the thinking of consciousness directs itself. As we have seen, the Idea is essentially

[37] See p. 25 of this chapter.

conceptual; as the content of the logic, it encompasses and describes the categories required for thinking an object in general. However, as thinking, self-consciousness is the conceptual in action. It is the Idea or the rational in existence and at work in the activity of specific minds, or, to use Hegelian terminology, it is the universal particularized and present in the world. For Hegel, human consciousness or the 'I' is reason, at least implicitly, since it implies the same unity of the conceptual and objectivity that we find in the Idea. Consciousness is, by its very nature, an identity-in-difference. For as consciousness, it necessarily has an object, and that object is for consciousness by its very nature an other. But at the same time consciousness, as the conceptual, necessarily overreaches the object. Whether consciousness is aware of it or not, its object is conceptually articulated for consciousness, and since the conceptual is consciousness' own nature, consciousness is identical with its object. As reason that is explicitly for itself, consciousness is "certified that its determinations are no less objective, or determinations of the essence of things" (*EG* §439).

This identity of the conceptual and objectivity as it appears in actual human consciousness is what Hegel refers to as 'spirit'. Unlike the Idea that is only in itself, spirit is essentially for itself, i.e., there can only be spirit if spirit is aware of itself or if it is differentiated into subject and object and unites these two poles within itself (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 74/164, 269/370). *Finite* spirit for Hegel is implicitly reason, but not explicitly so. As consciousness, it is the identity of itself with its object, but it does not know itself as such (*EG* §441). God is spirit for Hegel not as *finite* spirit but as *absolute* spirit (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 35/119; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 269/370; *BS* 413). Absolute spirit is spirit that is explicitly for itself as spirit. In other words, it is spirit that has itself as its object

and *knows* that it has itself as its object. It is reason that knows itself as reason.[38] As absolute spirit, the individual recognizes the truth of the Idea, i.e. the fact that consciousness has no other that is ultimately other and that the object of consciousness is necessarily ideal or simply a moment of one's own subjectivity and rational nature. As Hegel indicates at the end of his *Encyclopedia*, absolute spirit appears as the more developed forms of art, religion and philosophy. In these activities, God is, on the one hand, the object of knowledge, since God is the truth that is represented in these activities, the object of these activities. But, on the other hand, God is also the activities themselves, since God is not just the truth as object but as absolute spirit is the infinite relation of subject and object that is spirit. Thus, for example, God *is* religion: "religion is this idea, the idea of spirit that relates itself to itself, *the self-consciousness of absolute spirit*" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 222/318). It is only in absolute spirit that the identity of the subject and object is made explicit or that this unity becomes real for the subject, and, as a result, it is only here that freedom fully emerges. As absolute spirit, God is not a being but a form of knowing or a form of consciousness, a specific relationship between a subject and the world. This allows us to understand what Hegel means when he claims that God *is* only in his community (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 74/164). As it turns out, this claim follows easily from his conception of God

[38] Hegel also uses the term 'spirit' in other ways. When he is introducing the stage of world history in both the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel employs the expression 'spirit of a people' (*Volksgeist*) (*PR* §340; *EG* §§ 548, 549). With this term Hegel appears to refer to the overall way of thinking of a whole society or nation, a way of thinking that includes in particular their religious beliefs, as well as their political ideas and social values. The sense of the term 'spirit' here is one that we are familiar with from expressions like 'the spirit of the French' or 'the spirit of the '60s'. However, instead of the term 'spirit of a people' we would be more likely to use the term 'culture' to refer to that to which Hegel is referring. In contrast, the term 'world spirit' for Hegel is the collective name for the totality of *Volksgeister* as they appear over time. It is human culture as a historical whole, and the spirits of various peoples or nations constitute the stages of its development (*EG* §549). For Hegel the character of these spirits or cultures is not entirely contingent but contains an element of

as absolute spirit and even risks being trivial. Since God is ultimately a form of consciousness or knowing, and since consciousness requires a being that is conscious, it follows necessarily that God *is* only in the consciousness of the human community.

This is merely a very short outline of Hegel's conception of God, but since this topic is not the immediate focus of my dissertation, it should suffice for my purposes. In closing this chapter, I wish to address briefly a question that is raised by my interpretation of Hegel's concept of God. By the term 'God' one normally understands a supernatural being of some sort, whether personal or impersonal. Yet I have indicated that God for Hegel is reason as both the Idea and absolute spirit; God is both reason in itself and reason instantiated in human consciousness. Certainly we must wonder why Hegel would refer to these things as God. Why would Hegel employ the term 'God' in such an unconventional way?

Hegel does not address these questions explicitly in his work, but an explanation is possible. As I have already mentioned,[39] one of the central tenets of Hegel's philosophy, and especially of his logic, is that we cannot take the meaning of our basic concepts for granted, but that we must investigate this meaning carefully without making any presuppositions. In the case of each concept that is investigated, Hegel must start with some sort of basic definition. For example, in his analysis of the concept of necessity, Hegel begins implicitly with the most basic meaning of necessity: the necessary is that which must be the case. He then reflects speculatively on what necessity involves, arguing for example that the necessary in its truth must be the infinite or the whole. As I see things, Hegel has arrived at his conception of God

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rationality. The task of the philosophy of world history is to give an account of this rationality by demonstrating the necessary development of these cultures from one to another.

by a similar process. As with all other important concepts, Hegel thinks that the concept of what God is cannot simply be assumed in all its detail but must first be thought through carefully. Hegel's conception of God as Idea and spirit makes sense if we assume that he starts his investigation by maintaining that God is the truly infinite. Once this has been established, he must then consider what this means for our understanding of God's nature as a whole. We have seen already that the true infinite is that which ultimately has no other, whose other is only itself.[40] For Hegel God is Idea and absolute spirit because only reason and its manifestation in the world are what is truly infinite. Thus, the reasoning behind Hegel's conception of God in a nutshell is as follows: if God is infinite and if the infinite is reason, then God must be reason. God cannot be identified with a being or with an object of any kind, with something existing in the universe, since any object necessarily has an other that limits it and is thus finite. Even the totality of all existing things in the universe, whether natural or supernatural, is ultimately finite, since this totality is the other of the logical or is other than the domain of the conceptual and so is limited by it. In contrast with the objective, the subjective or the conceptual is not ultimately limited by its other. The subjective has an other, the objective, but it is also identical with this other or overreaches it. The whole or the infinite in the fullest sense for Hegel is not the universe itself as a collection of existent objects but the sphere of meaning or subjectivity that includes the universe within itself as its other.

As I indicated at the outset of this chapter, Hegel's interpretation of his concept of God will have implications for his understanding of religion. If God for

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[39] See pp. 11-12 of this chapter.
[40] See pp. 13-14 of this chapter.

Hegel is not a personal being, then it follows that religion for Hegel cannot be the relationship between humans and an infinite subject; it cannot be Christianity as it is traditionally understood. Religion for Hegel involves the theoretical, practical and personal relationship of humans to the rational truth. Exploring this further is the task of the following chapters.

Chapter 2: Religion as a form of knowledge

In the 1827 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel divides his analysis of the concept of religion into the concept of God, knowledge of God and the cultus. These three moments follow a pattern that recurs often in Hegel's work. In the concept of God we begin with immediate unity, the unity of God and human spirit (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 87/178), in the knowledge of God distinction is introduced between the human that knows God and God as the object that is known, and finally in the cultus the two previous moments are reunited in a relation of identity-in-difference between God and human spirit. In the cultus the human becomes one with God, but in so far as she remains a self-conscious singular, she is also still distinct from the divine.

Religion in the ordinary sense only begins for Hegel with the second of the three moments or with the knowledge of God (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 87/179, 272/373, 277-8/380-1). Religion is the relationship between human and God, and this presupposes that both of its poles are distinguished from each other. Thus, for Hegel the first moment of immediate unity is only a conceptual moment of religion and is not a moment in the development of concrete, historical religion: "only with distinction does religion as such begin" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 277-8/381).

My task in the next two chapters is to explore the second and third moments of Hegel's concept of religion. As I hope to show, the practice of religion for Hegel involves three essential features: (i) knowledge of the truth, (ii) conformity of the individual's will to the demands of the truth, and (iii) feeling of the truth. In this chapter I investigate what knowledge of the truth or knowledge of God involves for

Hegel. More specifically, I want to understand Hegel's claim that in religion we know the truth by means of representation. The task of my next chapter will be to examine the cultus or the third moment of religion and to show how this involves both a practical element and the element of religious feeling.

2A. Hegel's concept of truth

Hegel associates religion with truth in his discussion of the identity thesis,[1] which claims that the content of religion is identical to that of philosophy (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 63/152, 292/396; *VGP* 1: 296), or that religion and philosophy are similar pursuits in so far as both involve knowledge of the truth. These two activities differ only in their form or in the way in which they know or express the content that they share. Religion expresses the truth in the medium of representation, while philosophy expresses it in the form most appropriate to the truth, the form of the concept.[2] Because it is much easier to grasp the truth in the medium of representation, religion is the activity in which the average person grasps the truth, while the conceptual grasp of the truth provided by philosophy is accessible only to the few (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 88/180, 292/396; *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 209/283; *EL* 23-4/11; *EG* 379/303).

If we are to understand Hegel's claim that religion is knowledge of the truth in the form of representation, we must first understand what Hegel means by the terms 'truth' and 'representation'. As the object of knowing in both religion and philosophy, truth undoubtedly plays an essential role in Hegel's thinking, but like

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[1] I have borrowed the term 'identity thesis' from Beiser, *Hegel*, 146.

[2] In his "*Rede zum Antritt an der Universität Berlin*," Hegel claims that the form of the truth in religion is not appropriate to the content. Hegel goes on to say that thinking spirit cannot remain at the level of representation and that this form must be overcome. See *BS* 14-5.

other basic concepts in his philosophy, the meaning of his concept of truth is not obvious. If we consider the claims that Hegel makes about truth throughout his work, the following picture of truth emerges.

First, Hegel's use of the term 'truth' differs from the use with which we are most familiar. Hegel himself points this out in the following passage in which he contrasts the ordinary meaning of the term 'truth' with the meaning that Hegel attributes to it.

> In the ordinary way, what we call "truth" is the agreement of an object [*Gegenstand*] with our representation of it. We are then presupposing an object to which our representation is supposed to conform. In the philosophical sense, on the contrary, "truth," expressed abstractly and in general, means the agreement of a content with itself. This is therefore a meaning of "truth" quite different from the one mentioned above. (*EL* §24A2)

The meaning of the term 'truth' that Hegel is distancing himself from is that associated most closely with the correspondence theory of truth, according to which a claim about the world is true if and only if the world is as the claim represents it to be. For example, the claim that Caesar crossed the Rubicon in 49 BCE is true because it accurately represents a state of affairs that occurred. Hegel would not deny that such claims are correct, but truth for Hegel is not mere correctness. It is not exclusively the property of a claim or judgement, but is rather a property that can be applied appropriately to objects, since, as Hegel mentions above, truth is the agreement of an object with itself, or the correspondence of an object with its concept (*VR*$_{21}$ 2: 1/93; *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 195/269; *Br* 2: 328/493). Hegel thinks that this meaning of the term 'truth' is also reflected in everyday usage. For example, we may call a person a true friend, which means that this person is in reality as a friend ought to be (*EL* §24A2). Here the actual friend corresponds to the concept of a friend, or, to put it negatively, there

is no contradiction between the friend in reality and the concept of a friend by which she is being judged.

However, in spite of this example, Hegel maintains that the domain of the true is significantly limited. It follows from Hegel's definition of truth that the finite is necessarily untrue, since the finite by its very nature is what contradicts itself or is a lack of correspondence with itself. For, on the one hand, the finite, taken on its own, presents itself as what has being independently and in opposition to its other, and, on the other hand, the finite *is* only by virtue of the other which forms its limit. Only the infinite is true, since the infinite overcomes contradiction and contains it within itself. "The Idea in its highest sense, God, is thus alone truly true, is alone that in which the free concept no longer has any unresolved opposition to its objectivity. In other words the Concept is in no way entangled in the finite" (*Br* 2: 328/493). It is for this reason that Hegel makes the famous claim in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that the true is the whole (*PG* 24/11). Only the whole is not limited by an other, and so only the whole is not finite and untrue.

Since the true for Hegel is necessarily the whole or the infinite, and since, as I have argued in the previous chapter, the infinite is conceptual, it follows that for Hegel the whole to which truth is ascribed is conceptual in nature. As we saw in the quote above, the true is the Idea. Hegel affirms that the true is conceptual when he tells us that absolute truth is for thinking (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 216/291). For Hegel the truth can also be grasped in feeling and representation, but only because these forms of experience have implicit conceptual content or are moments within the life of thinking or the 'I'. Thus, to grasp the truth of religion or philosophy in its full sense cannot

merely involve the immediate intuition of an object. In spite of the fact that Hegel speaks as if truth is the property not of judgements but more generally of objects, truth for Hegel is ultimately a property that belongs to the domain of the conceptual.

Moreover, for Hegel there is only one truth (*VGP* 1: 19, 21; *VR*$_{24}$ 1: 46/130). This follows from the fact that the true is the infinite or the whole, and that there is only one such infinite or whole. However, given that the truth is conceptually articulated, it also follows that this truth is not abstract, but concrete (*VGP* 1: 21), that it contains all content within itself (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 219/315). The true cannot be expressed by just one claim (*VGP* 1: 21), but consists of a series of claims or a system of claims that together constitute the whole of the truth.

Nevertheless, there is also a sense in which certain particular claims for Hegel are true or are the truth. The system of truth is constituted by the content of the system in its necessary logical development, and this logical development involves various stages or moments, which, to the extent that they are moments of the system, are true. One can claim that what is revealed at a particular stage of philosophical development is the truth, as long as it is understood that it is the truth only in so far as it is a moment of the whole. It is for this reason that Hegel can speak of truths in the plural,[3] or can identify a particular claim as the truth. To take an example of the latter, Hegel states that humans recognize the following truth in the story of Christ's resurrection: "that humanity has attained the certainty of unity with God" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 250/326).

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[3] For example, Hegel claims that in philosophy "the basic truths of Christianity" are preserved (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 188/262).

When Hegel claims that the content of the system is true, I believe that the term 'true' here needs to be understood in both ways that we have considered. First, these claims are true in the peculiar sense that Hegel has attributed to the term 'truth', namely truth as the agreement of a content with itself. As necessary moments of the infinite whole, these claims form an integral part of that which agrees with itself, and so are true in this sense. Second, it is fair to assume here that Hegel also associates these claims with truth as correctness. In other words, Hegel takes these claims to be true in the sense that we normally understand the term, i.e., as an attribute of judgements. When understood properly and in their full context, these claims tell us what is the case. For example, when Hegel states that humanity has attained certainty of unity with God and claims that this is a truth, he is claiming that this statement is correct and that to deny it is wrong.

The important result of this discussion is that the truth grasped or known by religion will ultimately involve a set of basic claims that Hegel takes to be correct. My task later in this chapter will be to show what at least some of these claims are. But before we can turn to this task, we must still examine the meaning of the term 'representation', the second term that Hegel uses in his description of religion as a form of knowledge. This will allow us to understand what it means to know the truth in representation.

2B. Religious truth as representation

For Hegel a representation in its most general sense is "a consciousness of something that one has before oneself as something objective [*Gegenständliches*]"

(*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 292/396).[4] It is any object that comes before the mind, or that which the mind puts before itself (*vor-stellen*). As Hegel tells us, "[e]very spiritual content and all relationships generally – of whatever sort they may be … are representations" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 296/401). In this broad sense of the term, even the most abstract concept is a representation.

Religious representations for Hegel include both sensible and non-sensible configurations. Sensible religious representations can be further subdivided into two groups. The first subgroup is that of images: representations or sensible forms "for which the principal content or the principal mode of representation is taken from immediate intuition" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 293/397).[5] As images, religious representations are symbolic or allegorical, since they "have a significance distinct from that which the image as such primitively expresses" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 293/397). In other words, representational religious imagery carries with it both an outer and an inner meaning (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 293/397-8), and the meaning that is expressed or intended by the image *qua* symbol is not its external but it internal meaning. In this way, the religious image illustrates Hegel's claim that a representation is both a veiling (*Verhüllung*) and an unveiling (*Enthüllung*) (*VGP* 1: 79): it veils the truth in so far as the truth is not presented explicitly in the representation, but it is also an unveiling in so far as the image contains an implicit truth that it communicates successfully to believers. As an example, Hegel suggests that the Christian image of the son of God should be interpreted as a religious symbol (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 293/398). The external meaning of the image, the one that we draw from intuition, is the idea of a son and his relationship to

[4] See also *VPG* 195, where representation is defined as intelligence positing intuition as its own.
[5] See also *VPG* 198.

his father, but when Christ is referred to as the son of God, this expression or representation should not be taken literally or at face value. The symbolic image of Christ as son does not imply that God actually had a son in the same way that humans do, and the relationship between God and Christ is not a father-son relationship like the ones that we are familiar with. The sensible image of Christ as son is meant to signify a relationship of a different nature that is analogous to, or "something like", a father-son relationship.[6]

The second subgroup of sensible religious representations for Hegel is that of historical representations. On the one hand, a historical religious representation can be a myth, e.g. the myths of Zeus and the other Greek gods (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 294/399). These myths are not factual history and are not meant to be taken seriously (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 294/399), but they do nevertheless take the form of a historical narrative and they have an inner religious significance. On the other hand, historical religious representations can be historical in the proper or narrow sense, in so far as they are narratives of events that actually occurred. For Hegel the most important example of this type of religious narrative is the story of Jesus. As with symbols, religious narratives have both a surface and a deeper meaning, and it is in the deeper meaning that the religious significance of the narrative is ultimately to be found. Hegel makes this point in his discussion of the story of Christ:

> This story does not merely count as a myth, in the mode of images. Instead it involves sensible occurrences; the nativity, passion and death of Christ count as something completely historical. Of course it therefore exists for representation and in the mode of representation, but it also has another, intrinsic aspect. The story of Jesus is something twofold, a divine history.

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[6] Other examples of symbolic religious representations provided by Hegel include God's wrath, and allegories such as the stories of Prometheus, Pandora's box, and the tree of knowledge (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 293-4/398).

> Not only [is there] this outward history, which should only be taken as the ordinary story of a human being, but also it has the divine as its content: a divine happening, a divine deed, an absolutely divine action. This absolute divine action is the inward, the genuine, the substantial dimension of this history, and this is just what is the object of reason. Just as a myth has a meaning or an allegory within it, so there is this twofold character generally in every story. (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 294/399)

In addition to the two types of sensible representations that are found in religion, Hegel also claims that religious activity involves certain non-sensible representations, e.g., God and the world (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 295-6/400-1). If we are to understand what is common to both the sensible and non-sensible representations that are found in religion, we must consider how Hegel associates representations with the understanding. At the outset of this discussion of representation, we saw that for Hegel the term 'representation' can refer to all objects before the mind. In this sense, even the most abstract concepts employed by philosophy are themselves representations. But for Hegel there is also a representational *way of thinking* that is proper to religion and that is opposed to the way of thinking in speculative philosophy. This representational way of thinking is that of the understanding, while speculative thinking is referred to by Hegel as the thinking of reason. What ultimately distinguishes the thinking of the understanding in religion from the rational thinking of philosophy is not the object of thought itself but the manner in which it is thought. As we have seen, it is not the content of the knowing but the form of the knowing that is particular to religion and that distinguishes it as a practice from philosophy (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 296/401).

We saw in the previous chapter that the understanding treats its objects as existing on their own account and it fails to consider the way in which such objects

are connected to each other.[7] The thinking of religion belongs to representation for Hegel or is associated with the understanding because it views the determinations that form its content as "related simply to themselves" or as "in the form of independence" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 296/401). The determinations of religion belong to representation or to the understanding "to the extent that they are not yet analyzed internally and their distinctions are not yet posited in the way in which they relate to one another" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 296/401). Unlike philosophy, religion does not attempt to show the necessary relatedness of its content, but rather presents the determinations of its content sequentially or side by side (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 235-6/334). Each determination simply exists alongside the other, with one coming after the other either in space or in time. We see this thinking of the understanding in religious representation drawn from the sensible or having sensible content. For example, in the story of the tree of knowledge from Genesis, there is a tree, a fruit, a serpent, a man, a woman, God, etc. However, the thinking of the understanding also influences the way in which religion grasps non-sensible representations such as its representation of God. In Christianity, God is generally conceived of as an object with many attributes or predicates: omnipotence, righteousness, goodness, wisdom, providence, omniscience, etc. (*VR*$_{21}$ 3: 13-4/75).[8] In the understanding's representation of God, these properties are not conceived of as essentially related to each other, but rather as simply co-existing alongside each other. To borrow Hegel's expression, the means for combining these predicates are the words "and" and "also" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 296/401).

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[7] See chapter 1, pp. 12-3.

[8] Hegel also discusses the concept of God as grasped by the understanding in the follows passages: *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 296/401; *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 195-6/270, 203/277-8.

Sensible and non-sensible religious representations are similar for Hegel, because in both we find a surface meaning and a deeper meaning. We have seen that with sensible representations it is the sensible content that allows for the two-fold meaning structure, since the surface meaning is the meaning associated with the sensible presentation of the representation, while the internal meaning is the non-literal signification. As we saw, the truth conveyed by the representation to the believer lies not on the surface but in the deeper meaning. In non-sensible representation, however, it is the form of the understanding that gives representations a two-fold meaning. Here the surface meaning of the religious representation is the representation as it is grasped by the understanding. Taken literally, the understanding's interpretation of the representation is not the truth. For example, the representation of God as an aggregate of qualities is, in and of itself, a distortion of God's true nature (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 195/270, 203/277). However, such representations still allow the believer to know the truth, in so far as they form part of the representational apparatus through which the believer has access to the truth. This truth that is conveyed to the believer by the representation is the deeper or inner significance of the non-sensible representation.

2C. Faith as a form of knowing

Having examined Hegel's conceptions of the truth and of religious representation, we can now turn to the issue of how religion is knowledge of the truth in the medium of representation. If indeed it is the case that religious representations are not, or need not be, literally true, how do representations convey the truth to pious

believers? How is the inner truth of a representation accessible to a believer that does not determine the inner meaning of the representation reflectively or in thinking?

When Hegel claims that in religion one knows the truth in the form of representation, the mode of knowing here is immediate knowing or faith. Hegel distinguishes the knowledge associated with faith from two other forms of knowledge. First, faith is not the certainty or knowledge that arises from immediate sense certainty (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 283/387). It is not, for example, the immediate sense knowledge that there is a desk in front of me or a sky above me. Second, faith is not the mediated knowledge associated with speculative thinking or a knowing of things in their necessity (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 283/388). In other words, faith is not a part of philosophy. Falling between these two other types of knowledge, faith is a form of immediate knowledge of what is non-sensible, namely the truth. It is immediate because it is knowing of the truth that is self-verifying. In faith humans are able to see immediately for themselves that something is true. And faith is self-verifying because in faith spirit knows itself, i.e., humans as rational beings are grasping a truth that is rational or logical.

Hegel's claims about faith may seem confusing, since, on the one hand, he is saying that in faith we have knowledge of non-sensible truth without having to engage in reflection, but, on the other hand, non-sensible, rational truth is truth that we can normally only know in reflection. Unlike knowledge of sensible objects, rational truth, it would seem, is not something that can be verified immediately. To make sense of Hegel's view, we need to recognize that Hegel *does* think rational truths can be immediately verified, and this is because Hegel claims that there is an instinct of reason at work in human nature. Humans, as rational beings, are able to see

immediately that certain rational truths are true, even though they have not arrived at this verification by a process of reflection. For example, as we will see shortly, humans have understood from a very early stage that the finite has no independent being. The proof of the truth of idealism for Hegel is a complicated affair that he presents in the *Science of Logic*, but as rational beings humans are able to grasp this truth immediately or instinctively, and they see for themselves in religion that it is true.[9]

As in other instances, Hegel's use of religious terminology in this instance is not typical. Faith for Hegel does not have the meaning with which we often associate it today: belief in something that we cannot know for certain, e.g., belief in the existence of a transcendent God or belief in the fact that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Rather, faith involves *certainty* in a peculiar sense of the term. For Hegel I am certain of a content if I have the content within me or before my mind, and if this content also exists on its own account (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 282/386). Thus the certainty associated with faith is not merely a subjective state of belief that can belong to the believer independently of whether or not the belief is correct. In so far as it involves certainty, faith is itself a form of knowing, a fact that is reflected in "*Gewißheit*", the German term for 'certainty' that has "*wissen*" or 'knowing' as its root. When I am certain of a content, that of which I am certain actually is. As Hegel himself claims, faith is not opposed to knowledge, since "what I believe, I also know" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 283/387). For Hegel the paradigm instance of faith is faith that there is a God (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 284/388). This faith is certainty of God, and this certainty is immediate knowledge of

[9] For examples of where Hegel talks about the instinct of reason or the instinct of thinking, see *VR*$_{27}$ 2: 422/524; *VBG* 486/131; *VGP* 1: 19; and *BS* 11.

God (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 282/386). Consciousness of God is not merely the subjective belief that God exists, a belief that may or may not be true, but it is "the consciousness that God also *is* – not merely [as] my own or [as] a subject within me, but [as] independent of me and of my acts of representing and knowing" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 282/386).

Thus in faith the believer not only *thinks* that there is a God, but she *knows* that this is the case. This is confirmed elsewhere by Hegel's claim that we all have immediate knowledge of God (*VR*$_{21}$ 1: 4/85; *VR*$_{24}$ 1: 167/260, 168/261). This claim on Hegel's part is certainly problematic if God for Hegel is a fully transcendent, existing being. For in this case it attributes all humans with the capacity to know about the existence of a being that is beyond sense experience, a view that is at the very least questionable. However, if one interprets Hegel's conception of God as I have, then I think that Hegel's view here can be more easily understood. For if God is reason itself as Idea and spirit, then the certainty or immediate knowing that constitutes faith is not the immediate knowledge of something that is *ultimately* other than the believer. God is indeed in one sense other than the believer and independent of her in so far as God is reason or the universal truth. The truth is the truth whether the particular believer exists or not. But at the same time, the believer is identical with the truth or with God, since she is a thinking, rational being and the truth is a rational truth. The believer has immediate knowledge or certainty of God in faith because in knowing God she is only knowing her own essential nature. To know God is simply to be aware at some level of objective rational truth and what this truth involves.[10]

[10] Houlgate presents a similar view in his discussion of Christian faith. "However, for Hegel, though it lacks the trappings of formal argumentation, faith is in fact deeply rational, because our felt, intuitive recognition of the truth of Christian doctrine is nothing other than the 'dim recognition' (*dunkles*

Hegel defines authentic faith as the witness of the spirit (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 238/337, 239/338, 242/341-2), an expression that needs to be understood both as a subjective and an objective genitive. On the one hand, spirit is the subject of the genitive as the individual believer who is witnessing the truth. Genuine faith involves witness of the spirit, in so far as the believer sees *for herself* that the truth is true. On the other hand, spirit is the object of the genitive in so far as spirit is the truth that is being witnessed. In faith spirit knows the truth with certainty, because this knowledge of the truth is ultimately a form of self-knowledge: it is spirit knowing spirit, or a rational being knowing what is rational.

> But the absolutely proper ground of belief, the absolute testimony to the content of a religion, is the witness of the spirit and not miracle or external, historical verification. The genuine content of a religion has for its verification the witness of one's own spirit, [the witness] that this content conforms to the nature of my spirit and satisfies the needs of my spirit. My spirit knows itself, it knows its essence – that, too, is an immediate knowledge, it is the absolute verification of the eternally true, the simple and true definition of this certainty that is called faith. (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 285/389)

Thus for Hegel the religious believer knows the truth immediately in faith. But if religious truth is presented to the believer in the form of representation, we must still explain how representation allows her to have an immediate grasp of this truth. To provide such an explanation, we must still overcome a significant challenge. On the one hand, the knowledge of the truth in faith is immediate, but, on the other hand, the truth being conveyed by the representation is not its surface meaning or that which the believer immediately encounters. In faith the believer must in some way be capable of grasping the deeper meaning of the representation without having to reflect upon the representation conceptually. For ordinary consciousness, religious

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Anerkennen) by our *reason* of the nature of absolute reason itself." See Houlgate, *Introduction to*

representation exists "as a content that primarily presents itself in sensible form, as a series of actions and sensible determinations that follow one another in time and then occur side by side in space" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 295/400). However, Hegel tells us that the simple, unsophisticated believer has an "obscure consciousness" of the universal laws and powers that are implicit in the representation, or a "dim recognition" of the inner meaning of religious representation (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 295/400). These vague expressions that Hegel uses to describe the believer's consciousness of the truth suggest that the believer grasps the truth of representation in a way that is not fully self-conscious or not fully articulated.[11]

This is as far as Hegel's explanation takes us, and it is up to us to figure out how this "dim recognition" of the truth actually occurs in faith. In the explanation that I am proposing, I start with an example drawn from Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, and I then list some generalizations that I suggest can be drawn from this example. In his discussion of Greek religion, Hegel pays particular attention to the myth of the war of the gods that Hesiod presents in his *Theogony*. In this myth an older generation of divine beings and a younger generation of gods led by Zeus do battle with each other for control of the cosmos. The older generation is ultimately defeated and is cast into Tartarus by Zeus, thus establishing the supremacy of the younger generation over the older. For Hegel this myth is a representation of central importance in the Greek worldview. Externally, this myth is the narrative that I have just related, but according to Hegel the myth also has a deeper meaning, one that expresses "the essence of Greek religion" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 537/645). As Hegel interprets

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Hegel, 245.

[11] See Houlgate, *Introduction to Hegel*, 245-6.

the narrative, the older gods (Cronus, Uranus, Oceanus, etc.) are nature deities, while the younger gods led by Zeus are spiritual powers. The defeat of the nature gods by the spiritual gods expresses or represents the basic truth that the natural is subordinated to the spiritual or that the spiritual overcomes the natural.

> A major point of their mythology is that the gods, with Zeus at their head, have gained the mastery for themselves by a war, by violence. The spiritual power has cast down the giants, the Titans, from the throne; the sheer power of nature has been overcome by the spiritual, the spiritual has elevated itself above it and now rules over the world. (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 537/645)[12]

As Hegel tells us, the truth expressed by this myth is not one that is merely perceived by us, but is one that the Greeks themselves expressed, or of which the Greeks themselves were conscious (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 533/645). Presumably this representation was, in Hegel's mind at least, one of the primary ways in which Greek culture conveyed this particular moment of the truth to the Greeks. How then might the believer come to know the truth from this myth? Let us assume for the sake of argument that the pious Greek believes that this myth is literally true. In this case, the Greek holds an incorrect belief, since he accepts that the gods described in this myth actually exist and that there really was a battle between these gods that the younger generation won. Nevertheless, this incorrect belief need not hinder the Greek from knowing the religious truth conveyed by the myth, since by believing in the myth the pious Greek is also likely to at least implicitly accept its inner truth. Because the Greek accepts that the spiritual gods have defeated the gods of nature in a thoroughgoing way, it is also probable that he will at least implicitly accept the superiority of the spiritual over the natural. When asked, he may not be able to express the inner truth of the myth in a clear, conceptual way, but this truth is one that

is implied by the myth and so in accepting the myth the believer should also accept this truth at some level. This acceptance of the truth, for example, is likely to be borne out in the actions of the believer. If a Greek acknowledges that the spiritual gods are superior to the natural gods and worships these gods, he will likely show that he values the spiritual above the natural in his own life and practice.

It is in this way that the believer can grasp the inner truth of representation immediately. This grasp of the truth is immediate in so far as it is not one that is arrived at by a process of abstract reflection or whose necessity is demonstrated in thinking. Rather it is a truth that the believer appropriates directly from the religious representations of his culture, representations that he recognizes as truthful through the witness of the spirit or in faith. If I am correct in this interpretation of the way religious representation functions, then the truth conveyed to the believer in representation need not be present for the believer in an explicitly conceptual form, and it is possible that the believer, by accepting the representation, will hold certain false beliefs about the world. Nevertheless, in acknowledging the representation as the truth, the believer in effect accepts a basic claim or claims that are moments of the truth, whether or not the believer is explicitly aware that she is doing so, and this acceptance of the truth will be evident in the believer's conduct. Knowledge of the truth in representation is a grasping of the truth that is not fully self-aware but for Hegel it is a grasping of the truth nonetheless.

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[12] For Hegel's discussion of this myth, see also *VR*$_{24}$ 2: 364-5/464-5; *VR*$_{31}$ 2: 636/753.

2D. The three basic truths of religion

Having examined what it means to grasp the truth in the form of representation, I attempt in the rest of the chapter to determine more specifically the content of the truth that religion presents and conveys. The remainder of this chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, I argue that there are three basic truths for Hegel that are known and accepted by all religions worthy of the name, and in the second part I discuss how knowledge of the truth develops in the determinate religions.

If religion for Hegel is by definition the relationship between humans and the divine, then all religions must involve some sort of representation of the divine. As Hegel claims, "God is always a present reality for human beings from time immemorial" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 429/532). Thus, the first basic truth that is represented by all religions, even the most basic, is that there is a God: "knowledge of God in the universal sense belongs to religion generally" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 428/531) Here the term 'God' needs to be understood in the most general possible sense. For in some instances Hegel uses the term 'God' very narrowly to refer to a "spiritually subjective unity" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 561/669), or to the one personal God of western monotheism, and when taken in this way God only appears late in the development of the determinate religions at the stage of Judaism. However, in its most general sense, the God of religion is for Hegel simply a power that is higher or nobler than the natural.

This higher power that is God is necessarily a spiritual power. Hegel distinguishes between the spiritual[13] (*das Geistige*) and spirit itself (*Geist*) (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 435-6/538). In the earlier forms of religion, God is represented as the former but not

as the latter. In other words, in these forms of religion God is not yet *spirit* because God is not yet represented as a universal with the content that is a part of spirit, e.g. the norms associated with some form of ethical life. However, God is *spiritual* in these religions in so far as God is not treated merely as a natural object but as a thinking being just like ourselves. In the most basic form of religion, the religion of magic, the higher power is not some sort of supernatural deity but the shaman, a particular human being that possesses power over nature. The shaman is not God in any conventional sense, but for Hegel he is in these cultures a representation of the divine, since he is a spiritual being that is seen explicitly as being higher than nature. "[T]he spiritual is at first just the singular and contingent human self-consciousness which, in spite of being only sheer desire, self-consciously knows itself to be nobler than nature, and knows that self-consciousness is a power transcending nature." (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 436/538).

That God for Hegel is always spiritual is supported by Hegel's claim that humans never worship nature in the strict sense. In nature religion, the natural is merely the mode in which the spiritual is expressed, but God is never nature itself.

> [K]nowledge of God in the universal sense belongs to religion generally, and we can assume at least this much, that God is spirit. Hence nature religion contains the spiritual moment directly, so that the spiritual is the highest reality for human beings.
> This rules out the view that nature religion is one in which human beings revere natural objects as God. Reverence for natural objects does indeed play a part in it, but in a secondary way. Even in the basest religion the spiritual is, for human beings as such, always nobler than the natural; (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 428-9/531)

When a religion claims, for example, that the sea is a god, this does not mean that the sea is worshipped in this religion *qua* natural object. Rather, the sea, though natural

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[13] In his translation of *VR*, Hodgson translates "*das Geistige*" as "spiritual aspect".

in its content, is treated in this religion as if it were a spiritual being, a being that is capable of reflective action in the same way that we are (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 172-3/267). For example, by making sacrifices to the sea in hopes that one's ship will be granted safe passage, one is not treating the sea as if it were simply a mass of water, but as if it were a being that can be propitiated, that has likes and dislikes and that can choose one course of action over another. When one worships the sea, one implicitly identifies this god as one of us, i.e., as a thinking being.

The second universal truth of religion is that God is the one substance. "In all higher religions, but particularly in the Christian religion, God is the one and absolute substance" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 471/575).[14] Given Hegel's identity thesis that religion and philosophy both involve knowledge of the same content or truth, the claim that God is substance is, as one might expect, a fundamental and essential claim of both religion and philosophy.[15]

> Dialectical development such as has been given here does not, however, belong to the systems of simple substantiality, to pantheistic systems. They do not get beyond *being* or *substance*, a form that we shall take up again. This category, taken in itself, is the foundation of all religions and philosophies. In all of them God is absolute being, an essence that exists simply in and for itself, not through an other, and that is independence pure and simple. (*VBG* 498/142)[16]

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[14] See also *VGP* 1: 64.

[15] In his discussion of Thales at *VGP* 2: 17/2: 26, Hegel confirms that philosophy begins in his view with a recognition that God is substance. Here Hegel claims that Thales' theories are philosophical because they deal with the One or the true that alone is the in-and-for-itself.

[16] The two references that I have given in support of this second truth appear to contradict each other. In the second reference Hegel implies that *all* religions conceive of God as substance, while in the first reference he claims that God is substance in all *higher* religions. I believe that this contradiction can be explained if we consider Hegel's interpretation of the religion of magic and the ambiguous place that he gives it within determinate religion. On the one hand, Hegel identifies the stage of magic as a form of religion for the reason that I have already stated: in a culture of magic humans are aware of a power that is greater than the natural and this power is identified as a spiritual power. But on the other hand, Hegel on more than one occasion either plays down the claim that magic is religion or denies that the practice of magic is religion in the full sense (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 177/273, 209/305; *VR*$_{27}$ 2: 433/535, 435/538). According to Hegel, religion in the true sense requires consciousness of a universal in opposition to self-consciousness and this only first occurs in more developed forms of nature religion (*VR*$_{24}$ 2:

In his discussion of the concept of God in *VR*$_{27}$, Hegel tells us that the view of God as substance is the foundation of the concept of God (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 270/371) or its basic determination (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 272/374). The concept of God does vary from one determinate religion to another, gradually progressing as the development of the determinate religions moves towards Christianity. Yet Hegel is claiming here that in any conception of God worthy of the name, God is substance, and thus any religion that represents God for itself will necessarily represent God as substance.

The concept of substance certainly plays an important role in Hegel's thinking, e.g., in his famous claim from the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that "everything turns on grasping and expressing the true not only as substance but equally as subject" (*PG* 22-3/10), but it is also a term that Hegel does not clearly define, and it is one that he uses in multiple ways. God is certainly not substance in the everyday sense of being a material substance. Nor is God for Hegel a substance in the Aristotelian sense or as substratum.[17] In his analysis of substantiality towards the end of the objective logic, Hegel does write of this relationship in the Aristotelian terms of substance and accidents, and when discussing the relations of causality and reciprocal relationship, he speaks of "substances", or substance in the plural (*WL* 2:

182/278-9). Thus for Hegel the culture of magic is religion in the most general possible sense of the term, but in a narrower sense of the term 'religion' it is not. Hegel treats the stage of magic as if it were a pre-religious stage, but part of the development of religion nonetheless.
This allows us to explain the inconsistency between the two quotes. When Hegel claims that all religions represent God as substance, he cannot mean to include the religion of magic as a form of religion, since at the stage of magic God is not grasped in this objective, universal way. In this instance, Hegel has the narrower understanding of religion in mind. He can say that God as substance is the foundation of all religions because he is not including the religion of magic in what he considers to be religion. In contrast, when Hegel claims that God is substance in all *higher* religions, he has the broader understanding of religion in mind and is implicitly identifying the religion of magic as a lower form of religion.

[17] Stephen Houlgate in "Why Hegel's Concept" argues against an understanding of Hegel's substance as substratum or as that which underlies the world.

219-40/555-71). Nevertheless, Hegel only speaks of substance in this way in these sections of the logic, whereas in his discussion of God and the truth, Hegel does not use the term 'accident' but refers to the determinations of the absolute as moments. Moreover, Hegel's God cannot be Aristotelian substance because his philosophy denies that there is a plurality of substances, stressing on the contrary that substance is one.[18]

Hegel's God is also not the acosmic form of substance that he associates with Spinoza and the Eleatics.[19] In other words, God is not an immediate unity or absolute identity, an abyss into which all differentiation is thrown (*VGP* 4: 111/3: 163).[20] In certain passages Hegel is obviously using 'substance' to refer specifically to the Spinozan absolute. For example, Hegel claims that Spinozism is "the philosophy in which God is determined only as *substance*, and not as subject and spirit" (*EL* 20/8).[21] But when Hegel claims that God is the one absolute substance and states that this is particularly the case in the Christian religion, he cannot have Spinozistic substance in mind, since God for Hegel is necessarily concrete or determined within itself. Substance for Hegel must mean something else.

It makes most sense to interpret Hegel's claim that God is substance by understanding the term 'substance' in a general way: substance is that which is independent or that which does not require another for it to be. We have seen this already in the passage quoted above, where God as substance is described as that

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[18] See chapter 2, note 23.
[19] Hegel examines this particular concept of substance in the section on the absolute in *WL* 2: 187-200/530-40.
[20] In the following passages Hegel refers to Spinoza's philosophy as a form of acosmism: VR_{27} 1: 274/377, 322/432; *EL* §§50R, 151A; *VGP* 4: 111/3: 162.
[21] For other examples of where Hegel uses the term 'substance' in this way, see *WL* 2: 249/580; VR_{27} 2: 561/670; VR_{31} 1: 354/465; *NHS* 432.

which "subsists in and for itself, not through another" (*VBG* 498/142). It is also the meaning that Hegel attributes to substance in the following passage:

> God in his universality, this universal in which there is no limitation, finitude, or particularity, is the absolute subsistence and is so alone. Whatever subsists has its root and subsistence only in this One. If we grasp this initial content in this way, we can express it thus: "God is the absolute substance, the only true actuality." All else that is actual is not actual on its own account, has no subsistence on its own account; the uniquely absolute actuality is God alone. Thus God is the absolute substance. (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 268-9/369)[22]

We find further evidence that this is the correct interpretation in a discussion of Descartes' concept of substance. With Descartes' definition, as with Spinoza's, substance is "an object [*Gegenstand*] that requires no other thing [*Etwas*] for its existence" (*VGP* 4: 98/3: 145). Although Hegel would normally express this definition differently, one can say, according to Hegel, that it is the "genuine definition of substance" (*VGP* 4: 98/3: 145). For Hegel to be substance is to not require an other in order to be.[23]

For Hegel, substance is necessarily the infinite. This proposition follows from two other propositions: (a) the infinite is necessarily substance, and (b) only the infinite is substance. Proposition (b) is true because, as we will see below in more detail, the finite by its very nature cannot be substance.[24] The truth of (a) for Hegel follows logically from the concepts of substance and the infinite. Substance is by definition that which is independent, and the infinite for Hegel is also independent or absolute (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 520/628). We have already been introduced to Hegel's concept of

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[22] See also *BS* 347, where Hegel writes: "it expresses what all Christian theology expresses, that God is the absolutely independent essence, absolute substance."

[23] Hegel goes on to argue that there cannot be many substances, since any such substance is necessarily finite and thus stands in need of an other if it is to have being (*VGP* 4: 98-9/3: 145-6). Thus, strictly speaking, Descartes is mistaken to refer to the world in terms of a plurality of substances, since such things cannot be substances in the genuine sense of the term.

[24] See p. 69 below.

the infinite in my previous chapter, and, as we have seen, the genuine infinite for Hegel cannot be radically opposed to the finite. For if the infinite is opposed by a finite that is radically other, then the infinite has a limit in this other and hence is no longer infinite. The infinite for Hegel is ultimately the whole or the totality, since it is only the whole that does not have an other outside it and hence is not limited by an other. However, the infinite whole is not static; it is the unity of the finite and the infinite as a process or as becoming (*WL* 1: 164/148). The paradigm example of the infinite for Hegel is the 'I' or the structure of consciousness.[25] On the one hand, consciousness involves two distinct sides: the subject knowing the object and the object that is known. As this relationship of difference, the subject is opposed to its object or is other than its object, and as such the object constitutes the limit of the subject. In this relationship of difference, the knowing subject is finite, and, to this extent, is not substance. On the other hand, the relationship between subject and object in consciousness is also one of identity, since the object falls within consciousness, and in so far as the object is a moment of consciousness, consciousness is the whole or is infinite, not as pure identity but as identity-in-difference. Consciousness is the infinite or the whole not because it has no other, but because it has an other that it then affirms as only itself. To the extent that it is identical with its other or overreaches it, the infinite does not have an other that is truly other, and if it does not have such an other, it cannot be dependent on an other

[25] As self-related negation, the infinite is being-for-self (*WL* 1: 166/150), and for Hegel the primary example of being-for-self is consciousness or the 'I' (*WL* 1: 175/158; *EL* §96A). In the following passages, Hegel confirms that the 'I' as thinking is infinite: VR_{21} 1: 120/212; *VBG* 479/125; *EL* §28A; *VGP* 4: 161/ 3: 235.

for its being. To this extent then, the infinite is necessarily independent or absolute; it is necessarily substance.

Not only is substance necessarily the infinite, but it is also necessarily true for Hegel that there is only *one* substance. This follows from the claims that (a) the finite cannot be substance and (b) that there can only be one infinite. To prove that claim (b) is true, we need only consider the reverse scenario. If there were more than one infinite, then relative to each infinite there would be at least one infinite that was other to it. But if this were the case, then each infinite would be limited by an other and would be finite. Since only the infinite is substance and since there is only one infinite, it follows that substance is necessarily one.

When Hegel claims that God is substance in all religions, he means simply that God is self-standing in these religions or does not require an other in order to have being. Moreover, religion in general grasps the logical implications of the concept of God, i.e., it grasps that God as substance is one. In all higher religions, God is "the *one* and absolute substance" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 471/575). However, the claim that God is substance is merely the starting point in an account of God's nature, since one has still not yet specified the particular form of substance that God assumes. In other words, there are various ways in which God as substance can be grasped conceptually. As independent being, God can be the abstract universal that Hegel attributes to Spinoza, or God can also be the concrete universal that posits an other and that returns to itself in this other. In the relevant sense of the term 'substance', the claim that God is substance merely specifies one facet of God's being and is not yet a full description of what God is.

This second truth common to all stages of religion is closely connected with the third such truth, the truth of idealism. Idealism is the view according to which the finite is ideal (*ideell*) (*WL* 1: 172/154). Hegel defines the ideal as "the finite as it is in the true infinite – as a determination, a content, which is distinct but is not an *independent*, *self-subsistent* being, but only a *moment*" (*WL* 1: 165/149-50). Hegel also defines idealism by saying that it "consists in nothing else than the realization that the finite is not truly that which has being" (*WL* 1: 172/154, trans. modified). The truth of idealism is "the most important proposition of philosophy" (*EL* §95R) and, as with the second basic truth, it is accepted by all forms of philosophy and religion.

> Every philosophy is essentially an idealism or at least has idealism for its principle, and the question then is only how far this principle is actually carried out. This is as true of philosophy as of religion; for religion equally does not recognize finitude as that which truly has being, as something ultimate and absolute or as something underived, uncreated, eternal. (*WL* 1: 172/154-5, trans. modified)[26]

This idealism that is accepted by all religions should not be confused with the subjective idealism that Hegel associates primarily with the philosophies of Kant and Fichte. Subjective idealism takes its start from the view that external being is *for* the 'I', and is thus sublated or ideal in the 'I' (*WL* 1: 173/155). Hegel himself accepts that this is true, but from this view subjective idealism draws a false conclusion. According to subjective idealism, the things of the world do not have being in themselves and are only appearances for me; they do not really exist but are created by me (*VGP* 3: 19/2: 193). Or, as Wartenberg puts it, subjective idealism claims that something is ideal because "it is dependent for its existence upon the minds of

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[26] See *EL* §45A and *VR*$_{24}$ 2: 159/254 for further proof that all forms of religion accept idealism. At *EL* §95R, Hegel confirms that "every genuine philosophy is *Idealism*". When Hegel claims that the truth

conscious beings".[27] Hegel thinks that subjective idealism of this sort runs counter to common sense and should be rejected (*EL* §45A). As Stace writes:

> But, of course, it is of fundamental importance to understand that when idealism says that the ultimate reality is thought, it does not mean thought in the common sense of subjective thought, psychic processes going on in an individual mind. It does not assert that the universe is dependent on the operations of human minds, or even on the operations of a divine mind in popular theistic sense. Idealism is perfectly consistent with the view that there was a time when no minds, human or divine, existed, when there was nothing but masses of incandescent vapour with no trace of life anywhere.[28]

Nor does the idealism common to all forms religion claim that the finite does not exist, in the sense that our experience of the finite is some form of illusion. Hegel may give the impression that this is the case when he states, as he does in the quote above,[29] that for idealism the finite is "not truly that which has being". Hegel reinforces this impression elsewhere when he claims, for example, that the finite "is not" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 316/424) or has no "genuine being [*wahrhaftes Sein*]" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 315/422, 322/431). However, we have seen already in a previous quote how Hegel interprets the claim that the finite lacks being: it does not truly have being because it is not "something ultimate and absolute" or "something underived, uncreated, eternal" (*WL* 1: 172/155). Thus, when Hegel claims that the finite is not genuine being, he is not claiming in a one-sided way that the finite *is not*. He is not saying that we think that there is a finite world but in fact there is none. Rather, the evidence suggests that this expression needs to be understood in an unconventional way. That which lacks being for Hegel is that which does not have being *independently of an other*: it is that which

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of idealism belongs to religion in general, he is once again excluding the religion of magic from this generalization.

[27] Wartenberg, "Hegel's Idealism", 104.

[28] Stace, *Philosophy of Hegel*, 28. See also Wartenberg, "Hegel's Idealism", 105.

[29] See p. 66 of this chapter.

is not substance.[30] In short, the ideal for Hegel is the opposite of the substantial. The second basic truth of religion claims that God and only God is substance, while the third truth merely claims what is implied by the second: that the finite is not substance.

Just as the infinite is by nature substance, so too is the finite necessarily non-substantial or ideal. This consequence follows logically from the concept of the finite. Like 'something', a form of determinate being that appears earlier in the logical dialectic, the finite necessarily has an other. At the stage of the something, the role of the other is not yet explicit, but this role is made explicit in the concept of the finite. The other is what makes the finite what it is, since the finite is by its very definition that which has a limit (*WL* 1: 139/129), and the other of the finite is what provides this limit. The limit has a dual significance for the finite, since it is both the end of the finite – that where the finite no longer is – and that which effectively defines the finite or allows it to be what it is. In the latter case, the otherness of the limit is the finite's own moment (*EL* §92). The point of this analysis of the finite is simply to show that the finite requires an other in order to be itself. Because the finite is dependent on its other for its being, by its very nature it cannot be substance; the finite must be ideal.

Hegel's concepts of the infinite and the finite, of substance and the ideal, provide the basis for an ontological distinction in Hegel's system between two levels

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[30] The following quote lends support to my view that when Hegel claims that something has being or *is*, he uses this expression at times in a peculiar way. Hegel writes that "the finite *is not*, i.e., is not the truth, but is merely a transition and an emergence to something higher" (*EG* §386R). Since the true for Hegel is the whole and is that which is substance or has independent being, Hegel's claim here implies that the finite *is* not in so far as it lacks *independent* being or is not substance.

or orders of being.[31] On the one hand, there is the absolute or independent being of God or the whole, and on the other hand there is the dependent being of the finite. However, although this distinction has these ontological consequences for Hegel's philosophy, one must not lose sight of the fact that this distinction is grounded in logic. When Hegel claims that the finite necessarily depends for its being on an other and that it ultimately has its being in the infinite, this dependence is not some form of causal dependence in a traditional metaphysical sense. In other words, his theory of the finite and the infinite does not entail that all finite things have being because they are created in a physical or quasi-physical way, and that the starting point of this creation process is ultimately to be found in absolute substance. Nor does Hegel's view entail that the infinite is more real than the finite in the way, for example, that an actual tree is more real than the image of a tree. For Hegel the dependence of the finite and the independence of the infinite are *logical*.[32] When Hegel claims that the finite is dependent for its being on an other, he means that we cannot even *think* of something finite without thinking its other. Likewise, the infinite is independent for Hegel in so far as it is that which can be thought without also having to think of an other that is ultimately other to it.

If indeed it is the case, as Hegel claims, that all religions know God as substance and the finite as ideal, then one would expect to see this reflected in Hegel's analysis of the determinate religions. Since this grasp of the truth is supposed to be common to all religions, it should be found already in religion's most basic forms. When we consider the nature religions carefully, we see that these truths are present

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[31] See chapter 1, p. 14.
[32] See Stace, *Philosophy of Hegel*, 29-30.

in religion's initial stages. The first stage of true determinate religion in 1827 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is not the religion of magic but the religions of Buddhism and Lamaism.[33] Hegel associates these religions with the doctrine of substance at the very outset of his discussion (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 458-9/562-3), and it is clear from his treatment of this religious stage that the doctrine of substance is the foundational belief of these religions, a view that prompts Hegel to refer to this stage of religion as the standpoint of substantiality or pantheism (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 468-9/572). This standpoint involves a grasp of both the truths of substance and idealism, which is clear from Hegel's description of the standpoint as "this Oriental knowing, consciousness, or thinking of this possible unity, of the absolute substance and its internal efficacy, an efficacy in which everything particular or singular is only something transitory or ephemeral, and not genuine independence" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 469/572). In his discussion of Buddhism and Lamaism, Hegel goes on to affirm that substance is the basic determination of our knowledge of God (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 469/573), and that God remains substance in subsequent forms of religion (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 471/575).

A recognition that the finite is ideal plays a very important role in religion in two respects, the first theoretical and the second practical. First, it is only by accepting the ideality of the finite that humans are able to know God. The knowledge of God attained by humans is not immediate; it involves a movement or a passing-over to God, an elevation to God (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 308/414). This process or passing-over in which humans come to know God's being is a mediation that occurs in thinking and that Hegel associates with the traditional proofs of God's existence. We have seen already that the proofs of God's existence in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of*

[33] See p. 61, note 16 of this chapter.

Religion are not proofs in the standard sense but describe precisely this process of inference implicitly at work in thinking when humans arrive at knowledge of God.[34] For Hegel this process of inference comes in two forms: it either begins with being and leads to God, or it begins with God and leads to being (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 314/421).[35] The latter form of transition to God is expressed by the ontological proof of God's existence and is limited to Christianity or religion in its most developed form. It is the former pattern of inference that is at work in the whole spectrum of religions, a pattern of inference associated with both the cosmological and teleological proofs. In its most basic form this process of inference leads from the existence of the finite world to the being of the infinite or God.

> Humanity rises from the finite to the infinite, rises above the singular and raises itself to the universal, to being-in-and-for-itself. Thus religion consists in this, that human beings have before them in their consciousness the nothingness of the finite, are aware of their dependence, and seek the ground of this nothingness, of this dependence – in a word, that they find no peace of mind until they set up the infinite before themselves. (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 159/254)[36]

When faced with the finite world, humans begin their elevation to God in religion by recognizing that the finite by its very nature is dependent on an other, and they see that the other that is the ground of the finite is the infinite. It is in this way that humans come to know God in religion. Although this process of reasoning in the elevation to God is brought about unconsciously (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 316/423), it is nevertheless sound, and it is the job of philosophy to show that it is sound.

In this inference from the finite to the infinite, an acceptance of the truth of idealism is indispensable for two reasons. First, it is only by recognizing that the

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[34] See chapter 1, pp. 30-1.
[35] See also *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 308-9/414-5.
[36] See also *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 312-3/419-20, 314/421-2.

finite is ideal or dependent that humans are led to seek an infinite ground of the finite. Without this recognition there would be no knowledge of God. Second, by taking account of the truth of idealism, this process of inference is able to avoid the problem that Hegel attributes to the cosmological and teleological proofs as they are traditionally grasped by the understanding. The problem with these proofs is that they deduce the infinite from the finite, and in so doing they treat the finite as if it had true being or as if it were not ideal. As a result, these proofs continue to assume that the finite has its own being opposite the infinite and they thereby not only reduce the infinite to a finite, but also make God's being dependent upon the being of the finite (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 312/419). In the version of the proof or the process of inference that governs religious thinking, the finite as ideal does not remain as an independent other opposite the finite. The problem faced by the proof of the understanding is solved, since in religion it is recognized that the finite is not absolute but is dependent for its being on the infinite. Hegel's claim here about religious thinking is striking: while the traditional proofs are governed by the thinking of the understanding, unconscious reflective processes in religion are speculative. Hegel is suggesting that the process of inference implicit in the most basic of religions is more sophisticated than the formal inferences of certain forms of theology.

Second, a recognition of the truth of idealism has an important role to play in religious practice, because an idealistic standpoint is a presupposition of the cultus.[37] Idealism has implications not just for the way we understand the nature of finite objects around us, but it also has consequences for our own self-understanding. Each of us is a natural, particular human being, a single finite person that is one being in a

world of many and that has her own needs and desires distinct from those of other humans. To recognize the truth of idealism is to acknowledge that as finite, particular human beings we are not independent or absolute; it is to accept that we too must have our ground in the infinite or in God. The religious cultus is the movement of the individual out of her separation from God into a relation of identity with God (*VR*$_{21}$ 2: 16/110), a movement in which she rises above her natural existence and identifies herself with the universal. The beliefs associated with idealism play a vital role in religious cultus because if we do not recognize our relative, dependent nature as finite particulars, we will not see the need to, or even the possibility of, seeking the ground of our being in the infinite. By being aware that we as finite creatures do not have true being, we are drawn to that which has true being.

2E. The development of the truth in the determinate religions

In the previous section I discussed the common truths that are grasped by all religions, but these basic truths cannot be the whole of the truth that is proper to religion. Within the development of the determinate religions, different religions grasp the truth differently: the higher the form of religion, the more adequate or complete is its grasp of the truth. One of Hegel's main objectives in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is to show how knowledge of the truth develops gradually, beginning with religion's earliest stages and ending with the consummate religion in which humans grasp the truth in its entirety.

[37] See my discussion of the cultus in chapter 3, pp. 91-101.

Outlining this development as it appears in the lectures on religion will be my task in the last portion of this chapter.[38] We have seen that all genuine forms of religion are acquainted with the absolute or substance, i.e., that which does not require an other in order to be. What develops in Hegel's account of the determinate religions is how each religion conceives of this absolute. In these religions we see a gradual development from a grasp of the absolute in natural terms to one that identifies the absolute as the spiritual or as what is properly human.

The first stages of the determinate religions are nature religions for Hegel because they represent the divine to themselves in a natural mode (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 429/531). Here Hegel has a particular sense of the term 'natural' in mind. As mentioned earlier,[39] there is a sense in which the divine for Hegel is never what is purely natural, since even in the religion of magic, the divine is always associated, at some level at least, with the human or the spiritual. When Hegel refers to a religion as natural, he is not necessarily claiming that it represents God or the spiritual to itself in the form of animals or forces of nature, since there is another way in which the expression of the divine can be natural. In these religions God is natural, because God is spirituality in its sheer particularity: the absolute power is a specific human or group of humans

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[38] Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion*, 263-84; and Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 206-7, 217-8, make two important claims about Hegel's various attempts to present the determinate religions as part of a single development. First, they argue that Hegel does not attempt to make the development of the determinate religions conform to a pre-determined logical schema. Rather, Hegel pays close attention to the specific details of each religion and is continually expanding and revising his account of the determinate religions in response to new information. Second, Jaeschke and Hodgson argue that Hegel does not succeed in presenting us with an account of the development of religion that is convincing, and that the attempt to provide a unified account of this development should be abandoned in favour of what they refer to as a geography of religions. I agree with both of these claims. However, whether he was successful or not, Hegel did nevertheless attempt to produce a unified history of religion or a history of religion that is guided by a particular principle or goal. My objective is to show what this principle is for Hegel in *VR*$_{27}$. Doing so is important for my investigation because if we understand the principle guiding religion's development, then we also better understand what Hegel thinks religion is all about and what Hegel thinks religious knowledge involves.

(*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 417/519, 429/531). As the determinate religions advance, the form of the absolute as the natural or as a particular is replaced gradually by representations that have the form of the universal and as such are progressively more appropriate to the spiritual.

In the first three stages of the determinate religions (Buddhism, Hinduism and Persian religion), there are two major developments in which religion shifts away from a grasp of the absolute as the natural and towards a grasp of it as the spiritual. First, we see the transition from a conception of God or substance as indeterminate to a conception of this substance as subject. When Hegel describes the absolute in this context as subject, he is once again using his terminology in an unconventional way. Here the term 'subject' for Hegel does not refer to what we normally associate with the term, i.e., a particular existing consciousness. Subjectivity for Hegel is rather the true form of substance (*PR* §152); it is the shape or structure that belongs to spirit or to the absolute when it is fully known. Subjectivity as "self-relating negativity" (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 262/362) involves two sides: the positing of itself as otherness and the return to itself in this otherness.

> Subjectivity in general is abstract identity with self, the being-within-self that differentiates itself, the process of this differentiation, and at the same time what negates the self-differentiation and maintains itself in what it has thus distinguished. (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 262/361-2)[40]

Subjectivity is a form that belongs to particular existing subjects or conscious individuals, but it is not attributed to them exclusively. As we will see in our discussion of Persian religion, it is a form that Hegel also attributes to conceptual objects like the idea of the good.

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[39] See pp. 60-1 of this chapter.

As mentioned earlier,[41] Buddhism is the first genuine religion, at least in part because it grasps the divine as substance. In the next stage of determinate religion, the Hindu conception of substance improves upon the Buddhist conception but still falls short of true subjectivity. In Buddhism substance is represented by nirvana, a state in which a person's thinking processes cease and her mind becomes still. As nirvana, substance is completely indeterminate (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 464/568); it is pure universality, pure nothingness or emptiness (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 462/566). The Hindu representation of substance is a halfway point between the indeterminate substance of Buddhism and the representation of substance as subject in Persian religion. This representation of substance is what one might call a pseudo-form of subjectivity. Initially Hindu substance appears to involve the positing of self as other and the return of other into self that are characteristic of true subjectivity. This substance is a positing of self as other in so far as it begins as the empty void but then differentiates itself as the external world (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 476-7/581), and it is a return of the other into self in so far as the external world or the particular ultimately returns into this substance (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 477/581). However, the Hindu representation of substance ultimately falls short of true subjectivity because its differentiation is not an act of *self*-positing. (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 478/583, 498-9/604, 504/610), i.e., substance is not identical with that which it posits as external to it. Substance remains indeterminate and the world is external to it or independent from it (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 478/583). Yet, committing what Hegel refers to as a 'shocking inconsistency" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 481/585), the Hindu representation of substance also maintains that the particular simply vanishes in substance. Although the

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[40] See also *VR*$_{27}$ 2: 515/622, 518/625; and *PS* 23/10.
[41] See p. 71 of this chapter.

particular is supposed to be independent, it is now claimed that it has no being at all. Thus, in Hinduism we see a full return to the indeterminacy or emptiness of substance. The Hindu representation of substance improves upon the Buddhist version by acknowledging that substance involves change or movement, but Hindu substance is ultimately still just a pure identity rather than the identity-in-difference that is characteristic of genuine subjectivity.

The Persian religion is the first determinate religion that represents substance as subject (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 505/610, 506/611). In the Persian religion, God is the good. At this still relatively early stage of development, the good is not represented in a form that is explicitly spiritual, but appears in a natural mode as light (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 504/610). As in the Hindu religion, the God of Persian religion is abstract substance that determines itself as other, since God as the good manifests itself as the world in its manifold existence (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 505-6/611). However, unlike Indian religion, the product of substance in the Persian religion is not ultimately external to substance (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 504-5/610). The world is the other of the good that is also identical with the good, since the finite world that proceeds from the good is itself good and in this way belongs "to the realm of the good" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 506/612). "Because of it, the stones, animals, and human beings are altogether good; the good is a present substance in them" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 506/612). Thus, in determining itself as the world, substance is *self*-determination (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 505/610), and as such it is subject: it is the positing of itself as other that remains identical with itself in this other.

There is a second way in which the Persian religion brings us away from a representation of the absolute as natural and closer to a representation of it as

spiritual. According to Hegel, Buddhism and Hinduism are nature religions because they grasp substance not just as a substance for thought, but as a sensible presence that exists in particular human beings (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 461/564). In other words, Hegel claims that in these religions particular human beings can become God. In the Buddhist cultus, the devout seek to achieve the indeterminate state of nirvana that they represent as substance. As such, their cultus is "the uniting of oneself with this nothing, divesting oneself of all consciousness, of all passions." (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 465/568). When the Buddhist achieves Nirvana, he becomes substance; he becomes identical with God as a particular (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 462/566, 464/567, 465/568). In Hegel's interpretation of Buddhism, particular individuals are literally identified as divine beings. The abstract thinking of such holy people "*is* the effective substantiality, is the creating and preserving of the world" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 472/576).

> [T]his essential God is nevertheless known as a specific, immediate human being, as Fo, Buddha, or Dalai Lama. This may appear to us as the most repugnant, shocking, and unbelievable tenet, that a human being with all his deficiencies could be regarded by other human beings as God, as the one who eternally creates, preserves, and produces the world. A Dalai Lama has this image of himself and is revered as such by others. (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 467/570)

Hegel maintains that similar views are to be found in Hinduism. In this religion particular humans become God by achieving a state of pure abstraction, one which is "that most complete emptying out of the human, the renunciation in which the Hindus relinquish all consciousness and willing, all passions and needs (nirvana)" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 490/595). In devotion the Hindu can become Brahman or substance itself (*VR*$_{27}$ 2:

491/595, 491/596), and as Brahman he "is then perfect and has absolute power over the whole of nature, over all deities" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 492/597).[42]

In the Persian religion substance is no longer identical with the subjectivity of particular humans but is truly objective for the first time (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 501/606-7). In this way, Persian religion moves beyond nature religion, occupying a place in the transition to higher religions of spirit like Greek religion and Judaism. The Persians do associate particular humans with substance, in so far as substance for them is the good and, like all finite things, humans share in the good. However, for the Persians a particular human is not God or is not the good itself. Ormuzd, the god of the good or the god of light, is the abstract totality that is necessarily other than, or more than, specific humans. Thus, in the Persian religion we see the full break between subjectivity and objectivity (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 501/607), a break that was not yet complete in Buddhism and Hinduism.

> But now it is no longer the case that the human being is simply God, and God simply the human being, that God is only in an empirically human mode; instead God is truly and intrinsically objective, God is essentially object and is altogether in opposition to human beings. (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 502/608)

The development from Buddhism and Hinduism to Persian religion seems to contradict another claim that I have made. I have stated that the determinate religions for Hegel progress in so far as they increasingly grasp God as the spiritual or as what is properly human. Yet in the progression from Buddhism and Hinduism to Persian religion we move from an identification of the divine with particular humans to an

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[42] When Hegel claims that Buddhists and Hindus see particular humans as God, he is of course distorting these religions and presenting them in a way that is inaccurate. He does the same in his presentation of Judaism. However, in this last section of the chapter we wish simply to determine how Hegel characterizes the development of these religions and not whether Hegel presents the various determinate religions in a way that is correct and fair.

identification of the divine with what is in opposition to human beings. This appears to be a shift away from religion in which the divine is grasped as the spiritual. Nevertheless, in spite of initial appearances, Persian religion for Hegel does lead us closer to a conception of God as what is truly spiritual. Spiritual or human activity in its highest form is necessarily universal, and as the good, the Persian God is clearly identified with the universal for the first time. In the later stages of determinate religion, universal substance will be identified more and more with universal human activity, i.e., human thinking. However, before this can happen, humans must first overcome any tendency to view the divine as human beings in their particularity, i.e. as specific humans. This is what occurs in the Persian religion.

The second stage of transition from natural to spiritual religion occurs in the religion of Egypt. In his account of Egyptian religion, Hegel focuses primarily upon the story of the god Osiris, who like the Persian god of the good, is opposed by a god of evil. In Egyptian mythology, Osiris dies but then returns to life, not as a natural being but as the ruler of the dead, overcoming in the process the god of evil Typhon (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 519-20/626-7).

Egyptian religion represents substance more adequately than previous religions do in at least two ways. First, in Egyptian religion the divine is known explicitly as the spiritual and any representations of the spiritual as natural are known explicitly by the Egyptians as representations (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 519/626). In the case of the previous determinate religions, we as philosophers recognize that they are using the natural to represent the spiritual. For example, we see that for Buddhists or Hindus the spiritual is known as particular humans, and that for the Persians the spiritual is

associated with light. However, in these cases, the practitioners themselves of these religions do not grasp their own representations as representations. They do not recognize that the natural is for them simply a way of expressing the spiritual.[43] In contrast, the Egyptians do recognize that this is the case (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 519/626). For them Osiris is a spiritual power that is other than the natural and that is represented by the natural (e.g. the cycles of the sun or the Nile) (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 524/631). Osiris is not the sun or the Nile themselves, but the spiritual that lies behind the natural and that is expressed symbolically by it. Thus, the Egyptians are the first to realize fully for themselves that God is not the natural but the spiritual.

Second, Egyptian religion progresses beyond previous religions because it has a more nuanced grasp of what it means for substance to be subject. The Persians were the first to represent substance as subject, but their representation is inadequate because it is dualistic. Ormazd, the god of good, is opposed by evil and this evil principle is strictly opposed to the good or lies outside of it (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 507/612-3). In Egyptian religion negation falls within substance. For Hegel, the Egyptians represent this truth to themselves when they claim that Osiris dies and then overcomes death to become ruler of the underworld. In this story death is the negative that is ultimately assimilated by the divine. According to Hegel, one must recognize explicitly that substance overcomes the negative if one is to have a complete grasp of substance as subject.

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[43] The Persians see substance as the good, which is spiritual, but also associate the good with the natural as light. Why can we not claim that the Persians also explicitly use the natural to represent the spiritual, just as the Egyptians do? The essential difference here between Persian and Egyptian religion is the following. As the god of the underworld, Osiris for the Egyptians explicitly belongs to the realm of the non-natural, and thus any expression of Osiris using the natural is necessarily for them a form of representation or symbolism. In contrast, it seems that for Hegel the Persians have not yet fully

> Thus it is only now that for the first time we have the dying of God as internal to God himself, the determination that the negation is immanent in God's essence; and it is essentially through this that this God is verily characterized as subject. This is what the subject is – bringing itself forth by giving to itself inwardly this otherness, and returning to itself through the negation of itself. (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 518/625)

Although the Egyptians are aware that substance is spiritual, their religion falls just short of the stage of spiritual religion. Egyptian religion is deficient in this regard because it is only able to convey the spiritual symbolically. It seeks a clear expression of the spiritual in the form of the natural, but uses natural forms that are not fully suited to the task. The religion of Egypt is "the impulsion toward fine art" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 527/634), in so far as it wants to communicate the divine in a way that is beautiful, but it is ultimately only a groping towards the spiritual or a craving for the beautiful (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 530/637), because it fails to find an appropriate natural expression for the spiritual. This means specifically that, unlike Greek art, Egyptian art does not express the spiritual by means of the human form. Instead of beauty, Egyptian art gives us the enigma: "the meaning is something inner that impels itself to make itself outwardly visible; but it has not yet arrived at the consummation of its portrayal in externality" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 531/638). In Egyptian art the spiritual is not yet clearly expressed but is only signified (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 531/638). The religion of Egypt has taken us to the threshold of spiritual religion, but is not yet spiritual religion itself.

With the Greeks we reach the stage of spiritual religion for the first time. The final three determinate religions (Greek religion, Judaism and Roman religion) all explicitly recognize that substance is essentially spiritual. In these religions, "God who is spirit is known as spirit" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 561/669). The spiritual form assumed by

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separated for themselves the good from light, or the spiritual from the natural. The good is not yet

substance varies from religion to religion. In Greek religion, substance is the ethical, for the Jews it is pure thinking and for the Romans it is purposiveness. Substance is spiritual in each of these religions because in each case it is human activity in its universality: substance is identified as thinking and its content.

The Greeks were able to express clearly for themselves the truth that the Egyptians struggled to represent, namely that the substantial is the human.

> In Greek religion the riddle is solved; according to one very significant and admirable myth the Sphinx is slain by a Greek and the riddle is resolved in this way: the content is the human being, the free, self-knowing spirit. (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 532/639)

The content of Greek religion is not the human being in its particularity, since the Greeks do not identify particular humans as God. Rather, substance for the Greeks is human as the concretely rational or as ethical life: the norms that regulate and make possible a life of freedom (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 535/643). For the Greeks substance consists of powers that are "the ethical aspect that is proper to humanity, the rational aspect of freedom, the ethical vocations of human beings, their extant and valid rights" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 554-5/662). Like the Egyptians, the Greeks represent the spiritual by means of the natural, but, unlike the Egyptians, the Greeks employ for this purpose the human figure, the only natural form that allows the spiritual to be represented clearly (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 551-2/659, 553/661; *VPK* 132, 157). Thus, along with earlier determinate religions, the Greeks use natural forms to express the spiritual, but in a way in which the natural is fully mastered. For the Greeks the natural only has significance as an instrument or as a moment of the spiritual (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 533/641, 534/642). It does not impede an expression of the spiritual but allows the spiritual to reveal itself clearly. In the

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recognized by them as what is fundamentally non-natural.

ethical aspect and in the human figure that they use to convey this aspect artistically, the Greeks see only themselves and are at home with themselves; "this substantial element that is revered as God is at the same time the proper essentiality of the human being" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 555/662).

The Jewish representation of substance advances beyond that of the Greeks by dispensing with the natural altogether. Although Greek religion achieves a reconciliation of the natural and the spiritual, it is still, in so far as it employs the natural, "afflicted with this externality" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 534/642), whereas in the Jewish religion, the divine is "raised up beyond naturalness and finitude, and is no longer afflicted with and clouded by the external" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 534/642).[44] For the Jews, God or substance is grasped as pure thought or as thought that is free from the sensible.

> God here subsists without shape – he subsists not for sensible representation but only for thought. The inwardly infinite, pure subjectivity is the subjectivity that is essentially thinking. As thinking it subsists only for thinking, and therefore subsists in its [activity of] judgment. Thinking is the essential soil for this object. (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 563/671)

In Greek religion the divine is fragmented into a number of particular gods, but as thought the God of the Jews is one (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 562/670).

The Jewish representation of substance is imperfect in two ways. It is limited, first, because in Judaism God's purposiveness only operates within the Jewish people and not within the people of the world as a whole. In one sense, God's purpose in Judaism is unlimited, since, as Hegel acknowledges, the Jews viewed certain religions norms as universally binding (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 571/679). For example, the commandment that one ought not to kill is for the Jews a moral law that ought to be followed not only by Jews but by all humans. However, for Hegel the Jews have a limited representation

of God's purposiveness because they see God at work only in their own people (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 575-8/683-6).

> All peoples are called upon to recognize him and glorify his name [Ps. 117: 1-2], but the actual work that is really brought about is a limited one – just this people, in its conditioned existence, its inner, outer, political, and ethical determinacy. God operates within one single family. (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 335/436)

This limitation is overcome by Roman religion. In one sense, the Romans have a less developed conception of purposiveness than the Jews, since unlike the Jews they view as divine merely the particular finite purposes of humans and not the purpose demanded by universal reason. But Roman religion improves upon Judaism in so far as God's purpose is seen to be at work not only within a particular people but in the world as a whole. The highest overriding purpose in Roman religion is the promotion of the Roman state and the domination of the world (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 581/689, 584/692), a purpose that is embodied in the ruling god Jupiter Capitolinus (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 584/692). Unlike the God of the Jews, Jupiter Capitolinus in his activity includes all peoples, since his goal is to bring all nations and all gods within his dominion.

The Jewish concept of substance is also limited for Hegel because for the Jews God's wisdom or God's purposiveness is abstract (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 574-5/683).[45] When Hegel claims that this purposiveness is abstract, he does not mean that the God of the Jews completely lacks purpose or that this purpose is undefined. On the contrary, this God has a theoretical purpose in so far as the whole world should proclaim God's glory, and a practical objective in so far as God requires that humans should follow his law (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 571/679). Hegel refers to God's purpose as abstract because this purpose is "something immediate in its determinate being or existence" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 578/686). As

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[44] See also *VR*$_{27}$ 2: 561/669.

thinking, God is "self-determining" or "determinative" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 563/671), i.e., God particularizes Himself in his commands. But God's norms are not yet posited as internal to God (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 563/672). "Instead what is assumed is that God decrees, and what is posited or determined by God subsists at once in the form of an unmediated other" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 563/672). This means that God's commands in Judaism are represented as being merely contingent, or to use a term that Hegel associates with Judaism in his earlier writings, God's commands are abstract because they are positive. At the stage of Jewish religion, divine norms do not yet follow necessarily from God and are not yet an essential part of God, a fact that is reflected in the Jewish understanding of God's commands. God's decrees may be rational, but their rationality is not understood or felt by the Jews (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 578/686-7). From their point of view, these commands are external or are to be followed simply because they are Gods' commands. As a result, the norms associated with the divine are for the Jews still alien or other. Although the God of Judaism as pure thought is a reflection of the Jews own essential human nature, this people is not yet fully at home in God's purpose.

This second limitation of the Jewish of substance is eventually overcome not by Roman religion but by Christianity. Like the Jewish God, God for Christians has a universal purpose, but here God's purpose is not abstract. Rather in Christianity substance as spirit remains identical with itself in its determinations. Here purpose is the necessary expression of spirit. This means ultimately that the norms associated with Christianity – the norms of ethical life – are not viewed by Christians as positive commands but are understood and felt by them as their own, and so the Christian

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[45] At *VR*$_{27}$ 2: 563/671, Hegel defines God's wisdom as purposiveness.

identifies with God's law. As spirit, the God of Christianity is substance in its highest form or substance that is fully spiritual. In God the Christian is fully at home, since God is none other than a complete representation of the thinking that is most essentially human.[46]

[46] I discuss Christianity in more detail in chapter 5.

Chapter 3: Religion as cultus

For Hegel knowledge of God or of the truth is a necessary moment of religion, but on its own it is not the whole of religion (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 330/442). In knowledge of God or the theoretical moment of religion, one considers God as an object, but one does not reflect upon oneself and upon the relationship that exists between oneself as subject and God as the absolute object. As Hegel states: "In the theoretical relationship I am immersed in my object and know nothing of myself" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 330/442). Religion in its full sense is what Hegel refers to as cultus. Cultus is not just knowledge of God but is religion in practice or the concrete relationship between God and the human individual. Hegel uses the term 'cultus' to refer to all forms of religion in practice, including, for example, simple devotion, acts of ritual sacrifice, the sacraments, and perhaps less obviously, ethical life as a whole. Knowledge of God is a necessary moment of this relationship between God and human, since how the believer knows or represents God will inevitably determine the way in which she relates to God (*VR*$_{21}$ 1: 99/190, 101-2/193; *VR*$_{24}$ 1: 230/328). However, the cultus is not merely theoretical, since it engages not only the believer's intellect but her will and feelings as well.

In his many formulations of the cultus, there are three characteristics that Hegel states or emphasizes repeatedly. All three are expressed clearly in the following version:

> The cultus in its specific concept is the movement of the individual out of its separation, positing itself in identity with the absolute, giving itself the certainty of unity with the absolute – the feeling of raising itself to the love of the absolute. (*VR*$_{21}$ 2: 16/110)

First, cultus for Hegel involves a state in which the particular human is in unity with God or is identical with God. This unity is expressed in various ways as a union with God (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 331-2/443; *VR*$_{31}$ 1: 358/469; *VGP* 1: 64), with the absolute (*VR*$_{21}$ 1: 98-9/190), with the divine (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 378/478; *VPW* 85) or with the subject's own essence (*VR*$_{21}$ 1: 102/193), but in all versions Hegel's meaning is the same. Second, this identity between human and God is not an immediate one, but requires that a state of separation between human and God be overcome (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 236/335; *VR*$_{24}$ 2: 378/478; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 91/183; *VGP* 1: 64; *EG* §555). Finally, the state of unity that is brought about in the cultus is one in which the feelings of the believer are engaged. "Feeling – the gratification that I am with God in his grace and that God's spirit is alive within me, the consciousness of my union and reconciliation with God – this is the innermost feature of the cultus" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 333/445).

When Hegel describes the cultus as the unity of the human with God, this may give the impression that the cultus involves some sort of direct encounter with a divine being, but I will argue against this view. According to this interpretation, God is the being that is the ground of our being as finite individuals, and in the cultus we become aware of ourselves as being one with this infinite substance or ground. This sense of unity with God is brought about through the various forms of religious practice, devotion and ceremony that Hegel associates with the cultus. On this view, the feeling that results from the cultus is the positive feeling that arises from encountering God and experiencing oneself as part of the absolute. This interpretation of the cultus presupposes that God in Hegel's system is a being that exists and that can be known directly in human experience. Earlier I claimed that God

in Hegel's system is not a transcendent being of this sort. If this is the case, then the cultus in Hegel's philosophy of religion cannot involve mystical experience of the type that I have described above. In this chapter I argue that the cultus is, in fact, a form of *self-transcendence*, one in which the participant sets aside her particular will and identifies with, or makes herself like, the universal.

3A. The cultus as self-transcendence

Since the cultus is an activity in which the participant overcomes separation from the absolute and achieves a state of unity with the absolute, it must begin from a state in which the participant is separated from God or is other than God. Moreover, that the participant is other than God is something that she must know for herself, since in the cultus the process of uniting with God is one that the participant is herself aware of.

We have seen that at the stage of pure knowledge of God, the believer is not yet aware of herself, and so does not yet see herself as distinct from God. For Hegel the individual only first sees herself as distinct from God in so far as she is an individual that wills. Although he does not mention Descartes by name, Hegel contrasts his position here with Descartes' view in the fourth meditation that our knowledge as humans is finite but that our wills are infinite. For Descartes human knowledge is finite because it is limited: there is much that we do not know or understand (*M* 57/38). In contrast, Descartes maintains that the will is infinite or perfect (*M* 56/38), since as free agents we are able to will that anything be the case. Obviously we are not able to bring about everything that we will, since our powers as

humans are limited, but this does not stop us from being able to wish at least that our desires be made actual.

Hegel turns Descartes on his head, suggesting that there is a sense in which Descartes' claim about knowledge and the will should be reversed (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 248/348; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 331/442-3). According to Hegel, we, as pure knowers, are unlimited, in so far as we lose ourselves in our content and thus are in immediate unity with the object that we know. In pure knowing, a knowing in which my identity as a particular human with particular desires does not come into play, I am the universal as pure thinking or pure observation. However, it is as a willing subject that the individual first becomes aware of herself as limited and finite. The form of willing that Hegel has in mind here is its most basic form, the willing associated with desire (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 331/442-3).[1] In desire the subject is directed toward an object that is external and thus limits the subject. By acting to appease the desire, I as a subject "have the need to assimilate this object to myself, to sublate my finitude in relation to it, to reinstate my feeling of self" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 331/443). When I have a desire that needs to be satisfied, the satisfaction of the desire is a goal for me, and having this goal presupposes that things are not as they should be. There is a disjunction between what I want and the current state of the world. This state of affairs that is not as it should be confronts my will as an other, offering it resistance, and when I act in pursuit of a particular end, I am striving to sublate this otherness or to overcome the discrepancy between my goal and the world by making the world identical with this goal. In so far as my desire necessarily entails that I am confronted by or opposed to a state of otherness in the

[1] In his presentation of self-consciousness in his philosophy of spirit, Hegel treats desire as the first form of self-consciousness. See *EG* §426.

world, I am necessarily finite or limited. In desire I am aware of this other as other because it is an obstacle for me that I must make an effort to overcome.

Thus, I am only aware of myself as other than God because I am a being with a particular will. More importantly, however, it is my particular will that separates me from God and that creates the need for the return to God that occurs in the cultus. God remains distinct from me as long as I am attached to the desires and needs that I happen to have, or as long as I remain wedded to my identity as the particular person that I happen to be. If unity with God is to be established in the cultus, the particularity of my will is something that must be overcome.

This transcending of one's particular self is expressed by Hegel in a number of ways, e.g., as a stripping away of subjectivity (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 249/349), a surrender of self (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 249/349), or a giving up of the immediate will (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 263/362). I refer to this transcending of one's particular self as the "overcoming of particularity", an unwieldy expression to be sure, but one that is ultimately justified. The self-transcendence that occurs in the cultus is not restricted to what one might refer to as "death to self". The term 'death' here is too strong, since in the Christian cultus the believer's particularity – the specific desires and identity proper to her – are in a sense also preserved and even a necessary element of the cultus. The expression 'overcoming' better accommodates this transcending of self that can occur in the cultus, since it can convey that the believer's particularity is sublated, i.e., surpassed while also being retained. Moreover, in spite of the way that Hegel expresses himself in places, the expression "transcending of *self*" is not sufficiently accurate, since there is a sense in which the believer is only truly herself in the cultus. The cultus is a form

of *self*-fulfillment in so far as the participant actualizes herself as the universal, becoming explicitly the universal subject that she was previously only implicitly. In the cultus it is only the *particular* self that the believer overcomes.

The overcoming of particularity is an essential feature of the cultus in both the 1824 and the 1827 versions of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. In the 1824 version, the goal of the cultus is God or unity with God (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 249/349), and, as Hegel emphasizes several times, the achievement of this goal requires that the believer overcome her particularity.

> Rather [the first step] that has to be accomplished in the cultus is to bring it about that the goal should be actual in me. The cultus is thus practical, in that the purpose is to be realized in me in opposition to me and my particular subjectivity, this subjectivity is the covering that must be stripped away, so that I may be filled by the spirit and this object may be in me as spiritual… The goal, God, is to be attained by me and in me, and that toward which the action (which is my own action) tends is just this surrender of myself, with me no longer clinging possessively to the self as personal property existing on its own account. This [is] the realization [of the cultus], the practical [moment]. (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 249/349)

In his section on the cultus in the 1827 version, Hegel does not discuss overcoming of particularity as explicitly, but it is present in all three forms of the cultus that Hegel outlines. Devotion (*Andacht*), the first form of the cultus, occurs "when the faith becomes vivid, when the subject prays and is occupied with this content not merely in objective fashion but becomes immersed therein" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 333/445). Hegel claims that the subject possesses itself or knows itself in the object of devotion (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 333/445), but she does so as the universal. In so far as the participant is immersed in the object of devotion, she loses herself or forgets herself as a particular; she holds

herself within the truth "in opposition to the consciousness with its former interests" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 334/446).[2]

The second form of the cultus comprises cultus in its external forms and includes both the sacraments and sacrifice (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 333-4/445). These external forms of cultus compliment devotion, since they help to bring about the state in which the participant becomes immersed in the divine content. In sacrifice, the participant "renounces something or negates something in relation to itself" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 334/446). Thus sacrifice involves overcoming of particularity in so far as the subject consciously parts with a physical possession, renouncing her attachment to this possession in order to serve a higher good.[3]

In sacrifice, the renunciation of particularity is piecemeal. The participant does not consciously let go of all of his particular desires and aims, but only parts with certain possessions. The final form of the cultus, the cultus that Hegel associates with Christianity, involves a renunciation of particularity that is thoroughgoing.

> The third and highest form within the cultus is when one lays aside one's own subjectivity – not only practices renunciation in external things such as possessions, but offers one's heart or inmost self to God and senses *remorse* and *repentance* in this inmost self; then one is conscious of one's own immediate natural state (which subsists in the passions and intentions of particularity), so that one dismisses these things, purifies one's heart, and through this purification of one's heart raises oneself up to the realm of the purely spiritual. (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 334/446)

Thus in the highest form of the cultus, the subject achieves unity with God by dismissing her own particularity or by transcending her natural state.

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[2] In the *Miscellaneous Papers* (*MiscP*), Hegel confirms that devotion involves an overcoming of particularity: "But in devotion the subject does not maintain itself in its particularity, but only in its movement within the object and only as this self-moving spirit" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 333/445).

[3] In the *VR*$_{24}$, Hegel confirms that in sacrifice the subject must "surrender and let go its subjectivity" (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 250/350).

If we understand the cultus as a process in which the participant abandons her subjectivity, then we are able to make sense of the cultus as union with a God that is universal reason. In this interpretation of the cultus, union with God essentially involves two sides. The first or the negative side is that in which the subject overcomes her particularity. In so doing, she lets go of her particular will that distinguishes her from the universal standpoint and thus removes the obstacle that keeps her from adopting this standpoint. The second or positive side of the cultus occurs when the participant identifies with the universal and becomes the universal in some form, e.g., lives an ethical life. Since God for Hegel is universal reason, and since in the cultus the participant effectively embraces the universal, the cultus is a form of union with God. This union with God is not some form of merger with a divine being, but is ultimately an appropriation of the truth and a shaping of one's own will so that one lives in conformity with the truth.

This union with the universal is an actualization of my own essential nature, since as a human I am in essence not a natural being with desires but a being that thinks. Thinking is spirit's "highest inwardness", its "principle", and "unadulterated selfhood" (EL §11); it is "active in everything human and brings about the very humanity of what is human" (EL §2). Because thinking is humanity's essential nature, Hegel defines the cultus in one place as "the eternal relationship, the eternal process <of knowing> in which the subject posits itself as identical with its essence" (*VR*$_{21}$ 1: 102/193). As Hegel explains, the union between human and God that occurs in the cultus is not one that needs to be brought about absolutely (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 332/443). In other words, it is not a reconciliation that occurs between two parties that are

completely distinct from one another. Rather the union between humans and God is already implicitly present even before the cultus occurs, since the human, as a rational, thinking being, is already the universal, and to fully actualize herself as the universal, she need only make a break with her particular will.

If my interpretation of the cultus is accurate, it should be consistent with the examples of the cultus that Hegel provides in his discussion of the determinate religions. In these instances we see that the participant in the cultus overcomes her particularity and identifies with the universal, although the way in which this occurs varies from religion to religion and depends on the manner in which the universal or God is understood in the particular religion. We have seen, for example, that in Buddhism and Hinduism the divine is conceived of as pure abstraction or as empty of content, a conception of the universal that shapes the way in which the cultus occurs in these religions. If God is the abstract universal, then it follows that to become one with God one must become the abstract universal. This is what occurs in the ascetic practices and meditation that Hegel identifies as the cultus of Buddhism and Hinduism (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 465/568, 490/595). In the cultus, the subject achieves a "state of negation" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 462/565) or "pure inward stillness" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 461/565). "Human holiness consists in uniting oneself, by this negation, with nothingness, and so with God, with the absolute" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 462/566). This union with the universal requires the overcoming of particularity in so far as it is brought about by the "cessation of desire" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 461/564). "To be blissful, human beings themselves must strive, through ceaseless internal mindfulness, to will nothing, to want [nothing], and to do nothing" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 462/565-6). Because the universal here is completely empty, the life of the

universal at this stage is devoid of ethical content. There are no universal norms that the subject adopts when he achieves unity with the universal. For this reason, Hegel claims, for example, that Hindu religion demonstrates a "total indifference toward everything ethical, toward all worthy human pursuits" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 491/595).[4]

The cultus of the Persians and the Jews is very different from the cultus in Buddhism and Hinduism, but here too we see that cultus involves the overcoming of particularity and union with the universal. In Persian and Jewish religion, cultus is performed by following religious law. The cultus of the Parsees requires that he "carry out the good in words, deeds, and thoughts" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 514/620), toward which end the Parsee is commanded to follow a number of laws, including moral laws (*VPW* 244-6). The Jewish cultus is similar in so far as it involves "ceremonial service, an action done because it is so commanded, so prescribed, a carrying out of [a law] that is abstract, wise indeed, and universal" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 578/686). Submitting oneself to the law of God in this way is itself cultus in the sense that I have described. For to follow religious law is to lay aside one's particular aims and desires that conflict with the law and it requires that one identify in some way with the universal law itself.[5]

In his treatment of the determinate religions, the cultus that Hegel examines in most depth is that of the Greeks. Hegel claims in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* from 1824 that the union of God and human in the Greek cultus is made possible because each party draws nearer to the other.

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[4] See also *VR*$_{27}$ 2: 498/603; *VPR* 16.

[5] It is not clear if the Jewish obedience to the law, as Hegel describes it in the *VR*$_{27}$, should be treated as cultus in the full sense, since, on the one hand, Hegel claims that it is cultus, but, on the other hand, he seems to deny that it has the characteristics that Hegel associates with cultus. As we have seen, cultus for Hegel involves finding oneself in the universal and having the universal in one's heart or in feeling, but Hegel presents the Jewish law as positive or external (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 578/687), one that the Jew does not seem to identify with and that "does not penetrate into feeling" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 578/686).

> First it is clear that if the divine and human stand over against each other and are to be united, they must come nearer to each other and must both let go some of their mutual independence. It is not just the giving on the one side that is posited, but the finite self-consciousness must also let go, surrender part of its particularity. (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 383/482)

On the one hand, the god in Greek religion does not just stand over against human beings, but also offers himself to humans to be drunk and eaten. Here Hegel has in mind in particular the gods Ceres and Bacchus, who are present for the Greeks and consumed as wine and bread (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 383-4/483). This eating and drinking of the gods is sacrifice (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 383/483), although not in the usual sense of the term. In this instance it is not the Greeks who sacrifice to the gods, but the gods who sacrifice themselves for the Greeks.

> The god is the sacrifice of himself, delivering himself up to finite consciousness and allowing it to take possession of him; he sacrifices himself, and what the human worshipers have to do then is to take possession of this sacrifice, while at the same time recognizing the essentiality that is in it. (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 383/483)

In consuming the god, the Greek assimilates the god, enjoys him and is one with him.

On the other hand, the Greek draws closer to the god not by worshiping the god but by honouring him. This occurs primarily in the various Greek religious festivals and in the activities associated with them. In these festivals the Greeks honour their god by making the god or the divine present or apparent in themselves (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 385/484, 385/485), and they do this by striving for the good in its various forms: “in its [religious] festivals humanity shows its excellence, displays its best side, the best that it can make of itself” (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 385/484-5). The Greeks represent the good or the divine for themselves in their artistic creations, but they also do so by displaying great athletic prowess at their games or by adorning themselves lavishly

for their festivals (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 385/485). Thus the Greeks in their cultus put the divine on display for themselves through themselves, and are able to derive "enjoyment from the way God thus appears in the individual" (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 385/485). By embodying the good, the Greeks embody a universal, objective ideal, but this ideal is not alien to them. In their cultus the Greeks are also free or fully at home with themselves, since in seeking greatness and in making the divine appear in themselves, they are only fulfilling their own potential as human beings. The divine that is represented in their festivals is "the proper essentiality of the human being" (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 555/662). The pursuit of the good, whether it be artistic beauty, athletic excellence or ethical virtue, requires that the Greek set aside his particularity, since if he is to be successful in any of these pursuits, he must not allow his conduct to be determined by his own contingent desires but only by what the good itself requires.

The most important form of the cultus for Hegel is not the cultus as it appears in any of these determinate religions, but the cultus of the consummate religion or Christianity. In the 1824 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel puts the Christian cultus in a category all its own. Unlike the restricted variations of the cultus that we find in the determinate religions, the cultus of Christianity is one of freedom (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 263/363). What sets the Christian cultus apart from its counterparts is that "the subject has inwardly attained to consciousness of its *infinity*" (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 262/362). In other forms of the cultus, the identity between God and human is only implicit, but in Christianity this truth is recognized by Christians explicitly. The Christian knows that the human in his essence is divine and that the divine is human. The Christian's task is to actualize her identity with God by making a complete break with her

immediate naturalness and by embracing the universal. For Hegel, the Christian cultus includes the sacraments, but appears in its truest form as ethical life (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 334/446; *EG* 354-5/283).[6] For, as we shall see, Protestant ethical life is the highest result of Christianity, and it is as an active participant in ethical life that the Christian is best able to rise above her natural state and to identify fully with the truth.[7]

3B. Hegel on mysticism and religious feeling

Thus far I have addressed the first two characteristics of the cultus. In this section I consider the third characteristic by examining Hegel's views on feeling and their role in religion. My task here is twofold, one negative and the other positive. First, taking William James' characterization of mysticism as a good statement of what this term generally means, I argue that religious feeling and religious experience are for Hegel not mystical in this sense.[8] My second task is to show what Hegel thinks religious feeling in its proper form involves.

In his discussion of mysticism in the *Varieties of Religious Experience*, James lists four properties that distinguish mystical states of consciousness from other conscious states.[9] First, mystical experiences are *ineffable* in so far as the content of such an experience "defies expression".[10] This content cannot be conveyed

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[6] *Pace* Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 124, who claims that Communion or Eucharist is for Hegel the definitive cultic act.
[7] See *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 211/285-6; *PR* §152; *VPW* 78.
[8] In this section I argue that religious experience is not mystical in the particular sense that I specify here. However, it is also true that Hegel was significantly interested in the work of German mystics like Jakob Boehme and Meister Eckhart, and that their ideas have a role to play in his philosophy. As O'Regan claims, there is "considerable evidence that Hegel was both an avid and appreciative reader of mystical texts." See O'Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*, 17. See also O'Regan, "Hegel and Eckhartian Mysticism"; and Magee, *Hegel and Hermeticism*.
[9] James, *Varieties*, 380-2.
[10] Ibid. 380.

adequately to others but needs to be lived if it is to be known at all. In this sense, a mystical state is like a state of feeling.[11] Second, mystical experience is also a state of knowledge or has a *noetic quality*, albeit one that is inarticulate or that cannot be expressed by the discursive intellect. This mystical knowing carries with it " a curious sense of authority for after-time."[12] In other words, there is some sense in which mystical experiences are self-validating or are the guarantors of their own truth for the person having the experience. The first two marks of a mystical experience are the most essential ones, but James adds two more that are also generally associated with the mystical. Third, mystical states are *transient*, rarely lasting longer than an hour or two. And finally, mystical states are generally have a *passive* quality. The subject of such an experience is able to facilitate its occurrence by performing certain religious exercises (e.g. forms of prayer or meditation), but once the mystical state sets in, it is one that he often senses is beyond his control: "the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power."[13]

Since I have argued that God for Hegel is not a transcendent being, religious feeling in my account cannot result from a special form of experience in which a God who is beyond the reach of the five senses makes himself present to human consciousness. However, it is worth noting that James' characterization of mystical experience makes no mention of the existence of a transcendent being, and that it is possible to defend a mystical account of religion without presupposing that there is such a God. Thus, even if Hegel's God is not a transcendent being, we cannot

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid. 381.
[13] Ibid.

conclude from this detail that his approach to religion is non-mystical. In fact, to find an account of religion that is both mystical and free of metaphysical commitments, we need only look to the early work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hegel's great rival during his stay in Berlin.[14]

Unlike Hegel, who defines religion most basically as the relationship between humans and God, and who thus presupposes some sort of God as a condition for religious experience, Schleiermacher makes religious experience itself the starting point or the foundation in his account of religion. For Schleiermacher, a certain kind of religious experience is a basic fact of human life. He maintains that regardless of whether or not one claims that God exists and regardless of how one interprets the nature of such a God, religious experience itself exists and he insists that religion is valuable strictly in so far as one has this experience. For Schleiermacher, religion occurs as "the sensibility and taste for the infinite" (*ÜR* 30/23) or as the "intuition of the universe" (*ÜR* 31/24).

> Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. It wishes to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe's own manifestations and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe's immediate influences in childlike passivity. (*ÜR* 29/22)

Religious experience does not involve the intuition or feeling of a content that is beyond the five senses. On the contrary, the content of religious intuition is drawn from the realms of nature and humanity (*ÜR* 58/43). Religious intuition is distinguished by what one might call the form of the intuition: it is an intuition not of

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[14] Friedrich Schleiermacher first published *On Religion* in 1799, and produced three revised versions of this work in 1806, 1821 and 1831. In my analysis of Schleiermacher's concept of religion, I have used the 1799 edition, because it most clearly conveys the approach to religion that I wish to contrast with Hegel's. In 1806 and 1821, Schleiermacher made substantial changes to this work, but later in life he never rejected the content of the original version. See Crouter, "A Note on Editions", xliv-xlv.

the particular object on its own but a sense of each object as a part of the universe. In religion, one accepts "everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite" (*ÜR* 32/25)

Schleiermacher tells us clearly that religion as he conceives of it does not presuppose a claim about the existence of a divine being:

> If we immediately proceed to the highest concept, to that of a highest being, of a spirit of the universe that rules it with freedom and understanding, religion is still not dependent upon this idea. To have religion means to intuit the universe, and the value of your religion depends upon the manner in which you intuit it, on the principle that you find in its actions. (*ÜR* 70/52)[15]

In fact, religion for Schleiermacher does not involve claims about the world at all. As we saw in the quote above, religion's essence is "neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling" (*ÜR* 29/22). Schleiermacher is at pains to overcome the usual association of religion with metaphysics on the one hand and with morality on the other. Religion "does not wish to determine and explain the universe according to its nature as does metaphysics; it does not desire to continue the universe's development and perfect it by the power of freedom and divine free choice of a human being as does morals" (*ÜR* 28-9/22). Religion is religion only in so far as it manages to keep itself free of speculation and praxis. As an activity of pure feeling and intuition, religion is its own activity alongside the sphere of speculation and praxis, one that is "the necessary and indispensable third next to those two, as their natural counterpart, not slighter in worth and splendor than what you wish of them" (*ÜR* 29/23).

Yet, although religion for Schleiermacher does not require that a transcendent deity exist, his conception of religion is mystical in so far as it has at least most of the

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[15] Schleiermacher also writes: "From my standpoint and according to my conceptions that are known to you, the belief "No God, no religion" cannot occur"(*ÜR* 69/51). Jaeschke makes the point that *ÜR* explicitly calls into question the concept of God. See Jaeschke, "Philosophy of Religion", 15.

characteristics that James associates with mysticism. First, Schleiermacher's view that religion is an activity of pure feeling entails that religious experience for Schleiermacher is ineffable. As James reminds us, feelings are by their very nature inexpressible, since what it is like to have a feeling can never be effectively conveyed in language to someone who has not had the feeling.[16] Try as one might, it is impossible to make a person grasp what love or hate is like if she has never had these feelings herself. That Schleiermacher himself holds this view is confirmed by his claim that in religion "only the particular is true or necessary" (*ÜR* 34/27), or that "[t]hose who truly know about their religion and its essence will utterly subordinate to the particular every apparent connection and will not sacrifice the smallest part of the particular to it" (*ÜR* 34-5/27). When Schleiermacher emphasizes the importance of the particular in religion, he is telling us that nothing can be a substitute for one's own experience of the infinite. Religion is an activity of pure intuition, and intuition "is and always remains something individual, set apart, the immediate perception, nothing more" (*ÜR* 33/26). In religion one must experience the infinite for oneself, because the feeling or intuition of the infinite that is the proper domain of religion cannot be known effectively in any other way.

Second, religious intuition or feeling for Schleiermacher is self-validating: "everything in religion is immediate and true for itself" (*ÜR* 33/26). The value of religious feeling is not dependent upon the particular content of the experience, since anything can be the object of such an experience.

> Everything that exists is necessary for religion, and everything that can be is for it a true indispensable image of the infinite; it is just a question of finding the point from which one's relationship to the infinite can be discovered.

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[16] James, *Varieties*, 380.

> However reprehensible something may be in another connection or in itself, in this respect it is always worthy of existence and of being preserved and contemplated. To a pious mind religion makes everything holy and valuable, even unholiness and commonness itself, … (*ÜR* 37/28-9)

Religious feeling is not good on some occasions and bad on others, but is inherently good. Third, religious experience for Schleiermacher is, as a form of intuition, essentially passive, since at the stage of intuition one receives the impression of an object but one does not yet process it conceptually. In religious intuition, one must be open to the universe's influence upon oneself "in childlike passivity" (*ÜR* 29/22) or "in quiet submissiveness" (*ÜR* 29/23). Active conceptual processing of religious experience falls outside of religion *per se* and can even hinder one from being open to religious intuition (*ÜR* 82/60). Religion in Schleiermacher's characterization is also passive to the extent that religious feeling is not a feeling of freedom but of dependence (*CG* 1: §9). One is not religious when one acts morally or when one actively seeks to improve the world, but when one simply intuits the world as it is with all its good and its bad.

In contrast to Schleiermacher, Hegel conceives of religion in a way that is not mystical at all, since religious experience for Hegel has none of the characteristics that James associates with mysticism. To begin with, religious experience or religious knowing for Hegel is not ineffable. As we know already from the previous chapter, Hegel, unlike Schleiermacher, thinks that knowledge of God is an important component of religion. If, as I have argued, God for Hegel is reason or the truth, then God or the object of religious experience is the very opposite of the ineffable. As reason, God is conceptual and can be expressed or conveyed to others in language. In his discussion of religious feeling in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* from

1827, Hegel reminds us that God is "a content that is universal in and for itself"(*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 289/394) or "a content that belongs to thought, for thought is the soil in which this content is both apprehended and engendered alike" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 290/394). Because God is a content that can be grasped in thought, Hegel insists that God "is *not envious*, and does not withhold from mankind knowledge of himself and of truth" (*BS* 80/*Hin* 352).[17]

Hegel accepts that in addition to being known God can also be felt, but even in religious feeling Hegel leaves little room for an experience of God as ineffable. This follows from Hegel's conception of feeling, since feeling for Hegel is itself an activity that belongs to thinking. When Hegel claims that feeling involves thinking, the term 'thinking' here does not mean what he refers to as "thinking-over": "*reflective* thought that has *thoughts* as such as its *content* and brings them to consciousness" (*EL* §2R). Thinking-over is intellectual activity that finds its highest expression in philosophy and is merely one human activity among many, one that is different than other modes of consciousness such as feeling, intuition, representation, etc. Feeling is a mode of thinking not in the narrow sense of thinking-over, but in a more general sense of the word "thinking". As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, thinking is the essence of what is to be human,[18] and all activities and modes of consciousness, including religion, are human only to the extent that they involve thinking (*EL* §2). These activities are, as Hegel writes, "*determined* and *permeated* by *thinking*" (*EL* §2R). Hegel associates all human modes of consciousness with thinking because they all have a content [*Gehalt*] that is based on thinking or that is essentially conceptual (*EL*

[17] See also *EG* §564R; *VGP* 3: 37/2: 208.
[18] See p. 96 of this chapter.

§2). "Whatever kind it may be, the *content* [*Inhalt*] that fills our consciousness is what makes up the *determinacy* of our feelings, intuitions, images, and representations, of our purposes, duties, etc., and of our thoughts and concepts" (*EL* §3). The various modes of human consciousness are the various forms in which a content can be grasped, and any given content can be grasped in a number of different forms, e.g. it can be felt, intuited, willed, etc. (*EL* §3). The content of all of these modes of consciousness is conceptual for Hegel, not because it is *explicitly* grasped in the mode as a conceptual content, but because it always has the potential to be made explicit for reflection in a conceptual form. For example, if I know a particular content strictly in feeling, I grasp the content of my feeling immediately and do not have a conceptual formulation of the content before my mind's eye. However, the content of the feeling is still implicitly conceptual, since I am able in principle to reflect upon my feeling and to make its content explicit for myself. Once made explicit, the content of my feeling is present as the conceptual or as a content that can be conveyed in language. For Hegel truth that is grasped in feeling is not ineffable because it always has the potential to be made conceptually explicit. Moreover, if it is to be in its proper form, the content of our feeling *ought* to be made conceptually explicit (*EL* §5). Because the content of religion is least explicit when grasped in feeling, Hegel claims that feeling is the worst form in which the truth of religion can be grasped (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 178-9/273; *EG* §447R).

Hegel would acknowledge that feeling also involves an element of ineffability, i.e., that there is a dimension to feeling that cannot be said and that must be experienced in order to be known. Where Hegel departs radically from

Schleiermacher is in the value that he attributes to the element of ineffability or particularity in feeling. Unlike Schleiermacher, for whom the value of religious feeling lies precisely in its particularity and inexpressibility, Hegel maintains that feeling or what cannot be said is "not what is most important, most true, but what is most insignificant, most untrue" (*EL* §20R).[19]

> One speaks often of the inexpressibility of feeling, i.e., of that which is only in the subjective manner of feeling. Language has for its content only the universal, the true, the concrete. What language cannot grasp is what is more negligible, worse, the merely subjective, that which is abstractly mine. That which is true in it is the rational, and the rational is what I am able to articulate. (*VPG* 189)[20]

In spite of this textual evidence, Hegel seems to contradict himself elsewhere, suggesting that religious experience involves an element of ineffability when he explicitly associates the cultus with mysticism. For example, Hegel tells us that "what is best known within devotion is the mystical attitude, the *unio mystica*" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 89/180),[21] and he refers to the sacrament of communion as a mystical union (*VR*$_{24}$ 3: 166/235). Drawing upon evidence such as this, Peter Hodgson argues that religion and the cultus for Hegel involve an element of the mystical and the mysterious. As Hodgson puts it, Hegel's theology is not purely kataphatic, but manages to preserve an element of the apophatic.[22] According to Hodgson, God as the rational is

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[19] See also *VL* 15.
[20] O'Regan expresses the basic difference between Hegel and Schleiermacher as follows: "[F]or Schleiermacher discursive articulation is an attempt to adequate to a prediscursive given whose riches and depth cannot be exhaustively translated. Hegel believes just the opposite. Discursive articulation is not less rich but more rich than the pre-articulate given, not less deep but more deep." See O'Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*, 67.
[21] See also *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 333/444-5.
[22] Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 64, 70. In contrast, O'Regan claims that by 1807 Hegel's apophatic vocabulary no longer carries any onto-theological weight. See O'Regan, "Hegel and Eckhartian Mysticism", 123.

knowable for Hegel, but what God is as the rational is not "immediately evident."[23] God is "the highest mystery, the highest truth, which demands reverent silence as well as the most rigorous philosophical speculation."[24] "Reason may penetrate the mystery but not exhaust it."[25]

However, if we look closely at what Hegel says about mysticism, we see that once again Hegel is using his religious terminology in a highly unconventional way, and that what Hegel means by mysticism is not at all what James means. For Hegel, the mystical is the speculative (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 391/491; *VR*$_{24}$ 3: 125/192; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 333/445; *PR* §139R; *VGP* 3: 190/2: 344; *VGP* 4: 29/3: 49). The speculative is mystical or a mystery, not because it is beyond the grasp of all forms of thinking, but because it is a secret for the understanding and for sense certainty (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 279/382; *VR*$_{24}$ 3: 125/192). The mystical is "whatever is concealed from the understanding" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 333/445).[26] Hegel claims that the content of Christianity is mystical because it can only be comprehended if we are able to grasp difference as a unity (*VGP* 3: 190/2: 344), and this is precisely what the understanding and sense certainty are unable to do. For example, Hegel states that the mystery revealed by the Christian religion is that God is the unity of the human and the divine (*VPW* 85). This truth involves unity in difference in so far as it claims that humans are both the same as God and other than God. For the understanding this is a contradiction, since the understanding takes identity as the strict opposite of difference. According to the understanding, one cannot be at the same time both identical with God and different than God, and thus

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[23] Ibid. 69.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid. 80.
[26] See also *VPW* 349-50.

this important truth of Christianity lies beyond the comprehension of the understanding (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 208/283). Thus, the concept of God and God's relation to humans is for the understanding a secret or a mystery, as is any speculative content whatsoever, whether religious or not.[27] But for speculative reason, the content of Christianity is not a secret; it is manifest (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 279/382; *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 205/280). Therefore, when Hegel associates mysticism with the cultus and Christianity, he is not implying that there is sense in which the truth of Christianity remains inexpressible. On the contrary, in his discussion of mysticism he affirms that the truth of Christianity is rational and that this truth is made known to us in speculative thinking.[28]

Thus religious feeling for Hegel is not the experience of an ineffable reality, or a feeling of the infinite in Schleiermacher's sense of the expression. What then does religious feeling involve for Hegel? We have seen that feeling is one particular form in which we are conscious of a content. According to Hegel, the content of feeling is my own as a particular individual; "my particularity is at the same time bound up with it" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 286/390). I know myself in feeling as one with my content and my content as one with me. " It is the feeling of a content and the feeling of oneself – both at once" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 286/390).

When Hegel speaks of feeling, there are several types of feeling that Hegel refers to. First, at certain points Hegel means feeling as sensation, the feeling that we experience by means of our five senses, e.g., the feeling of hardness that comes from

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[27] We see this for example when Hegel points out that the concepts of life and drive are a mystery for the understanding, since they involve unity in difference (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 206-7/281-2).

[28] O'Regan makes the interesting claim that Hegel's brand of mysticism is essentially Pauline, in so far as Hegel, like Paul, associates the mystical and mystery with revelation, i.e., with what is disclosed rather than undisclosed. This means that the mysterious for Hegel is not a form of negative theology, but "negative theology's antitype". See O'Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*, 43-4. See also O'Regan, "Hegel and Eckhartian Mysticism", 121-4.

a hard object (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 176/270; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 287/392). Second, Hegel uses the term 'feeling' to refer to emotions like envy, hatred, hostility or joy (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 176/271; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 287/391). Finally, when Hegel talks about feeling, he might have in mind feeling as a form of belief. Here what is being felt is some form of truth claim, either theoretical (e.g., I feel that God has being), or practical (e.g., I feel that it is wrong to kill). All of these types of feeling fit Hegel's definition. In other words, in all three cases the content of the feeling is present as my own or as bound up with my particularity. In the case of sensation and emotion the feeling is bound up with my particularity because it occurs for me as a particular, natural being. When I sense the hardness of an object or feel an emotion, the sensation or emotion exists only in my experience. Likewise, when I feel that a particular claim is true, the claim is true immediately for me. In this type of feeling the content is my own because regardless of whether the claim is objectively true, I, *qua* particular being, take it to be true. This contrasts with a claim of reflective thinking, whose content I take to be true not because I identify with it in some immediate way, but because I judge it to be true objectively.

For Schleiermacher religious feeling is a combination of the first and second types of feeling, while for Hegel it is primarily of the third type. Religious feeling for Schleiermacher has the character of sensation in so far as it is bound up with intuition and is what results from the passive experience of an other. And like sensation religious feeling for Schleiermacher can have a physical quality as it penetrates the body of the one experiencing it (*ÜR* 41-2/32). Schleiermacher also identifies emotions as religious feelings, emotions such as reverence, humility, love and

gratitude (*ÜR* 60-1/45). His conception of religious feeling, however, necessarily excludes the third type of feeling or feeling as a form of belief, since this type feeling involves claims about the world and for Schleiermacher such claims are foreign to religion.

As for Schleiermacher, religious feeling for Hegel involves sensation, not in the sense that feeling is passively received from outside through some form of observation, but in so far as it has a physical quality or an "anthropological aspect" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 286/390). "With [aroused] feelings the blood becomes agitated and we become warm around the heart" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 286/390). Moreover, Hegel also associates religious feeling with different emotions such as bliss (*Glückseligkeit*) (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 62/150), enjoyment (*Genuß*) (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 331/443, 333/445), and peace (*Ruhe*) (*VR*$_{21}$ 1: 3/83). Yet, as we will see below, religious feeling in the sense that it is important for Hegel is feeling as a form of belief, since religious feeling in this most important sense is feeling of the truth.

Hegel's chief claim about feeling in general and religious feeling in particular is that this mode of consciousness is never self-justifying (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 180/274; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 290/395, 298/403, *VR*$_{31}$ 1: 355/466; *VBG* 374/59; *EG* §400R; *VPG* 71). In other words, if I feel that a particular content is true or good or right, it is never true or good or right just because I feel that it is so. As Hegel points out, it is not only good content that we feel positively and strongly about, but any content whatsoever, including what is evil and base, can be felt by us as positive (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 177/272, 179/273; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 286/390; *EG* §247). "Even the unworthiest can arouse my enthusiastic response" (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 177/271). Although Hegel does not say so explicitly,

we see how this argument could apply to our various emotions. For example, happiness is generally considered a positive emotion, but feeling happy is not categorically good, since whether my feeling of happiness is good or not depends upon what is motivating me to feel happy. It is good in most instances if I feel happy that a person's life has been saved, but not if I feel happy that she has perished. But Hegel's claim applies perhaps most appropriately not to feelings of emotion but to instances of feeling as a form of belief. For example, just because I feel that there is an afterlife does not make this claim correct. Likewise, if I feel in general that it is right to kill, the mere fact that I feel this way obviously does not make my view true or right. Such feelings are only justified if their content-claims are shown to be true in thinking. Proper feeling, religious or otherwise, is feeling with a content that is true or good (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 177/271), and whether a content is true or good can only be decided discursively. Feeling is only justified if it can be justified in the domain of reflective activity.

We now see that religious feeling for Hegel at least in part lacks the second property that is generally associated with mysticism. According to James's characterization, mystical experience is noetic and involves a form of intuition or feeling that is immediately self-validating and authoritative for the person who experiences it. For Hegel religious feeling is a form of knowing, but it would appear that no instance of proper religious feeling is self-validating. Rather, for Hegel all religious feeling must be justified outside of itself. On the one hand, Hegel's assertion above is sensible and unobjectionable. It is true, of course, in ordinary cases that feeling something to be good is not enough to make it good. But, on the other

hand, Hegel's discussion of religious feeling does not directly respond to Schleiermacher's theory. Schleiermacher would likely not deny that ordinarily our feelings are not self-validating, but he maintains that there is a special form of human feeling, i.e. religious feeling, that is an exception to the rule, a form of experience that is ineffable and so intense and transformational that it imposes itself on us as immediately good by virtue of its own internal character, and Schleiermacher claims that we ought to accept such a feeling as immediately true and good. As far as I can tell, this kind of religious experience, one that is at the core of traditional mysticism and that appears in Schleiermacher's account in a more Romantic guise, has no role to play in Hegel's conception of what religion ought to be.

Whenever Hegel speaks of proper religious feeling, he has in mind what I have referred to above as feeling of the truth. Proper religious feeling has a content that is judged in reflective thinking to be good or true. This content consists ultimately of the basic theoretical and practical claims of religion and ethical life. In the case of practical feeling, the content is that of virtue and duty (*VPG* 246), and as a system of feeling it is the system of the objective determinations of freedom or the system of ethical life which is realized in life in the state (*VPG* 246).[29] According to Hegel, we ought not only to know these truths, either in representation or conceptually, but we ought also to feel the truth (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 179/274; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 286/391, 298/403; *VR*$_{31}$ 1: 355/466; *VBG* 372/57; *BS* 76/*Hin* 349). This means that the truth

[29] Are there any norms for Hegel that are exclusively religious and not ethical? I think there is only one: the norm implied by the story of the fall, that as natural beings we are not as we ought to be. This norm is the presupposition or ground for the whole system of norms that constitutes ethical life. For to be free is to overcome one's particularity, and the norms of ethical life are what we must follow in order to be free. As Hegel writes at the outset of the *WL*, the move from particular finite being to abstract universal is not only the very first theoretical demand, but the very first practical demand (*WL* 1: 91/89)

ought not to be something that we merely acknowledge intellectually as true, but something that we identify with personally or as particular individuals. To take an example of religious feeling, the content of such a feeling could be the truth inherent in the story of the fall: that as a natural being I am not as I ought to be, and that I ought to overcome my own natural existence. This truth can be known in the form of representation as a story or in a form that is explicitly conceptual. In either case, I have this truth in feeling if I recognize it not only intellectually but with my whole being. In this case, I sense its truth intuitively and acting in accordance with it becomes a part of my personality.

For Hegel we acquire religious feeling in the proper way by having the truth in our hearts (*Herz*).

> It is required not only that we know God, right, and the like, that we have consciousness of and are convinced about them, but also that these things should be in our feeling, in our hearts. This is a just requirement; it signifies that these interests ought to be essentially our own – that we, as subjects, are supposed to have identified ourselves with such content. (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 286/391)[30]

Having the truth in one's heart is a more specific requirement than simply feeling the truth (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 179/274). Feeling can be momentary, the product of a mere whim. In contrast, when something is in my heart, it becomes a part of my very nature or my very personality.

> [W]henever I say, "I have God in my heart, or have the right in my heart," the feeling of this content is expressed as a continuing, fixed mode of my existence. The heart is what I am, not merely what I am at this instant, but what I am in general in this respect if it really is my basic principle. The form of feeling as universal denotes basic principles or habits of my being, the settled pattern of my way of acting. (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 179-80/274)

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[30] See also *VR*$_{24}$ 1: 179-80/274; *VR*$_{31}$ 1: 355/466; *BS* 76/*Hin* 349.

When I have a content or principle in my heart, this means that my feeling for this principle follows automatically from who I am. The pure contingency of spontaneous feeling is replaced by a form of feeling that is determined necessarily by my character. Having the truth in my heart is a form of feeling, because in it I identify with the truth as a particular being. In other words, I not only recognize the truth as a thinking universal capable of reflection, but participate in the truth with my own particular personality by conforming my personality to the requirements of the truth. If I only recognize the truth intellectually in a detached way, I can choose arbitrarily whether or not to respond or act in accordance with the truth. But if I have the truth in my heart, I am no longer able to simply ignore the truth and its demands, because acknowledging and following the truth has become a part of who I am as both a spiritual and physical being.

In the end, we see that feeling, which I identified earlier as the third element of the cultus, is not that different from the first two elements. For Hegel the process of achieving proper religious feeling involves both an overcoming of one's natural will and an identification with the universal. What sets feeling apart from the other two elements is that the overcoming of the natural and identification of the universal occurs within "my particular subjective personality" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 331-2/443). In the cultus I conform not only my mind and my will to the universal but my very personal identity.

For Hegel, this personal identification with the truth that occurs in religious feeling does not happen immediately or instantaneously, but is the gradual result of a process of education. Here the term 'education' should be understood in both a

narrow and a broad sense. On the one hand, a person can attain proper religious feeling when she is educated in the narrow sense of receiving religious instruction (*Unterricht*, *Erziehung*). Feeling of religion "is awakened first by the general religious instruction that we receive from youth [up]" (*VR*$_{21}$ 1: 9/90).[31] In Hegel's mind, the task of religious instruction is the principal internal activity of the church (*BS* 60/*Hin* 338).[32] On the other hand, proper religious feeling is the result of education in the more general sense of culture or *Bildung*. If the content of religion is to be brought into her heart, a person must "be rightly educated [*gebildet*] in the religious and the ethical sphere" (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 180/274).[33] Here the term '*Bildung*' refers to more than just formal instruction or teaching. Religious feeling requires that a person cultivate herself, i.e., that she actively choose to pursue a way of thinking and acting that will lead her to fully identify with the truth or have the truth in her heart.

Whether one interprets education as *Erziehung* or *Bildung*, the task of education for Hegel is in either case the same: to allow us to overcome our particularity and to identify with the universal.

> The educated [*gebildete*] human is one who knows how to impress the stamp of universality on everything he does, says and thinks, who has given up his particularity [and] who acts in accordance with universal principles. Education is thus the activity of the universal, the form of thinking. (*VPW* 42)[34]

Education is the process that brings about religious feeling, because through it a person gradually identifies personally with the universal and thus has the truth in her heart. Here we see again a strong contrast between Hegel's understanding of religious

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[31] See also *VR*$_{21}$ 3: 86/151; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 298/403; *VR*$_{31}$ 1: 356/467; *BS* 74/*Hin* 347; *EL* §67; *VL* 76.
[32] See also *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 260/337.
[33] See also *VR*$_{24}$ 1: 179/273, *EG* §447R; *VPG* 188.
[34] See also *VR*$_{21}$ 1: 151-2/241-2; *VR*$_{21}$ 3: 37/101; *VR*$_{24}$ 2: 389-90/489; *PR* §§ 20, 187R; *VPR* 10-11, 12; *VPW* 73, 490, 502.

feeling and Schleiermacher's. For Schleiermacher religious intuition is not something that can be imparted to others through teaching, but something that a person is born with (*ÜR* 78/57-8). As he writes, "The universe creates its own observers and admirers" (*ÜR* 79/58). Moreover, Schleiermacher maintains in fact that education, with its emphasis on prudence, morality and understanding, harms or blocks religious feeling that would prosper if otherwise left alone (*ÜR* 80-3/59-61). For Hegel, however, feeling left to its own devices is precisely what should be avoided and overcome. Religious feeling must be intentionally and actively cultivated by reflecting upon the truth and by choosing to act in accordance with the truth. In Hegel's view, humans are not passive receptacles of religious feeling. It is instead "the task of individuals to give their feelings a true content" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 180/274).

3C. Philosophy as a form of cultus

In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* from 1827, Hegel finishes his discussion the cultus by making the striking claim that philosophy is itself a form of cultus. He expands on this claim as follows:

> To know this true not only in its simple form as God, but also to know the rational in God's works – as produced by God and endowed with reason – that is philosophy. It is part of knowing the true that one should dismiss one's subjectivity, the subjective fancies of personal vanity, and concern oneself with the true purely in thought, conducting oneself solely in accordance with objective thought. This negation of one's specific subjectivity is an essential and necessary moment. (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 335-6/446-7)

If we are to make sense of this claim that philosophy is cultus, we need to assume that Hegel has a robust conception of what philosophical activity involves, i.e., that philosophy for Hegel is not just a theoretical but also a practical pursuit. We have

already seen that the theoretical content of philosophy is the same as that of religion.[35] Both have God or the truth as their content, religion having it in the form of representation and philosophy having it in a conceptual form. But Hegel's claim that philosophy is cultus implies that philosophy in its full sense is a pursuit in which we not only know the truth but also act in accordance with the truth. Philosophy is itself a way of life. As in religion, the philosopher must overcome his separation from the truth and establish an identity with it, and as in religion, he does so by overcoming his particularity and living the life of the universal.[36]

In fact, by claiming that philosophy is a form of cultus, Hegel is saying that there is sense in which philosophy is itself a form of religion. In one passage from the second edition of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* edited by Bruno Bauer and published in 1840, Hegel says as much explicitly:

> Thus religion and philosophy coincide in one. In fact philosophy is itself the service of God; it *is* religion, because it involves the same renunciation of subjective fancies and opinions in its concern with God. Thus philosophy is identical with religion, and the distinction [between them] is that philosophy exists in a way peculiar to itself, distinguished from the mode we are accustomed to call "religion" as such. What they have in common is that they are both religion; what distinguishes them consists only in the type and mode of religion [that each is]. (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 63/152)

For Hegel, philosophy is still distinct from the traditional practice of religion or from religion in the way that we normally understand it. However, Hegel also seems to use the term 'religion' in a sense broader than its ordinary sense. Hegel repeatedly defines religion as the relation of humans or human consciousness to God,[37] a definition that can accommodate philosophy as a form of religion. For if God is

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[35] See chapter 2, p. 42.
[36] See *VR*$_{24}$ 1: 206/302; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 63/151; *VPW* 77; *BS* 8, 15-16.
[37] *VR*$_{21}$ 1: 95/185-6; *VR*$_{24}$ 1: 221/317; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 61/150, 72/162, 86/178, 336/448.

reason, as I have suggested, or if God is the one and only subject matter of philosophy as Hegel himself claims (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 3/84; *BS* 189), then philosophy, and not just traditional religion, is the relation of human consciousness to God. Moreover, towards the end of the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel characterizes the whole sphere of absolute spirit as the highest sphere and refers to it as religion (*EG* §554). Hegel is presumably using the term 'religion' in a similar way when he claims that "on the whole religion is the highest or ultimate sphere of human consciousness, whether as feeling, volition, representation, knowledge, or cognition" (*VR*$_{27}$ 1: 79/170). If the term 'religion' is taken here in the normal sense, then this means that religion is a higher sphere of activity than philosophy, which certainly does not seem to be something that Hegel believes. His claim only makes sense if we interpret the term 'religion' more generally to mean the sphere of absolute spirit, which has philosophy as one of its forms.

It is interesting to note that Hegel's followers during the Berlin period also interpreted philosophy as a form of religion. As John Toews illustrates, philosophy in their minds demanded a conversion in which the pupil of philosophy passed from his old life to one in which he, as one student put it, was "elevated above the limitations of the world".[38] This conversion required that that the philosopher overcome his natural desires and the self-centredness of his individual ego, identifying himself instead with what is universal and objective.[39] For the converted, philosophy made possible a state of blessedness in this life that was previously only associated with the

[38] Toews, *Hegelianism*, 91.
[39] Ibid. 92.

rewards of another world after death.[40] With this blessedness the philosopher experienced strong, positive feelings. This widespread agreement among Hegel's followers on the religious nature of philosophy adds support to my claim that Hegel himself held this view.

Hegel's view that philosophy is a form of cultus has an important implication, namely that the philosopher no longer requires traditional religion.[41] This is the case because philosophy as an activity involves everything that religion involves; traditional religion provides nothing that is not also provided by philosophy. By engaging in a life of philosophy, the philosopher not only knows the truth, but also conforms her will to the demands of the truth and feels the truth in her heart. This does not mean that traditional religion has become obsolete for Hegel and can be dispensed with altogether. On the contrary, traditional religion is still important for two reasons. First, for the vast majority of people who do not engage in philosophy, traditional religion is still the means by which they have access to the truth. Second, Hegel argues that religion is the manner in which all of us should be first introduced to the truth as children, regardless of whether or not we are destined to become philosophers, since religion for Hegel is the proper propaedeutic to philosophy (*BS* 546-7). Thus, traditional religion for Hegel is not surpassed or left behind. The point

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[40] Ibid. 90.

[41] Charles Taylor and Stephen Houlgate have argued the opposite, claiming that the philosopher requires religion because he ought to feel God or the truth in his heart and that such feeling can only be provided by religion. See Taylor, *Hegel*, 486-9; Houlgate, *Introduction to Hegel*, 244-5; and Houlgate, "Religion, Morality and Forgiveness", 97. Hegel's claim that philosophy is a form of cultus counts as evidence against their view, since Hegel makes it clear that cultus by its very nature involves feeling, leading us to believe that philosophy as cultus also involves feeling. In his review of Göschel from 1829, Hegel confirms that philosophy involves feeling:
"A philosophy without heart and a faith without understanding are themselves abstractions of the true life and being of knowledge and faith. Whoever is left cold by philosophy, or whoever is not enlightened by actual faith (*erleuchtet*), let him be mindful of where the blame lies: it lies in him, not in knowing or in faith. The former [person] finds himself still outside of philosophy, the latter outside of faith." (*BS* 325).

is simply that *for the philosopher* philosophy can serve as a substitute for traditional religion.

That the philosopher no longer requires traditional religion can perhaps shed light on that vexed question that has been a part of Hegel scholarship for a long time: was Hegel a Christian? This question admits of no simple answer, but my results do allow us to shed some light on one of its facets. If it is indeed true for Hegel that the practice of philosophy can act as substitute for traditional religion, then we have reason to suppose that Hegel himself felt no significant personal need to participate in organized religion and its activities. This would help to explain why, as Pinkard puts it, Hegel "does not seem in his daily life to have been particularly devout, at least in any conventional way."[42] Of course, we have seen already that Hegel claimed to be a Lutheran,[43] and I think that we can be confident that he made this claim in good faith (no pun intended). But for Hegel, being a Lutheran did not necessarily mean that one had to go to church; it did not necessarily mean being a Christian in this traditional sense.

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[42] Pinkard, *Hegel*, 577. See also William Desmond, *Hegel's God*, 13-17. Desmond holds a position similar to Pinkard's: "Though Hegel came from a Lutheran family, I do not divine a strong sense of personal piety in him" (15).

[43] See chapter 1, p. 26.

Chapter 4: Hegel's concept of freedom

It is customary to introduce a discussion of Hegel's theory of freedom by stressing the importance of this concept in his philosophy. On this point, commentators are widely in agreement. Some scholars emphasize the central role of freedom in Hegel's social and political philosophy.[1] This is to be expected, since the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, in which one finds the authoritative formulation of Hegel's social and political theory, and, to a lesser extent, the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, are the texts in which the concept of freedom is most conspicuous. But, as other commentators have pointed out, freedom can be viewed as the central concept not only of his political philosophy, but of Hegel's whole philosophical endeavour.[2] Will Dudley is not exaggerating when he claims that Hegel's "whole philosophical system, in all its incredible breadth and detail, can be understood as a single extended demonstration of the importance and meaning of freedom."[3] As Hegel himself writes in the 1817 edition of the *Encyclopedia*, "Philosophy can also be viewed as the science of freedom."(E_{17} 18), and as he states in the 1831 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, freedom is "the highest concept that human beings have" (VR_{31} 1: 340/452).[4]

It is not surprising then that the concept of freedom is also of central importance in Hegel's philosophy of religion. As we will see in this chapter and the

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[1] See Beiser, *Hegel*, 197; Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom*, x; and Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, 4.
[2] Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism*, 97; Schacht *Hegel and After*, 71; Dudley, *Hegel, Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 15; and Parkinson, "Hegel's Concept of Freedom", 153, discuss its more general importance in Hegel's philosophy.
[3] Dudley, *Hegel, Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 15.

next, Hegel thinks that freedom is the highest benefit that humans have to gain from religious practice and that it is as a way of achieving freedom that religion is valuable. In the previous chapter I argued that the highest moment of religion is the practical moment of the cultus, in which a person overcomes her natural self and identifies with the universal. According to Hegel, when a person overcomes the distinction between herself and God, freedom is achieved. She is free when she abandons her particularity and takes up the life of the universal. Thus, freedom is the fruit of the cultus; "[t]he freedom of self-consciousness is the content of religion" (*VR*$_{24}$ 3: 100/165).

If, as I am suggesting, freedom is religion's *raison d'être*, then any complete account of Hegel's concept of religion must include an explanation of what freedom means for him. However, Hegel's concept of freedom is a controversial topic. Although scholars agree strongly on the importance of freedom for Hegel, they tend to disagree on what this concept of freedom actually involves. In this chapter, I offer an interpretation of Hegel's concept of freedom that attempts to explain and justify my claim that for Hegel freedom is the highest religious value. In my interpretation I emphasize freedom as a form of independence. It is widely recognized that freedom for Hegel involves autonomy, or that it requires that a person act independently when making decisions. However, I argue that Hegel's account of freedom also involves a passive form of independence, independence in the face of life's contingent circumstances that are beyond a person's control and that cause her to suffer. As such, freedom for Hegel is a form of reconciliation with nature or with the world. In my reading, this reconciliation is possible precisely because freedom requires the

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[4] In *VPR* 12, Hegel states: "If one asks "What is the best for a human?", the answer is "That he be free.""

radical break with our particularity and full identification with the universal, objective standpoint that is typical of the cultus. As a result, Hegel sees freedom not only as a social and political value in the narrow sense, but as a value that is explicitly religious.

Before turning to my interpretation, I will set the stage with a more general discussion of what recent scholars have had to say about Hegel's theory of freedom. Having presented a number of ways in which Hegel's theory of freedom has been interpreted in the secondary literature, I will be able to build upon these interpretations, while also showing how my interpretation attempts to address their limitations.

4A. Freedom and reason

In addition to the claim that freedom has an important role to play in Hegel's thought, there are a number of other points about his theory of freedom that are uncontroversial. These points are discussed thoroughly in the secondary literature, and I will not examine them here in detail. It is widely accepted that what Hegel conceives of as freedom is different from the common sense understanding of freedom, one that is generally presupposed in liberal political theory. Hegel's conception is not what he calls arbitrary choice [*Willkür*] or what Isaiah Berlin has referred to as the negative conception of freedom.[5] According to Berlin a person possesses negative freedom or negative liberty to the degree that the person is able to

[5] See Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom*, 179-80; Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, 4; Parkinson, "Hegel's Concept of Freedom", 161; and Beiser, *Hegel*, 202-5, where these commentators claim that freedom for Hegel is not arbitrary choice.

act without being obstructed by others.[6] This form of freedom is indeterminate with respect to its content. In other words, the content of the action has no bearing on whether the action is free. No matter what one wishes to do, one is free to perform an action according to the negative conception as long as one is not prevented from doing it. As he makes clear in his discussion of arbitrary choice, Hegel denies that true freedom is simply a matter of being able to do as one chooses without constraint (*PR* §15R).

Hegel distinguishes arbitrary choice from the natural will, which does not involve a process of selection *per se* (*PR* §11). The actions of the natural will are determined immediately by whatever drives and inclinations that the agent happens to find himself with. For example, if the natural will has an overriding urge to act, then it will set about right away to satisfy this urge. In contrast, arbitrary choice presupposes the capacity for reflection on the part of the will. Here the will is not automatically determined by whatever drive comes along, but is able to detach itself from its inclinations to such an extent that it is able to identify a number of possible drives, and to choose to act on one of them. A basic example of arbitrary choice would be the choice between two flavours of ice cream. However, arbitrary choice is not yet, or need not be, what Hegel would see as an informed choice; the will does not yet have objective reasons for choosing one option over another. Its choice can be entirely contingent, one in which the will takes one option rather than another simply because it happens to fancy it. According to the negative conception of freedom, the individual who is able to effectively make this kind of choice is acting freely, but Hegel denies that this is the case. "When we hear it said that freedom in general

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[6] Berlin, *Four Essays*, 122.

consists in *being able to do as one pleases*, such an idea [*Vorstellung*] can only be taken to indicate a complete lack of intellectual culture [*Bildung des Gedankens*]." (*PR* §15R).

So if freedom for Hegel is not arbitrary choice, what then does it involve? The most basic determination of freedom for Hegel is what he calls '*Beisichselbstsein*', or 'being with oneself'. For Hegel an individual is with herself in so far as her actions or acts of the will are self-determined, and her actions are self-determined if and only if these actions are rational.[7] Commentators agree that freedom for Hegel involves rational self-determination, but the consensus stops as soon as one tries to spell out what rational self-determination means.[8] To help illustrate where commentators agree and disagree on Hegel's theory of freedom, it is useful to compare Hegel's views on freedom with Kant's. According to Kant one is free when one acts autonomously, i.e., when one acts in accordance with and out of respect for the categorical demands of reason, the moral law (*GMS* 104/49). Since we are essentially rational creatures, to act according to reason for Kant, as for Hegel, is to be self-determined; it is to follow one's own law, and so to be free. In this sense we can also say that for Kant one is free when one is with oneself.

All would accept the similarities between Kant and Hegel's theories of freedom as they have been expressed thus far. Commentators are divided, however, over how closely Hegel's theory of rational self-determination follows Kant's. To act

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[7] Although it is widely accepted that the free will for Hegel is rational, he does not state this very explicitly in the introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*. However, as Franco points out, this can be extrapolated from §24. See Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom*, 171.

[8] The following authors, for example, acknowledge that freedom for Hegel involves rational behaviour: Schacht, *Hegel and After*, 77; Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, 46; Parkinson, "Hegel's Concept of Freedom", 166; Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism*, 101; Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 41, 42; and Franco, *Hegel's Philosophy of Freedom*, 155, 169.

rationally is to act with a reason, and all reasons are necessarily universal in some sense. What is a good reason for me in a certain context is *ceteris paribus* a good reason for any other rational person in that same context. These reasons function as maxims or norms for the rational person; they are commands that the rational person ought to follow. As Kant has famously discussed, there are two different kinds of rational norms or two different ways in which such norms apply (*GMS* 58/25). First, reason provides us with hypothetical imperatives, norms that tell us how to act if we want to achieve a particular end. The hypothetical imperative is only binding or an obligation for the rational agent if she is trying to achieve the end associated with that imperative. In normal circumstances, the agent only has a rational obligation to open her umbrella in rainy weather if she wants to stay dry. Thus, hypothetical norms always presuppose a particular end on the part of the agent to which they apply, an end that has its source outside of reason itself. In contrast, categorical imperatives are imperatives of pure reason, commands that we as rational creatures have an obligation to follow independently of our particular ends or our particular situation. Because they are not determined by particular needs and interests, these imperatives apply equally to all rational creatures. Moreover, these imperatives that do not have their origin in our own particular interests often conflict with these interests, and so following them and acting out of respect for them requires that the agent free herself from these interests or be able to disregard them. Thus, for Kant an action can be said to be rational in a wider or a narrower sense. In the wider sense, an action is rational in so far as it is done for a reason, i.e. in so far as it is following some rational imperative whether hypothetical or categorical. In this wider sense, an individual can

act rationally while seeking to further her own particular interests. In the narrower sense, an action is rational in so far as it is not only done for a reason, but in so far as the motivation for following that reason comes solely from the rational part of our nature, completely independently of what the agent happens to want or need. For Kant an agent is only free or is only rationally self-determined if she is acting rationally in this narrower sense, since moral imperatives, and hence the maxims governing the free will, are necessarily categorical (*GMS* 73/33). The human individual has both a rational and a natural part, and Kant's theory of freedom sets these two parts of human nature in opposition to each other. For the agent to be free, she must act out of respect for the categorical dictates of reason, and this requires that she overcome the natural part of herself.

One of the main issues dividing interpreters of Hegel's theory of freedom is whether Hegel shares this view of freedom with Kant. In other words, interpreters disagree over whether freedom for Hegel involves rational self-determination in the narrow sense or in a wider sense, or, to put it yet another way, whether a person can be free when motivated to act in pursuit of her own particular interests. Below I consider two different approaches to Hegel's theory of freedom that have emerged from the secondary literature, focussing in particular on how each understands what free rational self-determination involves, and on how each explains the place of desires and inclinations in the life of the free individual. I refer to these two readings as the Kantian and non-Kantian readings.

4B. Hegel and freedom: the Kantian reading

Traditionally scholars have argued that Hegel's theory of freedom, like Kant's, involves rational self-determination in which the agent abstracts from his own particular needs and desires. The account that perhaps most clearly and explicitly addresses this aspect of Hegel's theory of freedom is the explanation given by Richard Schacht. According to Schacht, for Hegel, as for Kant, one is free by overcoming one's inclinations and by acting out of respect for the imperatives of pure reason. He writes that Hegel would agree with Kant "that if what prompts one to act in a certain way is some mere impulse or inclination, one's action is not really free at all."[9] An action is not free if my motivation for the action is that I simply want to do it. In this respect, Hegel's views on freedom have their starting point with Kant. But, in what has come to be known as the empty formalism objection (*PR* §§133-5), Hegel also criticizes Kant's theory of freedom because he claims that it is unable to give freedom its rational content.[10] In other words, Kant's categorical imperative cannot provide us with the norms that a rationally self-determined agent must follow if she is to be free. Hegel, however, finds a way of specifying the rational content of freedom that he thinks Kant's theory lacks. For Hegel, the rational consists in the duties associated with participation in the life of a state, forming "a system of pure reason", and as rational, these duties constitute the content of freedom. To be free is to act in accordance with these duties. Hegel "holds that it is in these laws and institutions, and in them alone, that the individual can find a basis for the determination of his actions that is rational, and so in conformity with his essential nature, and that

[9] Schacht, *Hegel and After*, 76.
[10] Ibid. 78.

guarantees their independence of mere impulse and inclination."[11] Thus, on Schacht's reading, Hegel's account of freedom is, in a nutshell, as follows. Freedom involves self-determination, and since the essence of humans is to be rational, we are self-determined or follow our own law in so far as we act rationally. To act rationally is to determine one's actions according to rational norms, and these norms are the duties of the state or of ethical life as Hegel conceives of them in the *Philosophy of Right*.

So according to Schacht, Hegel thinks that a free act cannot be one that is done in pursuit of particular interests. Yet Schacht emphasizes that Hegel is not opposed to the pursuit of individual interests *per se*.

> It should be observed, however, that Hegel's state is not one in which the interests of the individual – even *qua* particular person – are sacrificed to interests of the state that are inimical to those of the individual… The state as Hegel conceives of it is so constituted that as a member of it, I both attain the rationality in my actions which renders them self-determined and therefore renders me free, *and* find my personal well-being secured and enhanced far beyond what would be possible in the absence of the state.[12]

Thus the state for Hegel serves the dual function of both ensuring that the freedom of the individual is secured, and providing an environment in which the individual is best able to pursue her own happiness. However, on Schacht's view free actions and actions in pursuit of particular desires belong to mutually exclusive categories. A self-interested action is never a free action, because, motivated as it is by an inclination particular to me, it is never one that is determined strictly by the universal norms of reason, and so does not involve self-determination. An action is either free or self-interested, but never both.

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[11] Ibid. 79.
[12] Ibid. 89. See also ibid. 91.

Schacht's Kantian account of Hegel's theory of freedom is open to criticism on a couple of fronts. The first shortcoming of this theory is that it does not allow for the agent to be reconciled with the content of her duty. If the agent is to be truly free in doing her duty, she must find herself *at home* in doing her duty and following its commands. For to be free for Hegel is to be rationally self-determined, and one is only *self*-determined if the content of these determinations is truly one's own. This requires that the commands of duty not be ones that are imposed on the agent from an alien source; in true freedom the commands of duty cannot be positive.

Now, on Hegel's view the agent is certainly not free if the source of her duties is nothing but the contingent commands of some external authority, e.g. the church. For in following these commands, the content of her actions comes not from herself, but from a source outside her, and, as such, her actions are not self-determined. But in his early writings Hegel alleges that the commands of the Kantian moral law are also positive. The law of an external authority comes from without, while the moral law comes from within, but in either case the content of the law is alien to the agent. As Hegel himself claims in "The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate", the only difference between these two cases is that in the one the agent has her master outside herself, while in the other she carries it within herself (*FS* 323/*ETW* 211). In the Kantian moral picture, the individual is divided within herself into a rational and a natural part, and the individual, *qua* particular, with her own interests, is subject to the universal commands of reason. The human is identified most intimately with the rational part, but no further account is given by Kant to show that these commands of reason are in some sense the particular individual's own. The agent has no reason to

follow the moral law above and beyond the fact that it is what reason dictates to the individual. In other words, Kant's theory of morality and freedom does not give an adequate explanation, in Hegel's mind at least, of *why* the agent ought to follow the law.

The weakness that I see in Schacht's interpretation is that it makes Hegel's view of freedom look too much like the Kantian theory that the young Hegel criticized for being positive.[13] In Schacht's reading of Hegel, the individual is free only in so far as she determines her actions according to an objective ethical order.[14] This objective ethical order is in principle no different than Kant's moral law. By seeking to conform her will to the ethical order, the individual has her master in this order, just like, as the young Hegel alleges, the Kantian moral agent has her master in the moral law. Schacht tries to meet this line of objection by pointing out that the ethical order is not alien to the agent, since humans are essentially rational, and by following the commands of the rational ethical order they are acting in a way that is self-determined.[15] But this explanation is not good enough, since it is one that could apply equally to Kant. Hegel agrees, of course, that the rational agent is self-determined when performing rational ethical duties, but his point is that the rationality

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[13] As far as I know, the mature Hegel does not raise the positivity objection against Kant. However, this need not mean that Hegel has changed his mind on this issue. The view of Kantian-style moral imperatives as being positive is still very much in keeping with the spirit of Hegel's mature thought. In his later works, Hegel repeatedly raises the empty formalism objection against Kant. Perhaps we can explain the absence of the positivity objection as follows: Hegel no longer labels the content of the Kantian moral law as positive, because he now maintains that the Kantian moral law does not have the content that Kant thinks it does.

[14] Schacht, *Hegel and After*, 93-4.

[15] Ibid. However, at another point, Schacht himself acknowledges the force of the positivity objection, stating that there is a sense in which the norms of freedom are not our own. Speaking of the free individual, he writes: "He cannot be said to have given the law of his actions to himself, since the law of his actions is determined by the nature of reason itself. But, like Spinoza's God, he is at least subject to no laws other than those of his own essential nature and therefore is self-determined. And this is the only form of freedom, in Hegel's view, that it is possible for man to enjoy." (ibid. 79-80)

of the ethical order needs to be demonstrated properly. It needs to be shown why these commands are rational, or why the rational agent ought to follow them. And, as more recent interpreters have suggested,[16] Hegel thinks that this can only be done by showing why following these commands is in the interests of the rational agent. This is what Hegel thinks Kant fails to do, and this is what Hegel in Schacht's account does not do.[17] A fully adequate account of Hegel's theory of rationality must provide a more robust explanation of the rationality of ethical duty than Schacht's does.

The second weakness of Schacht's account stems from his explanation of the relation between freedom and self-interest. According to Schacht, Hegel separates the free actions of a person from those actions in which she pursues her own happiness. The one type of action is presented as opposed to and exclusive of the other, and thus, in Schacht's interpretation, human desires and inclinations do not have a place for Hegel as part of our freedom. However, Hegel's claims in the *Philosophy of Right* indicate that the free agent not only *can* pursue her particular interests, but indeed that she *must* do so if she is to be free. "The right of individuals to their *particularity* is likewise contained in ethical substantiality, for particularity is the mode of outward appearance in which the ethical exists" (*PR* §154).[18] As the quote indicates, individuals have a right to their particularity, but a right for Hegel is also necessarily a duty (*PR* §155; *EG* §486). Hegel confirms explicitly that the possession of property is itself a duty:

> In the phenomenal range right and duty are *correlata*, at least in the sense that to a right on my part corresponds a duty in some one else. But, in the light of the concept, my right to a thing is not merely possession, but as possession by

[16] See my discussions of Patten and Wood below.
[17] See Patten, 1999, p. 193, note 31.
[18] See also PR §200R.

> a *person* it is *property*, or legal possession, and it is a *duty* to possess things as *property*, i.e. to be as a person. (*EG* §486R)

As a duty, the pursuit of particular interests falls within the system of duties that contributes to our freedom, and the pursuit of particularity is itself a part of that freedom. How an agent can act in pursuit of her subjective interests while remaining free is something that Schacht's account cannot explain.

Alan Patten has provided us with a more recent and developed version of the Kantian account, a version that addresses the two criticisms that we have just seen. According to Patten, freedom for Hegel involves two components: subjective and objective freedom. First, a free individual possesses subjective freedom, which requires that she exercise the capacity to make reflective decisions for herself and that she find some sort of subjective satisfaction in those decisions.[19] Second, a free individual must also be objectively free, i.e., the norms guiding her actions must be ones that are prescribed by reason, and thus are commands in which she, as a rational creature, finds herself at home.[20] In Patten's view an agent is only fully free for Hegel if she is free in both of these ways.[21] Like Schacht, Patten argues that an action is objectively free for Hegel only if the norm guiding the action is rational in the narrow sense.[22] It must be one that applies categorically to all rational agents regardless of their particular circumstances. Thus, for Patten the norms that one must follow to actualize one's objective freedom are not rules that help us to further our own particular interests. On the contrary, full freedom requires that one follow norms

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[19] Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, 35, 57.
[20] Ibid. 35.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid. 51-3.

that are unrelated to one's desires and inclinations, since these desires and inclinations can never be the ground that justifies an objectively free act.

In his interpretation Patten is able to respond to the first problem that I have attributed to Schacht's account, i.e., the problem of positivity. Here Patten employs a general strategy that is also adopted by other scholars.[23] In Patten's interpretation the agent does not simply find herself confronted by a set of alien commands or imperatives that she must follow. Rather, according to Patten the agent has a substantive reason why she ought to follow these duties, namely, that acting from duty plays an indispensable role in promoting her subjective freedom.[24] It does so by promoting "the capacities for reflection, analysis, and self-discipline, the sense of oneself as a free and independent agent,"[25] capacities that are required if one is to be subjectively free.[26] In Patten's view, to be fully free is to share in two goods, since, as we have seen, full freedom for Patten is bi-partite. First, the free individual enjoys the good of subjective freedom: she is an individual who has developed the capacities associated with agency and who lives her life making appropriate and rational decisions for herself. The second good that follows from full freedom is the good of

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[23] See my discussion of Wood below. See also Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism*, 109-10; and Westphal, "The basic context", 244, 247.

[24] Patten refers to his own account as a "a variant of the self-actualization interpretation". See Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, 11. In Patten's reading of Hegel, full actualization is achieved when individual "develop and exercise their capacities for free and rational agency" (ibid. 4). This means that individuals are actualized when they are *subjectively* free. The conception of self-actualization that Patten is working with is less developed when compared with that of Wood, for whom self-actualization is not just a matter of exercising rational agency, but of exercising it *in the right way*. Patten does not give an account of what "the right way" would involve, for example, in the case of the pursuit of one's particular desires that is a part of subjective freedom. I am inclined to agree with Pippin's claim in his review of *Hegel's Idea of Freedom* that "an appeal to self-actualization does not do much work in his book after the term is introduced." See Pippin, "Review of *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*", 562.

[25] Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, 37.

[26] Pippin also claims that rational norms are justified because they contribute to our free agency. See *Idealism as Modernism*, 109-10.

objective freedom when one sets aside one's particular interests and performs one's duties within the state. It is the good that results "in not accepting anything from outside on authority but in being able to endorse everything that purports to be a reason-for-action from the standpoint of one's own thought and reason."[27] Although in Patten's account the free agent enjoys two goods, the norms of ethical life are binding in his reading of Hegel's model only because they promote the first of these goods. Subjective freedom, the exercise of free rational agency, is the end that justifies all the duties associated with ethical life.[28] A rational agent ought to follow these duties because they are a necessary condition for promoting the subjective freedom or the capacities for rational agency that every rational agent necessarily values. Patten avoids the positivity problem because he proposes a clear reason why it is in the interests of the agent to follow the commands associated with a free life.

Here Patten's approach suggests a fundamental difference between Kant and Hegel's theories of practical reason. With the categorical imperative Kant provides the rational agent with norms that (a) make her free, and (b) are binding independently of whatever interests the agent happens to have, whether they be particular or more general. Our interests play no role in determining what our duties are, and nor can they be the sole or principle ground that motivates us to perform our duty. However, according to Kant, we can, indeed must, suppose that our own interests are furthered when we act out of duty. Kant claims that we are commanded to make the highest good possible in the world (*KpV* 206/136), and, as part of this highest good, we must assume that happiness is eventually given to us in proportion

[27] Ibid. 198.
[28] Ibid. 36.

to our moral worth (*KpV* 197/131). But although we can hope that by doing our duty we are furthering our own interests, we do not know exactly how or when our own interests will be served. For Kant the link between fulfilling our duty and furthering our interests is external, one that requires the existence of a God who is capable of awarding us with happiness in proportion to our virtue (*KpV* 197-8/131).

Hegel's theory of practical reason abandons this Kantian line, at least in part. Like Kant, Hegel accepts that the demands of duty cannot be justified merely because they appeal to the particular interests of the agent. For in this case the demands of duty would no longer be necessary, since they would be grounded in desires which are necessarily contingent. However, Hegel does think that our ethical duties can be justified if they play a necessary role in promoting a *universal* human interest, i.e., the universal interest of freedom. Our ends do have a role to play in determining our duty.[29] In Patten's interpretation, ethical norms are binding on us because we must follow them in order to be free. These norms are still necessary because, as Patten argues, freedom is itself a necessary goal for all rational agents.[30]

Hegel's approach suggests or presupposes that any binding practical norm, if it is to lead to freedom, must also clearly and directly satisfy in some way the interest of the agent. For it is only if the agent has an interest in following duty that she can identify the norm as her own and be at home in it. If the agent has no interest in performing a duty, then it can only be made into an obligation by imposing it upon the agent, but imposed norms are positive and are inconsistent with human freedom.

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[29] Cf. Westphal, "The basic context", 252: "If Hegel is right about this, then Kant's view that we must abstract from all ends, determine how to act solely on the formal requirement of the conformity of a maxim to universal lawfulness, and perform an act solely because it is a duty, is impossible (*cf.* §124).

Patten's explanation also contains a response to the second weakness of Schacht's account, although it is a response that is ultimately unsatisfactory. Patten has acknowledged that objective freedom and self-interest are mutually exclusive, but he reconciles freedom and the pursuit of self-interest in the case of subjective freedom, since one can be subjectively free while choosing to pursue one's own particular desires. In this case at least, Patten overcomes the divide between freedom and self-interest that is present in Schacht's account. One weakness of this solution is that it is at best only partial: it applies not to freedom as a whole but to only one element of full freedom. It forces us to accept that most of our actions are not fully free (e.g., our choice of whom to marry).[31] But more fundamentally, I believe that Patten does not accurately portray the nature of freedom for Hegel. Full freedom is not an aggregate of two separate types of freedom; subjective and objective freedom do not stand alongside each other as two independent goods. Freedom for Hegel does involve both a subjective and objective component, but each is merely a *moment* of the one true freedom, full or concrete freedom. Subjective freedom on its own is a form of decision making that is not constrained by any universal norms and that can take as its highest goal the rational pursuit of self-interest or happiness. As I will argue in the next chapter, conduct that is grounded by the pursuit of self-interest is for Hegel the very definition of evil.[32] Objective freedom on its own would be conduct in accordance with universal norms in which the agent need not recognize for herself that these norms ought to be followed. Objective freedom of this type is not freedom

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It is impossible because such an abstraction would leave us with no reason to act, because reasons for acting always concern ends."

[30] Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, 98.

[31] Ibid. 194-5.

at all but heteronomy. Since subjective freedom on its own is not what Hegel really means by freedom, Patten's theory does not show us here how freedom for Hegel can be reconciled with the pursuit of self-interest.

4C. Hegel and freedom: the non-Kantian reading

Allen Wood is one of several interpreters who think that Hegel's theory of freedom is more distinct from Kant's than a reading like Schacht's or Patten's would suggest.[33] Unlike those who defend the Kantian reading, Wood thinks that Hegel's theory allows for the possibility, the necessity even, of actions that are fully free and that are done in pursuit of particular desires.

> British idealist ethics (especially Bradley and Bosanquet) carried on the Fichtean tradition, identifying freedom with the triumph of the active or rational self over the supine, empirical, or irrational self. Because the British idealists are supposed to be "Hegelians," Hegel's name has sometimes been associated with such views in English-speaking philosophy. In fact, Hegel rejects this entire conception of autonomy along with the conception of self and other upon which it rests.[34]

Wood refers to Hegel's view as a self-actualization theory of freedom.[35] This means presumably that the free human being is one whose potential is fulfilled or actualized, and that the norms that a free individual ought to follow are those that promote and preserve the actualization of the self. Hegel's theory of freedom does not prescribe one fixed, universal definition of a fulfilled human being, and thus it leaves some room for each individual to have her own particular idea of what actualization involves for her. In contrast to Schacht, Wood holds that an action

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[32] See my discussion of evil in chapter 5, pp. 170-6.
[33] See Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism*, 124.
[34] Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 44.
[35] Wood, "Hegel's ethics", 217.

motivated by a particular desire is free for Hegel if it is grounded in a rational choice. Each individual has her own unique situation: she lives in a particular social and historical context, has her own personal history, her own preferences, projects, abilities, etc. This situation forms the backdrop for the decisions that the individual makes. A free rational choice is one that makes sense in the overall context in which the individual finds herself.

> A choice is absolutely free only when I am "with myself" in it. This requires that it be specifically characteristic of me, integrated reflectively into my other choices, and standing in a rational relation to my desires, traits, projects, and my total situation.[36]

For example, the choice to buy a bottle of wine is ordinarily a free choice for a person who is going to a party. Purchasing a bottle of wine in this situation normally makes sense. But buying a bottle of wine is not free when it is done for personal consumption by an alcoholic who is struggling to overcome his addiction. In his case, reason would dictate that given his own life objectives he ought not to purchase the wine, and so he acts unfreely. As this example illustrates, not all actions in pursuit of the fulfillment of a desire are free: rational choice is not merely prudential reasoning. What makes the choice rational and free is not merely whether it is what an individual ought to do to achieve any specific end whatsoever, even if the end is ultimately harmful to her, but whether it is what she ought to do to achieve an end that it is appropriate for her to pursue or that contributes to her actualization. On Wood's reading of Hegel, freedom is rational self-determination not in the narrow sense of rationality that Schacht attributes to it, nor is it rational in the widest possible sense of prudential reasoning, but is somewhere in between these two extremes.

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[36] Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 49.

Thus Wood's interpretation does not face the second problem that I attributed to Schacht's traditional reading. According to Wood, there is for Hegel no fundamental opposition between freedom and the pursuit of desire. Free actions and self-interested actions do not form mutually exclusive categories. Rather, one can be free when one's action is motivated by a desire, as long as the desire is of the right kind. In fact, Wood claims "that subjective freedom and particular self-satisfaction are the foundation of morality, and that ethical duties liberate us only because we fulfill our particularity through them."[37] However, in Wood's self-actualization reading not all of the agent's free actions will involve the pursuit of something that she wants. He claims, on the contrary, that acting out of duty irrespective of one's particular interests is a necessary part of being free. For Hegel these duties are the responsibilities associated with full participation in the ethical life of the community.

> Hegel's view is that individuals, as individuals, can be fully self-actualized and concretely free only if they are devoted to ends beyond their own individual welfare, indeed beyond anyone's individual welfare, to universal or collective ends, which are summed up in the rational organization of the state.[38]

Social duties are an indispensable component of self-actualization because without social roles and obligations, a human would find herself in a natural state at the mercy of immediate impulses. In this condition, "I could have neither a concrete self-image, nor a determinate plan of action, nor any confidence that what I think ought to happen actually will happen."[39] Having social roles is a condition for the possibility of a person having an identity that can be actualized in the first place, and a person assumes these roles and achieves self-actualization by fulfilling her ethical duties.

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[37] Ibid. 51.
[38] Wood, "Hegel's ethics", 230.

By claiming that ethical duty plays a necessary role for Hegel in the self-actualization of the individual, Wood also gives his theory the tools that it needs to overcome the problem of positivity, the first weakness of Schacht's reading. In Wood's account, as in Patten's, the norms of freedom are not positive, because by following these norms the agent promotes her own good. However, in Wood's case the nature of this good is different: it is not subjective freedom or the capacity for autonomous decision making, but the agent's own self-actualization.

> The rational state is an end in itself only because the highest stage of *individual* self-actualization consists in participating in the state and recognizing it as such an end. This means that Hegel's ethical theory is after all founded on a conception of individual human beings and their self-actualization… In that sense, Hegel's ethical thought is oriented to the individual, not the collective.[40]

Unlike Schacht's interpretation, in which the individual is free only by following a given set of commands, Wood explains why it is in the individual's own interest to act out of ethical duty, thus showing that the imperatives of reason are also the agent's own. Here the interests being promoted are not particular interests or desires, but what Wood's interpretation takes to be the individual's highest interest or good: freedom as self-actualization. It is an interest that requires that the individual not always be seeking to maximize her own self-interest or satisfy her particular desires, but that she be willing to sacrifice her own happiness at least part of the time.[41]

The weakness of Wood's account lies simply in the fact that it does not adequately explain Hegel's claim that freedom involves the overcoming of particularity. In the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel does not provide unequivocal

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[39] Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, 50.
[40] Ibid. 21.
[41] Wood, "Hegel's ethics", 226.

evidence that freedom requires the abandonment of one's particular interests, desires or inclinations.[42] But in the *Encyclopedia* he appears to make this claim: "As ethical life true freedom is this: that the will does not have subjective, i.e., self-seeking (*eigensüchtig*) content for its purposes, but rather universal content."(*EG* §469R)[43] The opposition between freedom and the pursuit of one's own particular interests is confirmed in the following passage from the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*:

> … the best, most perfect state is that in which the greatest freedom reigns, for it is the actualization of freedom. But with this still not much has been said, and it must be determined wherein rational freedom consists … That which offers itself first, is that one imagines freedom as subjective will or arbitrary choice (*Willkür*) … But we have already laid aside this principle of arbitrary choice, saying that the nature of the state is just the unity of the subjective and the universal will, so that individuals have raised themselves to universality. The subjective will is raised therein, such that it renounces its particularity (*Besonderheit*). (*VPW* 78)

Wood's interpretation needs to account for such evidence. It needs to show how freedom for Hegel can involve the actualization of my identity as a particular, even though Hegel indicates in the quotes above and elsewhere that in freedom our particularity must be abandoned.

In fact, the reason that both the Kantian and non-Kantian interpretations have trouble accounting for all of Hegel's claims about freedom is that Hegel's claims about freedom appear themselves to contradict each other. In some places, Hegel

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[42] Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, 51-53 provides several examples of passages in which Hegel indicates that freedom involves an opposition between reason and desire, and among them he includes one lengthy quote from the *PR* §187. Although it is the reference in the *Philosophy of Right* that comes closest to supporting the claim that Hegelian freedom involves abstracting from one's desires, I do not think that the passage needs to be read this way. In this quote, Hegel claims that liberation requires the opposing not of subjectivity in general, but of *mere* subjectivity; not of all desire, but of the *immediacy* of desire; and not of caprice in general (*Willkür*), but of the *arbitrariness* of caprice. Thus the passage leaves open the possibility that desire and caprice could be consistent with freedom in some form.

[43] See also *EG* §485.

indicates that to be free one cannot have self-seeking purposes, while in other places he seems to make the opposite claim, i.e., that to be free one must pursue one's own particularity. The Kantian interpretation takes the former claim as true, while the non-Kantian interpretation adheres to the latter. Any complete interpretation of Hegel's theory of freedom must somehow reconcile these two seemingly irreconcilable claims.

In the next part of the chapter I argue that these two claims can be reconciled if we assume that for Hegel the pursuit of particularity is a *moment* of freedom.[44] To be free is to lay aside concern for one's own particular being and to act in accordance with the universal norms of duty. However, it is one's duty, in turn, to be a particular or to develop one's self-interest, although always in ways that are consistent with freedom or with the end of duty.

4D. Hegel's concept of freedom as independence from the world

At the outset of this chapter I mentioned that there is strong disagreement over what freedom means for Hegel. Having examined a few important interpretations of Hegel's theory of freedom, we now see more clearly how this is the case. All agree that being free for Hegel involves being independent, rational or at home with oneself in some form, but each of these expressions can be understood in various ways, and so interpreters are left to answer the following question: for Hegel what does it mean ultimately for an individual to be free? This question can be approached in another way. According to Hegel, freedom and not happiness is the highest good or the highest value that a human can achieve. Why is freedom the highest good for Hegel

and what form does it assume? Wood's account suggests that freedom is the highest good as self-actualization. For Patten and Pippin freedom is ultimately rational autonomy, the capacity to make independent, informed choices for oneself. In my view, freedom for Hegel occurs, first and foremost, as the reconciliation of the individual with the universal. This reconciliation is the good, first, because it involves autonomous action, and in this respect my interpretation of Hegel's theory of freedom coincides with others that we have considered. However, in my interpretation, freedom for Hegel also involves a form of independence that has been overlooked thus far. Freedom is the good for Hegel not just because it involves autonomous action but because it offers the individual a way to confront the suffering that she encounters in the world. In the remainder of this chapter I will present an outline of what my account of Hegel's theory of freedom involves.

In our discussion thus far, we have seen two different interpretations of the way in which free action is rational. First, there are those like Wood and Pippin who claim that free action for Hegel is rational in the broad sense that I have defined, i.e., because it is done for a reason. Such a reason is universal in so far as it applies to all rational agents in the same circumstances, but free action on this account is not restricted to the pursuit of universal ends. An agent who pursues her own goals is rational and hence free if she does so with good reasons. Second, there are those like Schacht and Patten who maintain that a free action for Hegel must be rational in the narrow sense, i.e., it is rational not when the agent is trying to fulfill her own needs and wants, but when following imperatives of reason that are binding on her irrespective of her particular goals. I am proposing a third, even stronger

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[44] See my discussion of Hegel's concept of moment in chapter 5, pp. 201-2.

understanding of what rationality means in this context. A free agent is rational for Hegel in so far as she effects a complete break with her own particularity and a complete identification with the universal. In other words, being rational requires that the agent assume a fully objective standpoint, and this in turn requires that she not only subordinate her desires when this is demanded by ethical norms, but that she disassociate or distance herself from all the particular wants and needs with which she finds herself. The agent's break with her particularity is thoroughgoing rather than selective and occasional.

This radical disassociation of the individual from her personal pursuits is what I have referred to as the "overcoming of particularity". It remains for me to show that freedom for Hegel does indeed involve a type of self-renunciation on this scale. We have seen that the overcoming of particularity is an essential element of the cultus, but it is also a theme that thoroughly pervades his work in the Berlin period. As one might expect, the restriction of subjectivity is a central part of Hegel's philosophy of religion as a whole. In the following quote from his inaugural speech at the University of Berlin, Hegel indicates that it is an essential element of what it means to practice religion.

> Religion is *my* affair; I am in it personally as a '*this'*, but *I ought* to be in it, *according to my very essence*. I ought not to assert my particularity in it, but rather to place myself above it, *to be beyond it*, [or] to abstract [from it]. I ought to conduct myself in religion *objectively*. It is precisely my objective being [*Sein*]. If I eat, drink, am directed generally towards purposes of my particularity, then I *am*, exist, *live*, feel, am conscious of myself only as a *particular*. Religious feeling and life is just that – the higher life. (*BS* 13)[45]

[45] See also: *VR*$_{24}$ 1: 206/302; *VR*$_{27}$ 1: 63/151, 79/170; *VPW* 77; *BS* 15-6.

The removal of particularity plays a role in religious faith,[46] love[47] and wisdom.[48] But self-renunciation also plays a part for Hegel in art,[49] and, as we saw earlier, it is an integral aspect of education,[50] philosophy[51] and ethical life.[52]

There is also plenty of textual evidence suggesting that the agent must rise above her subjective interests and embrace universal thinking if she is to be free. One of the most important discussions of freedom in Hegel's work occurs in the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*. Having finally reached his analysis of the complete form of freedom in §21, Hegel writes the following in the remark:

> the will which *has being in and for itself* has as its object the will itself as such, and hence itself in its pure universality. This universality is such that the *immediacy* of the natural and the *particularity* [*Partikularität*] with which the natural is likewise invested when it is produced by reflection are superseded within it. But this process whereby the particular is superseded and raised to the universal is what is called the activity of *thought*. (*PR* §21R)

Elsewhere Hegel tells us clearly that the capacity to give up one's particular interests is an integral part of freedom.

> Since man alone – as distinct from the animals – is a thinking being, he alone possesses freedom, and he possesses it solely by virtue of his ability to think. Consciousness of freedom consists in the fact that the individual comprehends himself as a person, i.e. that he sees himself in his distinct existence as inherently universal, *as capable of abstraction from and renunciation of everything particular*, and therefore as inherently infinite. (*VG* 175/144, my italics)

Moreover, in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel indicates that the transcending of particularity is a necessary element in the freedom afforded to us by religion.

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[46] VR_{21} 1: 152/243; VR_{24} 1: 248/348.
[47] VR_{21} 3: 60/125, 75/139.
[48] VR_{27} 2: 435/538.
[49] VR_{27} 2: 527-8/634; *VPW* 77; *VPK* 15.
[50] See chapter 3, p. 118.
[51] See chapter 3, pp. 119-20.

> I must be the particular subjectivity that has indeed been sublated; hence I must recognize something *objective*, which is actual being in and for itself, which does indeed count as true for me, which is recognized as the affirmative posited for me; something in which I am negated as this I, but in which at the same time I am contained as free and by which my freedom is maintained. This implies that I am determined and maintained as universal, and I only count for myself as universal generally. But this is now none other than the standpoint of *thinking reason* [*denkende Vernunft*] generally, and *religion itself* is this activity, it is thinking reason in its activity. (VR_{24} 1: 206/302)[53]

If one wants to resist my suggestion that freedom for Hegel involves a thoroughgoing break with particularity, there are perhaps ways of explaining Hegel's emphasis on self-denial in the quotes and references that I have listed above. Both of the other views of rationality require the capacity for some level of self-denial, since both acknowledge that freedom in some instances involves following universal norms, and so both can point to the fact that freedom requires the capacity for self-denial whenever the individual's interests conflict immediately with her duty. For example, her duty to follow her conscience may inhibit her in a particular situation from acquiring something that she wants. If she is to follow her duty and be free, she must be capable of resisting or controlling her desire to acquire this object. Furthermore, in the case of those like Wood who hold that free actions can include the pursuit of particular personal desires, these commentators can point to the fact that control of one's natural side is a necessary condition for any form of rational choice or deliberation. All agree that free actions for Hegel cannot be ones that are *immediately* determined by our inclinations, since an action can only be autonomous if it has been reflected upon, and actions that are immediately determined by inclination involve no such reflection. To deliberate on a host of possible personal

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[52] See chapter 3, p. 101.

goals, the individual must be able to stand back and consider the various things that she desires, and this in turn implies that she is capable of self-control or of opposing the influence of immediate inclination.

Whether the agent is controlling her natural side in order to pursue a universal duty or a particular interest, the nature of the self-denial in either case is essentially the same: it is the capacity to resist or control one's desires whenever this is required. When we control our inclination in this way, we do not give it free reign, but are capable of subordinating these interests to the pursuit of higher goals like freedom or happiness. However, for this approach, the demands that our particular desires make on us can be viewed, *ceteris paribus*, as legitimate ones. As long as they do not conflict with a higher good – with the pursuit of self-actualization, autonomy or even happiness – they are goals that the free agent can consistently pursue *for their own sake*. The satisfaction of my specific wants is a good that stands alongside the good of freedom, one that is perhaps not as important as the latter good but nonetheless has value on its own.

When I state that freedom for Hegel involves the "overcoming of particularity", I am claiming that freedom requires something more than self-control. As I mentioned earlier, it demands a form of complete renunciation of one's particular goals and desires, a break with one's natural self that is more typical of religious than political life. To explain what I mean, we need first to be clear on the meaning of a few expressions that I am employing. A purpose is particular if the object of this purpose is one that *I want*, either for itself or as a means to another end that I want.

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[53] See also: *VR*$_{21}$ 3: 45/109; *VR*$_{24}$ 1: 243/342, 262-3/362; *VR*$_{24}$ 3: 154/223, 165/235; *VR*$_{27}$ 2: 423/525-6, 516/623, 527-8/634; *VPR* 19; *VPW* 501, 519.

The object of a particular desire can be either basic (e.g., the desire for food) or sophisticated (e.g., the desire to pursue a specific career); it can be either purely self-centred (e.g., the desire for fame) or focussed on the well-being of others (e.g., the desire for peace in the world). A purpose is universal if it is one that is demanded by universal reason, irrespective of my particular wants and desires. A purpose can be (a) purely particular if I do it simply because I want to do it, (b) purely universal if it is demanded by the universal and I do not want to do it, or (c) both particular and universal if I both ought to do it and want to do it.

Being attached to the object of a desire can mean simply refusing to give it up. But there is a second, more subtle understanding of attachment that is relevant here. To be attached in this second sense is to treat the desire as one that ideally ought to be fulfilled simply because I want it to be fulfilled. In other words, my wanting the object of the desire is for me *ceteris paribus* a sufficient ground for thinking that it ought to be fulfilled. Unlike the first sense of attachment, one can be attached to an object in this second sense while being willing to give it up. For example, I may think a desire ought to be pursued but not pursue it because I decide that this would compromise my overall happiness, or because doing so would be inconsistent with the fulfillment of a moral duty. If a view of freedom condones the second type of attachment, it is apt to accept that a necessary element in the good life is that individuals, to at least some degree, get what they want. This does not meant that it accepts that it is good for every desire to be fulfilled, but that, all other things being equal, it is itself a good when the needs and desires of individual are fulfilled, e.g.,

when this fulfillment increases, or at least does not hinder, overall happiness and when it does not conflict with moral duty.

In contrast, if I overcome my particular desires and assume a universal objective standpoint, I take the position that the existence of these desires does not count as a sufficient reason *on its own* for claiming that they ought to be fulfilled. When I overcome a particular desire, this need not mean that I will not pursue it in the end. I may decide for other reasons that it is the best course of action. However, my wants or needs *in and of themselves* carry no force when determining what I ought to do. For the individual who has overcome her particularity, the good life need not be, or is not automatically, one in which humans are happy, since the fulfillment of desires is not a final good. For one who believes that freedom involves the overcoming of particularity, the satisfaction of particular desires is not a good on its own, not even a lesser good standing alongside the highest good of freedom. On the contrary, to hold onto the independent value of one's particular desires is to inhibit one's freedom, since doing so inhibits one's full identification with the universal objective standpoint that for Hegel is integral to freedom.

If we consider the language that Hegel uses in the quotes and references that I give above,[54] they suggest strongly that freedom for Hegel requires not just the discipline to resist certain inclinations but a complete break with one's particularity. If I am free, I "belong to self without seeking for self" (*VR*$_{21}$ 3: 45/109), and "I am negated as this 'I'" (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 206/302). My particularity is sublated (*PR* §21; *VR*$_{24}$ 3: 165/235), discarded (*VR*$_{24}$ 1: 243/342) or given up (*VPW* 501). Further support for my interpretation of freedom is to be found in my next chapter, in which I show that

freedom involves the complete overcoming of particularity. In the 1827 version of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, the conceptual starting point of Christianity is the reality of human evil. According to Hegel, humans are evil when they pursue their own particular objectives: selfishness or the pursuit of subjective aims for their own sake is what ought not to be. Thus human evil is what ought to be transcended and this transcending occurs in a complete way in the cultus. Since for Hegel the most genuine form of Christian cultus is ethical life, and since participation in ethical life is the highest form of freedom, I will argue that full freedom involves the overcoming of particularity, an overcoming in which the individual rejects the importance of pursuing personal aims for their own sake and assumes the perspective of the universal.

But even if we accept that this is what Hegel's vision of freedom is, we must still explain why Hegel considers this to be freedom. What is it about this kind of rationality that makes the individual free? Having adopted this rational, universal standpoint, a person is free because she is independent in both an active and a passive sense. First, she is free when she acts. Here freedom is the autonomy that is present when one acts in accordance with universal norms, norms that as rational are ones that the person is at home with or are her own. As we have seen, this facet of Hegel's concept of freedom is widely recognized in the secondary literature. However, freedom for Hegel also involves what one might call passive independence, i.e., independence that is maintained when one is acted upon or when one is subject to circumstances that are beyond one's control. When she has overcome her particularity, a person is free in the passive sense because she is able to transcend or

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[54] See note 53 immediately above.

rise above the negative effects or the suffering that are a part of life. This transcendence of suffering is not complete or one-sided; although she is free, pain is still a reality that she is familiar with. However, the free person is liberated from her suffering to the extent that she is able to maintain a feeling of peace and self-harmony in spite of whatever may happen to her. She gains a sense of independence in her dealings with the world because her sense of well-being is ultimately not subject to the whims of fate but lies within her own control. Thus thinking reason is also freedom because it provides a type of response to the problem of suffering in our lives.

In Hegel's work, freedom as transcendence of the world occurs in two forms: abstract freedom and concrete freedom. We see abstract freedom, for example, in the Greek cultus as Hegel presents it in the section on determinate religion in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. According to Hegel, freedom arises for the Greeks in their complete acceptance of necessity or fate. In the Greek worldview, all mortals and even the gods are subject to fate, a force of the universe that has often brought suffering and loss to humans. Unlike the influence of Christian providence in the world, the workings of fate are blind or unintelligible to those who are affected by it (VR_{27} 2: 543/651). In other words, the Greeks were not able to see any good reason for the suffering that they were exposed to in life. Yet the Greeks were able to achieve freedom by giving up their particular expectations, and by simply putting up with their lot.

> But there is still one form of freedom that is at least present, and that is on the side of [finite] disposition. In having this conviction regarding necessity, the Greek achieves inner peace in saying: It is this way and there is nothing to be done about it; I must be content with it. This implies that I *am* content with it

> and thus that freedom is present after all, in that it is my own state. This conviction implies that human beings are confronted by this simple necessity. In adopting this standpoint and saying "It is this way," one has set aside everything particular, one has renounced it and abstracted from all particular goals and interests. (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 543/652)[55]

With abstract freedom the individual establishes independence from the world because she has let go of her particularity and thus has become free or detached from absolute concern with this particularity. If the individual is able to view her particular needs and wants as no longer important in themselves, she is no longer affected in the same way when these needs are not met. When faced with loss, the Greek is still sad, in the way, for example, that Achilles is sad over his death that is soon to come, but this sadness is not to be confused with discontent (*Verdruss/Verdriesslichkeit*), which Hegel identifies as a "contemporary feeling" (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 381/481). One is discontented with one's situation in life only when one assumes that this situation is not as it ought to be. In contrast, the Greek in his pure sorrow accepts his situation.

> [T]heir sorrow is a resigned sorrow. It is grief pure and simple, and therefore it has this serenity within it; no absolute purpose is lost to the individual subjects; even in their grief they remain at home, and what has not been fulfilled can be renounced. Things are as they are, so they withdraw into abstraction and do not set their being up against this. (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 382/482)

Hegel also sees freedom as transcendence of the world in the Stoic way of life. In this case as well, freedom arises because the Stoic is able to disassociate himself from his particular claims on the world and so is not overcome by dissatisfaction when these claims are not met.[56] The Stoic is called to act in accordance with reason, but here reason is conceived of abstractly (*VGP* 3: 111/2: 274). For the Stoic, to act in accordance with reason is to renounce everything, or to make oneself indifferent

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[55] See also *VR*$_{24}$ 2: 381-2/481-2.
[56] I also discuss Stoicism in chapter 5, pp.176-7.

toward "every particular enjoyment, inclination, passion, and interest" (*VGP* 3: 112/2: 274). In so doing, the Stoic identifies with himself solely as abstract thinking or reason and disowns all his particularity, his drives and desires that arise within his consciousness. "In this lies the strength, the inner independence, the inward freedom of spirit and character that is the hallmark of the Stoics" (*VGP* 3: 112/2: 274). As with the Greeks, the abstract freedom of the Stoics is a form of independence from the natural and from suffering. According to Hegel, the Stoic does not eliminate suffering; pain is something that he continues to feel (*VGP* 3: 114/2: 276). However, there is a sense in which the Stoic does succeed in transcending or overcoming suffering, since by renouncing his personal desires and by identifying with himself as abstract reason he is able to maintain his own self-identity or his own inner harmony regardless of what he suffers in the world (*VGP* 3: 114/2: 276). Because suffering cannot deprive the Stoic of his freedom or his independence, it is for him not an evil (*Übel*) (*VGP* 3: 114/2: 276). Pain is for him still a reality, but he maintains his happiness (*Glückseligkeit*) in spite of the pain, since he continues to have the feeling of harmony with himself (*VGP* 3: 112/2: 274).

In Hegel's analysis of Greek and Stoic abstract freedom, we see that the concept of freedom as transcendence of the world is not foreign to Hegel. Moreover, unlike in his discussion of negative freedom in §5 of the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel here views the abstract freedom of the Greeks and Stoics as something that is incomplete but that is still positive or still works. In the Greek attitude of resignation "all dissatisfaction and vexation are removed" (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 544/652), and the Stoic conception of freedom is praised by Hegel as what is great in their philosophy (*VGP*

3: 114/2: 276). This shows that Hegel is open to this idea of freedom, not necessarily in the form in which it appears among the Greeks and Stoics, but in another more sophisticated guise. Hegel also associates this attitude of acceptance with Christianity in a remarkable passage from the *Science of Logic* in which he discusses Kant's reply to the ontological argument:

> The reference back from *particular finite* being to being as such in its wholly abstract universality is to be regarded not only as the very first theoretical demand but as the very first practical demand too. When for example a fuss is made about the hundred dollars, that it does make a difference to the state of my fortune whether I *have* them or *not*, still more whether *I* am or not, or whether something else is or is not, then – not to mention that there will be fortunes to which such possession of a hundred dollars will be a matter of indifference – we can remind ourselves that man has a duty to rise to that abstract universality of mood in which he is indeed indifferent to the existence or non-existence of the hundred dollars, whatever may be their quantitative relation to his fortune, just as it ought to be a matter of indifference to him whether he is or is not, that is, in finite life (for a state, a determinate being is meant), and so on – *si fractus illabatur orbis, impavidum ferient ruinae* was said by a Roman, and still more ought the Christian to possess this indifference. (*WL* 1: 91/89)

In the following passage from an addition to the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel goes even further, stating that if we are to be free we must accept the unfavourable aspects of life:

> [W]e can add one more comment on how important it is that everyone should interpret whatever happens to him in the spirit of the old proverb that says, "Everyone is the smith who forges his own fortune." What this means, in general, is that man has the enjoyment only of himself. The opposite view is the one where we shift the blame for what befalls us onto other people, onto unfavourable circumstances, and the like. But that is just the standpoint of unfreedom once more, and the source of discontent as well. By contrast, when we recognize that whatever happens to us is only an evolution of our own selves, and that we carry only the burden of our own debts, we behave as free men, and whatever may befall us, we keep the firm faith that nothing unjust can happen to us. People who live in discord with themselves and their lot get involved in much that is wrong and awry, precisely because of the false opinion that injustice has been done to them by others. Now, certainly, there is much that is contingent in what happens to us. But this contingency is

> grounded in the natural dimension of man. And, since we also have the consciousness of our freedom, the harmony of our souls and our peace of mind will not be destroyed by the misfortunes that befall us. (*EL* §147A)

In his discussion of the concept of spirit at the outset of the third volume of the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel indicates that the ability to bear pain is not limited strictly to ancient forms of freedom, but is a feature of freedom in general. For Hegel, the formal determination of spirit is freedom, and in this determination spirit is able to "withdraw [*abstrahieren*] itself from everything external and from its own externality, its very existence [*Dasein*]" (*EG* §382). He then goes on to explain that spirit "can thus submit to infinite *pain*, the negation of its individual immediacy: in other words, it can keep itself affirmative in this negativity and possess its own identity" (*EG* §382). This formal determination is not unique to the abstract freedom of the Greeks and Stoics, but is the foundation of freedom in both of its forms.[57] We have seen that in abstract freedom the agent renounces her particular wants and needs, and identifies herself solely with pure empty thinking or the pure 'I'. In concrete freedom, the individual still identifies herself as the universal, but this universality is concrete. She does not ultimately reject her particularity but sees it as a moment of her being as a universal.

In concrete freedom pain is borne differently than it is in abstract freedom. "In abstract freedom I am able to sublate all content, all determinateness in me; in concrete freedom I in my determinateness – restriction, negation – am only at home with myself [*bei mir*]; I annihilate the other." (*VPG* 14). In abstract freedom one responds to pain by renouncing desire, but in concrete freedom, the higher form of freedom that Hegel associates with Christianity, the individual deals with pain by

recognizing that the otherness of pain is not an absolute otherness and by affirming a sense of self-identity in spite of the pain. As part of his explanation of how concrete spirit is able to endure suffering, Hegel compares how negation affects both the natural and the spiritual. When certain properties of a natural object undergo negation, the object is changed or transformed completely; it is no longer what it was. To take Hegel's example, if gold no longer had its specific weight, it would no longer be gold (*EG* §382A). Spirit, however, is able to undergo the negation of its particularity without being fundamentally altered. It "has power to preserve itself in contradiction, and, therefore, in pain; power over evil [*Böse*], as well as over misfortune [*Übel*]." (*EG* §382A). In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel explains this peculiar feature of spirit in more detail:

> Pain belongs only to the living. It is a negative, and in this negative we nonetheless preserve ourselves. This is the contradiction. Self-feeling is the affirmative, that which, if it is negated, does not disappear as is the case with the natural, but rather here the contradiction as such comes to light. In injury or annulment [*Aufhebung*] of my self-feeling, my self-feeling is still there in it. In spirit, one's negation is subordinated to one's affirmation, the unity with oneself. This is the determination [*Bestimmung*] of freedom in general. (*VPG*, 14)

Pain is a type of negation unlike the negation that affects physical objects. It is not a negation of consciousness as a whole, but a negation that falls within consciousness as a moment, and thus it does not destroy spirit's own identity with itself. By recognizing that it maintains its own identity in pain, concrete spirit is in a position to come to terms with it. It does so not by trying to eradicate or flee this pain, but by recognizing pain for what it is, i.e., merely an object of consciousness, one whose otherness can be "annihilated" through acceptance. Pain and suffering are themselves

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[57] At *VPG* 13-4, Hegel confirms that concrete freedom involves the capacity to bear pain.

determinations of spirit, and so spirit can find itself at home with them. Pain ultimately does not, or need not, disturb the identity of spirit with itself.

When she accepts her suffering, a person is able to liberate herself from her suffering at least in part. On the one hand, by accepting her suffering, she does not expect it to go away, and she does not wish or demand that her situation were otherwise. Acceptance of pain is not an attempt to flee from pain or to disassociate oneself from it. On the contrary, this acceptance requires a full openness to the pain's reality. However, on the other hand, there is a sense in which this acceptance also reduces the person's suffering. Suffering has both a subjective and an objective component. The objective component of pain is the pain as it is given, the phenomenon of the pain itself, e.g., the feelings that arise from the loss of someone dear. But the subjective reaction of a person to suffering can also add to her suffering. A person who suffers and is discontented about her suffering suffers more than she would if she were able to accept her suffering. In the latter case, the objective suffering itself is still present, but the suffering that arises from one's reaction is either eliminated or diminished. Thus, the acceptance of suffering is, in this partial sense at least, a way of freeing oneself from suffering.

But, more importantly, concrete freedom is not just relief from suffering, but a way of achieving independence from the world. As natural or physical beings that exist in the world, we are at the mercy of forces and circumstances that are beyond our control. Our happiness or the adequate satisfaction of our needs and desires is not something that we can guarantee for ourselves, and to the extent that we remain attached to our happiness, we are dependent on the world for something that it may

not deliver. However, when we are able to accept the pain that we happen to suffer and that we cannot remedy, we establish a certain independence vis-à-vis the world. By accepting our particular situation we maintain peace in our lives, since there is nothing that the world can do to make us resentful about our situation. Our suffering may make us sad, but it cannot disturb this peace by forcing us to be discontented.

In my account of freedom as a form of transcendence of the world, concrete freedom requires the overcoming of particularity because it is by making a break with my particularity that I am able to adopt the universal standpoint from which I can bear pain. We have seen that there is strong textual evidence indicating that Hegel advocates this kind of radical self-renunciation. However, we have also seen that the pursuit of particular interests plays an important role in freedom. Moreover, there is also significant evidence, particularly in the *Philosophy of Right*, that Hegel places value on the individual's particularity more generally. For Hegel ethical life, or the life of freedom presented in the *Philosophy of Right*, is a worldly life, one in which citizens are at liberty and encouraged to develop as particular individuals. It is a life that involves the acquisition of property, marriage, freedom to pursue the career of one's choice, etc. Whole segments of ethical life, in particular civil society, require that citizens act as individuals pursuing their own particular goals. Moreover, in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel affirms the value of worldly life in response to the Catholic social ideal of holiness.[58] Rejecting Catholic virtues that demand that one quash one's own particular desires, Hegel promotes social activities in which these desires play a vital role. For example, he opts for married life over celibacy, and the acquisition of wealth over voluntary poverty. Even in his own

personal life we see that Hegel values the fulfillment of personal goals and wants, or at the very least, does not see them as harmful. A lover of beer, wine and card games, Hegel himself was far from being an ascetic and shows no trace of the guilt that might arise from the enjoyment of worldly fruits.[59] All of this evidence suggests that Hegel accepts and even promotes the pursuit of personal goals and wants, and this does not seem to fit well with his view that the free individual must transcend her personal desires. These two conflicting bodies of evidence need to be reconciled with each other.

The solution to this apparent dilemma is to be found in Hegel's conception of the concrete universal. We have seen already that Hegel acknowledges two forms of freedom, and with each is associated a different form of universality. With abstract freedom the individual is the abstract or pure universal, having abandoned or negated all of her personal desires. But in concrete freedom the universality is concrete: the individual identifies with the universal or the truth, but remains at the same time a particular individual with her own wants and needs. In concrete freedom these subjective wants and needs are consistent with this universality and with the freedom that arises from the universal standpoint because they are a moment of the universal itself. In other words, the most complete form of identity with the universal also necessarily entails being a particular individual and pursuing particular aims. In theory at least, achieving this concrete freedom is a two-step process. First, the individual renounces the pursuit of particular ends *for their own sake* or acknowledges that *in and of themselves* her wants have no value. In so doing, she is effectively

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[58] See *BS* 45-51; *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 264-5/341-2; *VR*$_{31}$ 1: 343/455-6, 361-2/473.

accepting that a life of mere happiness is not the good life. Having abandoned selfishness in a radical way, the individual dedicates herself whole-heartedly to adopting a universal standpoint, i.e., living according to the truth and following its norms. But in the second step the universal then gives particularity back to the individual. It is part of the life of universal reason itself that she be a particular and that she function in the world as a particular. This is one of Christianity's most important lessons: that particularity is not opposed to the universal but is rather an expression of the universal or part of the universal as an organic whole. Thus the pursuit of particularity is legitimate for Hegel because it has its ground in the universal.[60]

Thus both sides of the dilemma can be reconciled with each other. On the one hand, the agent is required to identify fully with the universal, and doing so requires the overcoming of particularity. But unlike with abstract freedom, this does not mean that she has to completely eliminate all desire. For, on the other hand, particularity is valued by Hegel in so much as it is grounded in, and a moment of, the universal. The pursuit of particular desires is good because it is part of what it means to be a universal.

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[59] Pinkard, *Hegel*, 248, states that playing cards was "a lifelong source of satisfaction for Hegel" and that Hegel had a "passion for good eating and drinking."

[60] How closely does Hegel think that the pursuit of particularity needs to be regulated by universal norms? In a passage from the *VGP*, he gives the impression that individuals have a lot of room to pursue particularity as they see fit. His comment appears in his section on the Cynics, who adopted an austere approach to life. Hegel states: "We can declaim against luxury in a moralizing fashion, but in cultured circumstances all the abilities, tendencies, and modalities that belong to human life must have full rein – it must be possible to indulge them and for individuals to pursue them as far as they wish – provided only that they be directed on the whole by universal factors. The main criterion is to attach no greater value to such things than is called for, or to attach no value to them whatever, whether it be to possessing them or to renouncing them." (*VGP* 2: 180-1/2: 174)

On what grounds does Hegel claim that the individual as a universal must express herself as a particular? My answer employs a line of argument similar to the one we have already seen used by Wood and Patten. As a universal, the individual must also be a particular because it is only by being a particular in ethical life, i.e. an individual who seeks to fulfill certain personal desires, that she creates an environment in which humans can be free. As Wood and Patten have argued, the norms of reason or the duties of ethical life are not just positive norms imposed on humans but are justified because they are conditions for the possibility of my freedom. For Hegel these norms are binding on the rational agent because (a) the promotion of her own freedom is the universal goal that is necessary for all rational agents, and (b) following these norms is necessary if the goal of freedom is to be achieved.

However, as we have seen, the freedom promoted by ethical life is in my view different than that suggested by Wood or Patten. The freedom that results from ethical life is concrete freedom. On the one hand, it is a life in which the individual identifies with the universal, enjoys this identity with the truth and as a universal is able to bear the ills that befall her. But this freedom manifests itself as ethical life. To be free is to engage in ethical life as a particular subject, one who pursues her own wants but does so always to the extent that this pursuit contributes to the life of the concrete universal. Thus ethical life is both means and end. Participation in ethical life is both the condition required for being free and the free life itself. In the end, the pursuit of particularity is for Hegel neither a good in itself, but nor is it merely an instrumental good, a means for achieving freedom. As a moment of the life of

freedom, it is itself part of what has infinite value, but its value always stems solely from its place in this whole.

Chapter 5: Christianity as the religion of freedom

In chapter 4 we saw that full freedom for Hegel is concrete freedom. An agent is concretely free if she overcomes her particularity and identifies with the universal standpoint. But unlike with abstract freedom, the particularity of someone who is concretely free is not eliminated but is preserved as a moment of the universal. The concretely free individual continues to pursue her desires and to develop herself as a particular, but only to the extent that these activities are demanded or legitimated by the universal standpoint.

My objective in chapter 5 is to show that Christianity as it is presented by Hegel in the 1827 version of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is the "religion of freedom" (*VR*$_{21}$ 3: 5/65; *VR*$_{24}$ 3: 106/171, 108/173). In other words, I argue that the role of Christianity as Hegel conceives of it is to make us free. Hegel's discussion of Christianity in the third part of these lectures is itself divided into three moments. The first is the idea of God in and for itself, where Hegel focuses on the concept of God that appears in Christianity, namely God as trinity. But strictly speaking, Christianity as a concrete religion does not appear in the lectures until we reach the second of the three moments, and this is where I begin my analysis. Although the basic schema that structures Hegel's presentation of Christianity is that of the three moments of God (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 196-8/271-3), the second and third stages of this presentation also provide a developmental account of Christianity, discussing the historical conditions out of which Christianity arose, the life of Christ, the early church and the development of Christian culture in Europe up until Hegel's own day.

As I will show, this development is essentially the process in which Christianity, as a way of understanding God and our own human nature, advances the cause of human freedom.[1]

Hegel begins his presentation of Christianity's development by discussing the basic need that Christianity is intended to address. For Hegel, this need is the evil that belongs to humans when they are in their undeveloped or natural state. Humans in this natural state are evil because they have not identified with the universal but act as particulars; their will is guided not by universal norms but by particular desires. To this extent, humans in the natural state are not just evil but also unfree. According to Hegel, Christianity arises in response to the shortcomings of two cultures – Judaism and Roman culture – that struggle to address problems posed by humanity's natural existence. Each of these cultures recognizes in its own way that humans ought not to remain in a natural state, but each falls short in its attempt to overcome humanity's natural side. Hegel shows in detail how Christianity eventually succeeds where these cultures failed, and how it finally allows humans to achieve full concrete freedom by participating in modern Protestant ethical life.

5A. Human evil and the need for Christianity

Hegel's analysis of the historical development of Christianity begins when he considers the need for truth as it appears in the finite element or in the world of finite spirit (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 218-9/293-5). For Hegel there is a need for the truth of Christianity

[1] Jaeschke makes the following claim about Hegel: "And the only reason why Christianity is of systematic interest to him, after all the critical utterances of his early writings, is that later as he elaborates his system, he finds preformed in it what is, according to his philosophy, the highest idea, that of the freedom of self-consciousness." See Jaeschke, "Philosophical Theology", 13.

because humans are by nature evil. Here Hegel is taking sides on a topic that received a lot of attention in his time, and, as Hegel himself admits, the view that he defends runs counter to the received wisdom of his day (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 221/296). Before we consider Hegel's presentation of the debate, it is important first to clarify what Hegel's expression "by nature" [*von Natur*] means when he speaks of humans as being either good or evil by nature. The more obvious interpretation of the term "nature" in this context is that it is synonymous with "essence". On this reading, the topic of the debate then becomes whether human nature is *essentially* good or evil, and when Hegel claims that humans are evil by nature, he is stating that evil is a necessary part of human nature. Hegel does have this interpretation of 'nature' in mind at certain points in his discussion of human good and evil,[2] but in his presentation of the debate Hegel seems also to intend a different meaning of the expression "by nature", and it is this meaning that indicates what is really at issue for Hegel in the debate. The main question for Hegel is whether humans are good or evil *in their natural or original state*, i.e., in their state of immediacy (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 221/297).

The Romantic view, one held by some of Hegel's philosophical opponents, is that humans were, like Adam and Eve, originally in a state of innocence, and as such were indeed good.[3] In the state of innocence humans were not yet selfish individuals, since both their hearts and minds were in perfect harmony with nature and with God. In this harmony or state of immediate unity, both nature and God were known to humans directly in intuition as they are in themselves. The first humans "knew God

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[2] We see this meaning, for example, in the following passage: "The first is that *humanity is by nature good*. Its universal, substantial essence is good" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 220/296).

[3] In discussing this view Hegel likely had Schelling and Schlegel in mind as its proponents. See *VR*$_{24}$ 2: 241, n. 27, in the English translation.

as God is" and "beheld the inner being of nature itself" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 420/522). With the development of human thinking and individuality in history, a rift occurred between the human subject and nature, and the original unity was lost. Our ancestors had been expelled from the garden of paradise. For the Romantics these developments are strictly negative. Humanity's original or natural state, its original form of religion, was the best one, and all later religions are only degenerate versions of it. As a result, the Romantic ideal involves some sort of a return to the original unity with nature and with God.

Hegel does seem to acknowledge that something like the state of innocence did exist, and, in the case of primitive societies, continues to exist (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 422/524).[4] However, Hegel challenges the Romantic conception of what the state of nature involves, rejecting the view that humans were ever in a state of complete unity with nature or a state of pure immediacy. His point seems to be essentialist rather than empirical. For Hegel humans are distinguished from animals by their ability to think. Thinking is a necessary feature of what it means to be human; humans are essentially spiritual beings. And to the extent that they think or to the extent that they are self-conscious, humans are necessarily divided from nature as subject is divided from object.

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[4] For Hegel the less developed that human consciousness is, the more it is animal-like and the more it functions on instinct. With instinct "animals or human beings in the natural state see into the heart of natural things and grasp their specific quality more correctly" (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 151/245). As an example of instinct, Hegel cites an animal's capacity to determine whether a particular plant is nourishing, salubrious or harmful (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 150/245). This instinctive acquaintance with nature demonstrates a more immediate unity with the natural than the modern individual experiences. A primitive person's capacity for clairvoyance or a sleepwalker's awareness of her surroundings are for Hegel further examples of how humans in the original condition are related to nature in some sort of immediate way (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 146/240, 151/246). In the case of both instinct and clairvoyance, as we move out of a state of nature and as consciousness progresses, these more immediate ways of relating to the world are lost (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 150/245, 151/246).

> [T]he cleavage is a stepping forth out of natural life and immediacy. But this is not to be construed to mean that there would be no evil until the stepping forth; rather this stepping forth is already contained in the natural state itself… but because the implicit being of human being is spirit, humanity in its immediacy is already involved in stepping forth from immediacy, in falling away from it, from its implicit being. (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 222/297-8)

Thus Hegel is saying that for humans, their original state is one in which they are already beyond pure immediacy. Even in this primitive state humans take God and nature on some level as other. For if humans were in a state of pure unity with nature, they would be animals and not humans.

According to Hegel, it is precisely because humans are necessarily thinking beings and divided from nature that they can be evil. This division or cleavage is the condition for the possibility of this evil. For Hegel, humans are evil in their immediate state because they are an unresolved combination of the rational and the animal. As spirit, humans are thinking beings, but they are also a part of nature and so are themselves natural beings. Humans share in the universal, but are also particular. Because she is a thinking being, a human is "simultaneously possessed of consciousness", but "can still be essentially natural inasmuch as the natural constitutes the purpose, content, and definition of [her] volition" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 223/299). Each of these spheres, spirit and nature, makes conflicting demands upon the human will. As free spirit, a human ought to act in the way appropriate to a free, rational being, and to make universal norms the content of her will. For Hegel, the human will ought to be governed by the spiritual and not the natural side of human nature. But the human in her immediate natural state, the one whose will has not yet been formed by education and culture, makes the natural or her own particular interests the content of her will. She follows "passions and instincts and remains within the sphere of desire" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3:

222/298), and thus she is selfish (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 223/299). For Hegel, this is evil. An evil person is one for whom the content of her will is "only instinct and inclination" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 222/298).

According to Hegel the truth about human evil is revealed to us in the Biblical story of the fall. The account of Adam and Eve from the beginning of Genesis is "very profound and is not just a contingent history but the eternal and necessary history of humanity" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 425/527). Because the story presents the truth in the medium of representation, it is bound to involve inconsistencies, but interpreted correctly it presents us with profound and fundamental truths about human nature.[5] Adam and Eve's eating of the tree of knowledge is itself merely a contingent act, but it represents a necessary feature of the human condition: to be human is to have cognition, to think, and this also implies that humans necessarily have knowledge of good and evil. In the story, the act of eating from the tree is sinful. In Hegel's mind, this indicates that the immediate natural state, the state that humans are in when they first emerge from animal life, is not a state that humans ought to be in or ought to remain in, since this state is the source of evil. However, as Hegel emphasizes and as many have overlooked, the story also has a positive side. The fall does not just bring humans into a state of evil, but is a necessary step on the path towards the good, and in this sense is also good; "it is also the midpoint of the conversion that consciousness contains within itself whereby this cleavage is also sublated" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 226/302). The serpent was not lying when it claimed that eating from the tree would make Adam and Eve like God, since God confirms the truth of this claim at Genesis 3:22: "Behold,

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[5] Hegel emphasizes these inconsistencies most strongly in the 1821 manuscript. See *VR*$_{21}$ 3: 40-3/104-7. Hodgson too makes this point. See Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 150.

Adam has become like one of us." (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 226/302). Thus the story of the fall illustrates for Hegel that cognition both establishes the need for reconciliation and presents us with the means to solve this problem. It is only as thinking beings that humans are able to know the good, to know God, and it is only as thinking beings that they are eventually able to overcome the evil of their natural state by becoming like God, "immortal" and free (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 227/304).

If we are to be clear about what evil means for Hegel, it is important to distinguish Hegel's conception of evil from a couple of other common conceptions with which his view should not be confused. An action is not evil for Hegel because it has negative or harmful consequences, and nor is it evil simply because it conflicts with certain universal norms, e.g., the command that one ought not to steal. In contrast to these views, whether an action is evil for Hegel depends upon the way in which one pursues the action. It matters not whether the action is injurious in some way, nor whether the type of action is morally permitted. Rather, the action is evil in Hegel's mind if the agent's full reason for her action is that she is simply inclined to do it. In such cases, it is evil even if a consequentialist or deontological approach would hold it to be permissible. If, on the other hand, her will is determined or guided by decisions made from a fully rational or universal standpoint, a standpoint in which she has overcome her particularity, then her actions are good. Of course, Hegel does not think that all manners of acting as a particular are evil. As we saw in chapter 4, Hegel maintains that the pursuit of one's particular desires is important, but this pursuit needs to occur as a moment of a life in which one's ultimate goal is to act as the universal. In other words, the pursuit of particularity is evil if it is valuable for the

agent in and of itself but not if it is valued because it contributes to her life as a rational individual. "The finite, in its broadest sense maintaining itself as finite and autonomous, over against and thereby in conflict with the infinite or the universal, is what is evil" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 507/613).

Hegel's discussion of evil is important for us because evil as he defines it is the same as the state of unfreedom. We have seen that a person is free for Hegel if she has overcome her particularity and she acts as a concrete universal. As long as a person allows her will to be governed by inclination, or as long as she treats her desires as worthy of fulfillment in and of themselves, she remains bound to the natural and is unfree. But, as we have now seen, this is precisely what it means to be evil. Thus, in so far as Christianity addresses the need that arises from the fact that humans are evil in their natural state, it also addresses their lack of freedom, and to the extent that Christianity allows humans to overcome evil, it equally allows them to be free.

5B. The two antitheses: Judaism and Roman culture

Before Hegel examines the way in which Christianity addresses the problem posed by human evil, he first considers two earlier cultures that claim that we ought not to be as natural individuals. Each is a response to the divide in humans that occurs between their spiritual and natural selves, and each starts with a different view of what it means to be human, i.e., each identifies the human with a different side of the divide. Judaism starts from the assumption that humans are irreducibly natural, while the Stoicism and Skepticism of Roman culture views the essence of humanity as pure thinking. In both cases, the attempt to remedy the spirit/nature divide fails

because of the one-sidedness of their views of human nature, or because each does not adequately integrate both the spiritual and the natural into its conception of what it means to be human. As a result, each contains an unresolved antithesis or opposition. In the case of Judaism, it is the antithesis of the human vis-à-vis God which leads to infinite anguish. This is "the antithesis of evil as such" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 229/305); it maintains along with Christianity that humanity in its natural state simply ought not to be. In contrast, the Roman holds that humans ought not to be in their particularity, not because he believes that the unmediated pursuit of the natural is intrinsically evil, but because he thinks that humans ought to be happy, and that happiness cannot be achieved in the world. The Roman must turn inward in search of his happiness. In Roman culture the antithesis is that of the human vis-à-vis the world, an antithesis that leads to a retreat from life that is typical of Stoicism. Let us look at each of these precursors of Christianity in turn.

Hegel refers to the first antithesis as one that is vis-à-vis God, thus giving the impression that it is an external antithesis or opposition. But from his discussion it quickly becomes clear that Hegel is describing what is in essence also an internal divide, a divide not between humans and a God who is other, but between the divine and the natural sides of human life. In order to understand why this antithesis within Judaism arises, we must first consider briefly how Hegel interprets the Jewish religion.

In Judaism we see for the first time the concept of God as one. The Greek religion, which immediately precedes Judaism in the 1827 dialectic, includes a manifold of spiritual or ethical powers which in Judaism are brought together in a

spiritual unity (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 561/669). The God of the Jews does not appear in a natural mode, does not have an external form, but has its existence (*Dasein*) in thought (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 561/670). God has its being as thinking and *is* only for thinking (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 563/671); it is the "universal and pure subjectivity" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 562/670). As universal rationality, or as "the rational determinations of freedom, the ethical determinations united in one purpose and one determination", God is holiness itself (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 562/670). For Hegel the Hebrew God is also purposive. In addition to the theoretical purpose that "the whole world should proclaim the glory of God" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 571/679), God also has a practical purpose that ought to be fulfilled in human consciousness, namely that humans ought to live an ethical life (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 571/679). To act ethically is to act in accordance with God's nature as the universal, and, in so doing, to be free or to be the universal will (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 571/679). This requires "a freedom from self-seeking aims" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 571/679) in which the individual no longer allows herself to be ruled by the particular inclinations or desires that are associated with the natural side of her being.

This demand on the individual to act ethically and to supersede her natural inclinations presupposes that the natural itself is something that ought to be overcome. That this is the case in Judaism is a consequence of this religion's interpretation of nature and its relationship to God. In the religion of the Greeks, the divine and the natural are in a state of immediate unity, and the natural is itself the appearance of the god. "In the religion of beauty we have a reconciliation of the meaning with the material, with the sensible mode, with being for another; the spiritual reveals itself wholly in this outward manner" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 569/678). In Judaism, however, we see a disenchantment of nature. The God of the Hebrews is the creator of the world, and as

such God is good (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 566-7/675). But the created world does not have its being preserved in God, or, to put it another way, in Judaism God is the starting point, but not the result (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 565/673). There is no speculative identity between God and the world. Only God has true being, while nature or the finite world is outside of God. In so far as it places finite being outside of God, we see in Judaism for the first time the view of nature as *prosaic*, as a manifold of natural objects subject to categories of the understanding like ground and consequent, cause and effect, etc. (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 568/676). It is because Judaism posits this ontological difference between God and the world that Hegel refers to it as the religion of sublimity. God or the infinite is not sublime all on its own, but only in relation to a world that has no independent being and that is inadequate to God (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 569/677). God is viewed by humans as sublime because God's actuality is infinitely superior to the reality of the finite world that God has created.

This distinction between God and nature in Judaism puts humans in a difficult position, since this sharp divide is mirrored within human nature itself. Humans as thinking beings are the universal and thus are like God, but they are also natural beings. As such, humans find themselves in a situation in which their natural side is completely inadequate alongside their nature as thinking beings. This creates the possibility of infinite anguish, an anguish that Hegel associates with Judaism even early in his career,[6] and that he discovers in the introspection and inner inquiry typical of the books of the Psalms and the writings of the prophets in the Old Testament (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 574/682; *VR*$_{24}$ 2: 341-2/441). This anguish arises when humans recognize

that "in their innermost being they are a contradiction" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 229/305). On the one hand, they know that they ought to be like God, i.e., that they ought to act ethically, free of self-seeking inclination; but, on the other hand, they recognize that as natural beings they do not measure up to this standard that they know they ought to meet. "I experience anguish because I as a natural being do not correspond to what at the same time I *know* to be my own essence, to what I should be in my own knowing and willing" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 230-1/307).

The existence of this anguish presupposes a fully developed understanding of human nature as evil. According to Hegel, the antithesis between good and evil or between nature and spirit is one that we find in all religions (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 228/304), but before Judaism human evil was viewed as something merely contingent. On this view, a human is only evil when she commits an act that is evil, and thus humans are evil only in particular cases. But the infinite anguish of Judaism is only possible because humans view themselves as *intrinsically* evil, "universally evil, purely and simply evil in one's innermost being" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 228/305).[7] Thus the Jews recognize, at least in part, the truth represented in the story of the fall.[8] Humans are intrinsically

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[6] Hodgson points out that in the earliest of his Jena system outlines (1802-3), Hegel associates Judaism with "the anguish of infinite separation between the divine and the human." See Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 31.

[7] In *VPK*, Hegel describes infinite anguish as "the infinite feeling of the nothingness of oneself as something finite" (*VPK* 181).

[8] The *VR*$_{27}$ stands out from the other versions in so far as it is the only one of the four in which Judaism appears later than Greek religion in the dialectical order of the determinate religions. Elsewhere Hegel suggests that the Jews fully missed the significance of the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis. For example, in a passage attributed to the *VR*$_{31}$, Hegel claims that "this story remained dormant among the Jewish people" and was only properly valued in Christianity (*VR*$_{24}$ 2: 341/440; see also *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 43/107-8; *VPW* 431). Hegel goes on to say that the Jews failed to see human nature as intrinsically evil, but only saw the anguish of this divide occurring in certain individuals. Thus it appears that Hegel's view on this issue changes between the 1827 and 1831 lectures. (There are other related changes that are significant: Hegel no longer seems to associate infinite anguish with Judaism, having made the religion of anguish as separate religion altogether). In my reading of the 1827 lectures I am claiming that for Hegel the Hebrews did grasp half of the meaning of the story of the fall. Though they failed to

evil because they are necessarily natural beings and because this natural being ought not to be. The anguish that this situation creates is infinite because it is completely unavoidable. One cannot escape evil simply by refraining from performing certain acts that are deemed evil. Because the human is *essentially* evil, she finds herself in a situation in which she knows that she ought to be different, but is powerless to do anything about it. She has reached "the deepest depth" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 229/305), a state involving "the crying of the soul for God, this descent into the depths of spirit, this longing of spirit for the right, for conformity to the will of God" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 574/682). For Hegel Christianity provides a way out of this seemingly inescapable state of suffering.

Judaism's antithesis of human and God has its counterpart in the antithesis of human and world encountered in Roman religion and culture. This state of division vis-à-vis the world is "the cleavage viewed from the other side" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 229/305). In Judaism, the individual suffers anguish because she does not measure up to the universal. Anguish presupposes that the individual is identifying herself largely with the natural side of her existence. The sense of remorse or humiliation is produced because the individual sees herself as the problem: she ought to conform to the universal, but as a natural being she does not. In Roman religion the individual does not view herself as the problem. Instead the problem is the world, a world that is not as it ought to be, and so does not allow the individual to be the way that she ought to be. The result of this situation is an unhappiness that leads a person to withdraw from the world in the manner typical of the Stoic.

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appreciate the full significance of the claim that Adam and Eve have become like God (this is only achieved in Christianity), they did grasp humanity's essentially sinful nature.

The unhappiness of the Romans has its origin in a basic contradiction that Hegel associates with the Roman worldview: in its efforts to promote the glory of the Roman state, Roman culture views the particular individual as entirely expendable, and yet it also views the fulfillment of particular needs as inherently valuable. Hegel expresses this incongruity in the following passage:

> [O]n the one hand the individual perishes in the universal, in the sovereign authority, in the Fortuna Publica; but on the other hand human purposes hold sway and the human subject has an independent, essential value. These extremes and their contradiction are the whirlpool in which Roman life tosses and turns. (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 589/697)

To understand the first side of the contradiction, namely the claim that the individual in Roman life perishes, we much consider Hegel's characterization of the universal purpose governing Roman society. In the various versions of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel characterizes Roman religion as the religion of purposiveness. We have seen that for Hegel Judaism is also purposive, but with the Romans purposiveness is expanded to embrace particularity (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 579-80/688). The overriding purpose in Roman culture is external and empirical, a specific finite purpose established by humans and attributed to God (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 580/689). This purpose is the Roman state itself, and it is fulfilled by establishing and promoting Roman dominion over the world (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 584/692).

Although this goal is particular in so far as it is a finite, contingent, worldly goal, it also excludes the particular by ignoring human particularity. Expressed more plainly, this highest purpose, i.e., that one ought to promote the Roman state and its domination of the world, is not a purpose that is able to accommodate the particular interests of individual Romans. Rather, Romans were expected to sacrifice

themselves for their country; "the individual must serve the interest of the state or the sovereign authority completely" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 589/697). As Hegel points out, the sacrifice of the individual for the universal is a strong theme in Roman culture and was made into a spectacle, not only on the stage in religious dramas involving "the shedding of torrents of blood", but particularly in the amphitheatre where "[h]undreds and thousands had to slay one another" and where spectators "beheld the nullity of human individuality, the worthlessness of the individual" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 587/697-8).

The greatness and virtue of the Romans lies in the fact that Roman citizens and soldiers were obedient and were able to make great personal sacrifice without hesitation for a higher cause (*VPW* 397, 412). This characteristic of Roman culture is important for Hegel because it is a necessary condition for freedom (*VPW* 423). For in his willingness to sacrifice himself for the goals of the state, the Roman soldier is breaking the tie with nature by overcoming his inclinations towards self-preservation. "Without the sensation of this negativity of the natural there is no interiority; there can only be freedom through nature's obedience" (*VPW* 423). Nevertheless, the demands of the highest purpose are problematic in this case because the universal purpose takes no account of human individuality: the goal is the promotion of the state regardless of how its citizens are affected. The good that the Romans pursued was inadequate, at least in part because, unlike the infinite purpose in Christianity, it failed to include the promotion and preservation of certain basic human needs, in particular needs or rights associated with freedom. It is this neglect within Roman society that leads to a state of unhappiness.

The neglect of individual interests and rights is not, in and of itself, sufficient to produce unhappiness or misery. If the individual has no awareness of his own true needs or if he does not think that these needs are ultimately important, he will not be unhappy when these needs are not met. But the Romans did view their own particular needs as important, which leads to the second side of the contradiction in Roman life. Although it was willing to sacrifice the individual to the state, Roman culture also acknowledged the importance of human individuality and the pursuit of particular goals. This is demonstrated by the fact that Romans recognized the rights of the abstract person and his right to own property (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 590/699). Outside his life as a soldier in the service of his country, the individual in the private sphere accorded the satisfaction of his desires an absolute value. This pursuit of desire was a selfish pursuit, one not mediated or tempered by ethical life or a vision of the good. Romans, "helpless and inactive, with nothing to trust, left the universal alone and took care for themselves" (*VR*$_{21}$ 3: 95/159). The pursuit of selfish ends in Roman culture was reflected in the wide array of Roman gods that were effectively "reduced to means" (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 580/688), gods like Jupiter Pistor, the god of baking, whose function was to help worshipers pursue prosaic purposes and fulfill immediate needs. The Roman world reached the height of pure particularity in its emperors, individuals who capriciously pursued their own particular goals without measure or limit, taking no account of the demands of virtue and showing no concern for their own vices (*VPW* 417-8).

Thus the Roman finds himself in a state of dissatisfaction. On the one hand, he feels that his needs should be met, but on the other hand they are not being met

within the Roman social and political milieu. It is clear from Hegel's discussion of this unhappiness in the 1827 lectures that it is of a very particular kind. Hegel does not seem to be referring to unhappiness that arises from a lack of basic necessities, disease, natural disaster, etc. It is rather a political unhappiness, the unhappiness that comes from a lack of freedom.[9]

> [T]he higher requirements of humanity, those having to do with ethical life, are requirements and determinations of freedom. Insofar as these requirements, which are implicitly justified in the concept of humanity – for human beings know what is good, and the good is in them – do not find satisfaction in existence, in the external world, humanity is in a state of unhappiness. (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: /307)

The Roman is unhappy because he is unable to develop his individuality within Roman society. With the exception of the right to property, he lacks other rights that are a necessary part of freedom, rights like that of conscience and morality (*VR*$_{27}$ 2: 590/699). The Roman knows, at least instinctively, that he ought to live a life in which these rights are exercised, and so he is miserable. The Roman's unhappiness stems from the fact that he does not have the opportunity to participate in ethical life, either of the immediate sort found in Greek culture or the mediated, more advanced form of ethical life associated with Christianity. As with infinite anguish, the external antithesis is interiorised. In this case it is the antithesis between human and world: the Roman's particular concrete existence is not the way that his universal or rational nature knows it should be.

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[9] In the *VGP* Hegel confirms that the Romans were unhappy because they lacked a form of political life in which they were fully satisfied (*VGP* 3: 167/2: 322), but in this text the lack of freedom is only one part of their unhappiness which has a deeper underlying cause, namely the break with nature that results when the natural is no longer viewed as divine. Here Roman civilization is portrayed as the unhappy middle step between the immediate unity with the truth that is part of the Greek world, and the mediated unity of humans and the truth that appears in Christianity. Though painful, this step is a necessary one in spirit's journey: "In this way the unity of god with nature was broken, but only so that it could be posited once again in a higher way" (*VGP* 3: 167/2: 322).

The Roman response to this unhappiness is Stoicism. If the individual is unable to have her needs met in this world, unhappiness can be avoided by giving up these needs altogether and by demonstrating complete imperturbability and indifference towards everything; "since the fixed demand that the world should be rational is present within them but does not find fulfillment, they renounce the world, seeking happiness and satisfaction in the harmony of the self with itself" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 231-2/307-8). By withdrawing into himself, the Stoic effectively constricts the domain of what he identifies as the self. Unlike the Jew who sees himself as irreducibly natural, the Stoic no longer views his natural, determinate physical side, the sphere of all his individual needs and desires, as a part of himself. This is now other to him, and he equates himself entirely with his universal rational or thinking nature.

As one might expect, Hegel views Stoicism both positively and negatively. We have seen already that Hegel sees a positive element in Stoicism. Nevertheless, Stoicism is ultimately an unsatisfactory solution to the problem of unhappiness. In the 1827 lectures Hegel justifies this assessment by claiming that Stoicism is a form of escapism, a "flight from the world" in which the Stoic also flees from his own actuality (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 232/309). This response needs to be supplemented, since it does not explain why it is a problem to withdraw from one's actuality or to disown one's own natural existence. I think that Hegel's answer lies in what we have already seen. The Roman is unhappy because he recognizes, if only in a vague way, that he ought to be living a life of ethical freedom and that the world ought to be structured in such a way as to make this possible. By withdrawing into himself, the Stoic does not change this fact. He has given up any claims on the world, but his rational nature still tells him, at

the very least, that the world ought to be different and that social life ought to be rationally structured. And so, perhaps no longer unhappy, the Stoic remains aware at some level that things are not as they should be, and this is a need that must ultimately be addressed in history.

5C. Christianity as a response to the two antitheses

In Hegel's presentation of the consummate religion in 1827, it is the double antithesis of Jewish anguish and Roman unhappiness that leads to the appearance of Christianity.

> The concept of the preceding religions has refined itself into this antithesis; and the fact that the antithesis has disclosed and presented itself as an actually existing need is expressed by the words, "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son" [Gal. 4:4]. This means: the Spirit is at hand, the need for the Spirit that points the way to reconciliation. (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 233/309-10)

As my discussion thus far illustrates, Hegel is at pains to show that the appearance of Christianity is not merely a chance event but is a logical or necessary result of the historical and cultural context within which it was born. The appearance of Jesus and, by extension, the arrival of Christianity need not be viewed as resulting from the act of a transcendent God intervening in world events. Spirit itself creates the need and spirit itself ultimately addresses it. In other words, when humans are faced with a problem that causes anguish or unhappiness and that is produced by their own understanding of the world, it is natural that, at some point, individuals will alter or improve their worldview in a way that allows them to solve their problem. The more pressing the need becomes, the more urgently a solution is required and the more likely it is to appear.

In the 1827 lectures Hegel proposes Christianity as an answer to both the infinite anguish of Judaism and the unhappiness of the Roman world. Unfortunately, Hegel does not tell us explicitly how this is the case, and we are forced to figure it out on our own. I show that Christianity addresses the problem of infinite anguish at the very outset in its early stages, but only fully deals with the problem of unhappiness at the end of the section on consummate religion when Christianity reaches its most modern form, since a resolution of the problem of unhappiness, as Hegel has presented it, requires changes to social structures that only take place in modern European ethical life. Thus in his discussion of the initial stages of Christianity, it is the problem of anguish, and not that of unhappiness, that is front and centre.

We have seen that infinite anguish arises when the individual's natural self does not conform to the demands of her rational self. She is in anguish because she is not and cannot be as she ought to be. But, as Hegel points out, the possibility of anguish presupposes that the two contradictory sides are implicitly one or are united to form a whole (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 233/310). The fact that the rational and natural contradict each other within human nature assumes that both sides already coexist within the same human being. The identity that unites the rational and the natural sides of the self is what allows the individual to subsist in spite of the pain, and it is what also makes the elimination of anguish possible (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 233/310). In anguish the antithesis is already *implicitly* overcome, and the reconciliation that alleviates that anguish involves an *explicit* sublation of the antithesis.

The individual overcomes anguish in two steps, one theoretical and the other practical. First, she needs to be aware that the rational and the natural are not just

distinct but also implicitly identical; "the subject must become conscious of the fact that the antithetic opposites are not [things] in themselves, but that instead the truth, the inner nature [of spirit], consists in the sublatedness of the antithesis."(*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 233/310) Second, having become aware of this truth, the individual must actualize it by making the implicit identity an explicit one; "because the antithesis is implicitly and truthfully sublated, the subject as such, in its being-for-itself, can reach and attain peace and reconciliation through the sublation of the antithesis" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 233-4/310). These two steps leading to peace and reconciliation are both made possible in Christianity, which not only announces that the antithesis is implicitly overcome but which also provides the means by which to profit from this truth and to reconcile our rational with our natural selves in our daily lives. Christianity makes the first step possible from its very inception by revealing the full truth about God and human nature. Once in place, this truth does not alter throughout the history of Christian culture. However, as we shall see, the way in which Christianity brings about the reconciliation of the divine and natural does change as this religion develops. If we are to understand in more detail how Christianity is a response to the problem of anguish, we must examine the Christian message. This message develops in two stages: first, in the life and teaching of Jesus himself, and then in the belief of the early Christian community.

According to Hegel, the figure of Jesus can be viewed from both a non-religious and a religious perspective. When discussing Jesus' life and teaching, Hegel takes the non-religious point of view, one in which Jesus is an "ordinary human being" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 239/316); he is "*immediately a human being* in all the external

contingencies, in all the temporal exigencies and conditions, that this entails. He is born like every other human being and as a human has the needs of other human beings" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 240/316-7). In his presentation of Jesus, Hegel is selective in the details that he emphasizes. He downplays, for example, the historical significance of Jesus' moral teachings like the commandment to "Love your neighbour as yourself", indicating that such commandments are already to be found in the Old Testament (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 243/319). Moreover, Hegel shows no interest in Jesus' miracles, since these are at best an external and spiritless way of attesting to the truth of Jesus' teaching (*VR*$_{24}$ 3: 151/221). Rather, Hegel focuses his attention on what he takes to be the central message of Jesus' gospel, the announcement that the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is at hand.[10] His clearest and most forceful expression of the importance of this truth appears in the excerpts from the 1831 lectures:

> What Christ's teaching includes in addition is the proclamation of the *kingdom of heaven*, i.e., the awakening of consciousness to inwardness, to this native soil of humanity, this absolute value, as against which all earthly things are seen to be valueless. This exaltation to inwardness is an outstanding feature of Christ's teaching, and it is brought before our representational imagination in an infinitely forceful manner in his teaching – [for instance in the words with which] Christ begins his ministry in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" [Matt. 5:8]. This is the greatest thing that can be said. Moreover, all unfreedom, all externality, and all superstition are superseded in these words. (*VR*$_{31}$ 3: 284/367)

This kingdom of God that Jesus exhorts his disciples to know and experience is, as Hegel understands it, "a substantial, intelligible world" (*VR*$_{21}$ 3: 51/116), " the element, the world, in which spirit must find its homeland; it is by virtue of this that humanity [has] its worth, its infinitude, an absolute worth in inwardness, in the spirit as such"(*VR*$_{21}$ 3: 50/116).

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[10] That Hegel takes the kingdoms of God and heaven to be synonymous is evident, for example, from

The kingdom of God is all of these things in so far as it is the state of pure, abstract universality or the world of pure thinking.[11] There are interesting parallels to be drawn here between Jesus' teaching and that of the Stoics. Both teachings promote a state of human freedom or independence that is abstract, one in which the individual liberates herself by becoming a purely universal subject. And in both cases, this freedom can only be achieved by the individual if she ultimately renounces the world. We have already seen that this is the case for the Stoics, who remain active in the world but give up their desires or their subjective attachment to their particular existence, but Hegel also claims that this renunciation is an integral part of Jesus' message. To achieve the kingdom of God, one is required to draw away from present actuality and to "remove oneself from finite things" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 241-2/318). It is, as we saw in the quote above, a teaching in which "all earthly things are seen to be valueless" (*VR*$_{31}$ 3: 284/367). This giving up of finite things includes not only a giving up of material possessions but even a renouncing of traditional ethical and familial relations within the world. Here Hegel supports this view by pointing to passages from the gospels that have posed interpretive problems for some. For example, in Matt 12: 46-50, Jesus denies or renounces his own blood ties in a way that seems inconsistent with his message of love, claiming "Who is my mother, who are my brothers? Whoever does the will of God is my mother, [my] sister, and [my] brother" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 242/318). In Hegel's reading, Jesus demands that even close relations like these must be abandoned, since it is only by renouncing all ties to the

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VR$_{21}$ 3: 51/116.

[11] In the *VR*$_{27}$ Hegel does not make explicit the universal character of consciousness of the kingdom of God, but he associates it with the universal in *VR*$_{24}$ 3: 147-9/216-8. Here he even associates Jesus'

world that one is able to achieve the pure universal existence that is the kingdom of God. This negative attitude towards the world is the only indication that Jesus gives regarding how consciousness of the kingdom of God is to be achieved. He provides no other method or practice that mediates the transition to the kingdom, but requires rather an "immediate self-transposition into the truth" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 242/319).

Although Hegel does not say so explicitly in the 1827 lectures, achieving consciousness of the kingdom of God is a way of addressing the problem of infinite anguish. For in achieving this consciousness, one has "the consciousness of absolute reconciliation" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 241/317), "the consciousness of a reconciliation of humanity with God"(*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 241/317-8). Anguish arises for the Jews because they thought that they could not conform to the standard that God or the universal demanded of them. But now this difference has been overcome. By following Jesus the individual has given up her natural or particular existence and has made herself into the pure universal. She is as such the same universal that God is; she is identical or one with God, and she is aware of this identity, at least at the level of feeling. In this way, the difference between human and God that was the cause of anguish is now eliminated.

It is in this reconciliatory dimension of Jesus' teaching that I think we see the essential distinction between Jesus' message and that of the Stoics. For the Stoics, the retreat into pure universality and the letting go of all particular desires and goals is a defensive manoeuvre (at least in the way that Hegel portrays Stoicism in the 1827 lectures). It is the only option open to the Stoic in the face of unhappiness or in the face of a world that is not able to accommodate his particularity and his need for

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message with Islam and the French Revolution, other standard examples in Hegel's mind of positions grounded in the abstract universal.

concrete freedom. Although the Stoic seeks refuge in his universal, divine nature, he does not see it as divine. In contrast, for Jesus the retreat from the world into the kingdom of God is not one necessitated by external circumstances, but one that is good in itself, one that is required for knowing the truth or for completing the "higher consciousness of humanity" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 240/317). Unlike the Romans whose gods pursued merely finite purposes, Jesus recognizes the universal as the divine.

However, in Jesus' teaching we have part of the truth of Christianity, but we do not yet have this truth in its entirety. For here God or the divine is only the *abstract* universal, and this leads ultimately to only a partial reconciliation. In Jesus' approach, the human can be reconciled with God, but only if she becomes a purely universal being. The reconciliation of humanity with God is only partial, because it excludes a whole aspect of what it means to be human. Humanity's natural existence must be given up and so is left outside of the reconciliation. By withdrawing from the world, the follower of Jesus is able to avoid anguish, but at the price of establishing a new antithesis vis-à-vis the world. As we shall see, Hegel thinks that Jesus' teaching is refined when these problems are addressed with the establishment of Christianity itself.[12]

Although Jesus' teachings formed the starting point for the arrival of a new religion, there is as yet no new religion explicitly present during Jesus' lifetime.[13]

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[12] Hegel does not claim explicitly that Jesus' teaching is lacking, a fact that is not surprising given the potential practical consequences that Hegel might have faced for making such a claim. However, Hegel does state clearly that Jesus' message is distinct from the doctrine of the church (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 240/317), adding that later on "these teachings are either interpreted in other ways or else they fall by the wayside" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 240/317). That Hegel thinks that Jesus' teaching falls short is implied by what Hegel takes to be the central truth of Christianity and by the way this truth differs from the position that Hegel attributes to Jesus.

[13] Here Hegel seems to contradict himself. On the one hand, he claims that the transition to the religious sphere only occurs with Christ's death. On the other, he talks of Jesus' teaching as a new

The transition to the religious sphere and the beginning of Christianity, properly speaking, occurs only with Jesus' death (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 245/322). During his lifetime Jesus was viewed by his disciples as merely a human being, but not yet as divine. After his death this understanding of Jesus is transformed. He is viewed no longer merely as a "teacher, friend, and martyr to the truth" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 248/325), but as God appearing in the form of a human being (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 249/326). This is the most obvious sense in which Christ's death and resurrection mark the transition from a non-religious to a religious viewpoint.

However, I believe that there are other reasons for claiming that the transition occurring here is from the non-religious to the religious. The move from Jesus' life to early Christianity marks a shift from immediate knowledge of the truth to knowledge of the truth in a mediated, objective form. In the consciousness of the kingdom of God preached by Jesus, God is present as feeling (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 246/322). But Hegel goes on to suggest that this purely subjective, immediate form of truth needs to be objectified.

> But since the kingdom is on the one hand [present] in need or feeling [on the part of the subject], the latter must, on the other hand, distinguish itself from it, must establish a distinction between this presence of God and itself, but in such a way that this presence remains certain to it, and this certainty can here occur only in the mode of sensible appearance. Because this is how the content behaves, we have here the religious aspect, and the formation of the community begins here. (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 246-7/322-4)

This helps to explain the need for a new religion or for the move to a religious viewpoint. As we have seen, Jesus did not provide a method for achieving the

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religion (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 241/317). One way to account for the contradiction is to claim that Jesus' teaching is implicitly a new religion, but that it is not explicitly so for the disciples.

kingdom of God apart from the negative prescription that one must withdraw from the world.

> He is the one who, because his demand is immediate, expresses it immediately from God, and God speaks to it through him. His having this life of the Spirit in the truth, so that it is simply there without mediation, expresses itself prophetically in such a way that it is God who says it. It is a matter of the absolute, divine truth that has being in and for itself, and of its expression and intention; and the confirmation of this expression is envisaged as God's doing. It is the consciousness of the real unity of the divine will and of his harmony with it. (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 243/320)

Thus, it is Jesus' immediate physical presence that makes consciousness of the kingdom of God possible for his disciples. With Jesus' death this immediate presence is no longer available. Jesus' teaching represented a respite from anguish, but now his followers are threatened with a return to this previous state. The possibility of a return to anguish is what pushes spirit to recognize the truth: "Spirit presses toward its truth because it has an infinite cleavage and anguish within itself. It wills the truth; the need of the truth and the certainty thereof it will have, and must have. Here for the first time we have the religious view" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 239/316). And so Jesus' death provides the occasion in which spirit or humanity recognizes the truth that will lead to reconciliation and spare it from anguish. For the early community, this truth appears in the sensible form of the resurrected Christ: the unity of the human and the divine is there as an object in its most accessible shape, not yet as a truth of representation or thinking but as the truth embodied, a truth that can be seen and touched. With the death and resurrection there is a shift from a non-religious to a religious point of view, because the truth is no longer something that is experienced in a purely immediate way, but is one that stands over against the subject as an object.

This change to a religious perspective also seems to be necessarily accompanied by the establishment of a community, as we saw in the quote on the previous page from *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 246-7/322-4. Jesus' followers in his lifetime did not yet form a community, since in the absence of any particular method to guide him, each person had to struggle to achieve the kingdom of God for himself (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 241/318). When the truth, however, is present for these individuals in an objective form, there is now at least the beginning of a common doctrine or set of beliefs that all followers share, and that binds them all together. "The community begins with the fact that the truth is at hand" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 254/331).

Does Hegel believe that Jesus was actually raised from the dead? At the very least, Hegel's account presupposes that the sensible presence of Christ was real for Jesus' disciples. However, Hegel sidesteps the issue of whether the resurrection actually occurred, indicating that the answer to the question is ultimately not important. The sensible appearance of the truth in Christ may have been the occasion that led spirit to discover the truth about itself, but the historical veracity of this appearance is not what makes it true (*VR*$_{24}$ 3: 157-60/226-30; *VR*$_{27}$ 3: 253-4/330-1). The ground for the truth of Christianity is the witness of the spirit itself. The claims of Christianity are true because individual Christians recognize in their hearts and minds that they are true.

Thus Christianity in Hegel's reading is not initiated by the contingent act of a transcendent deity, but emerges as an act of the human spirit in response to particular human needs when certain historical conditions are met. Among these conditions, Hegel argues that the truth must present itself or be embodied in the human

individual, and this embodiment must occur in one and only one individual (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 237-8/312-4).[14] When the need is present and these conditions are met, spirit is bound to see the truth. In other words, the development of history has reached a point where a particular group of humans is able and eager to grasp the truth about itself and about God. For Hegel the religion of Christianity does not just appear as a continuation and further development of the teaching that Jesus established. Rather Jesus' life, and in particular his death, provide the object of interpretation that in these conditions triggers within spirit a grasp of the truth, a truth that I have suggested advances beyond Jesus' original teaching. "For the origin of faith there is necessary first a human being, a sensible human appearance, and second, a spiritual comprehension, consciousness of the spiritual. The content is spiritual, involving the transformation of immediacy into what has a spiritual character" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 253/330).

What then is this central truth of Christianity that is represented in the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus? It is the truth that divine and human nature are not fundamentally distinct, but that they form a unity.

> The truth to which human beings have attained by means of this history, what they have become conscious of in this entire history, is the following: that the idea of God has certainty for them, that humanity has attained the certainty of unity with God, that the human [*das Menschliche*] is the immediately present God. (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 250/326)

In Christianity it is not just the case that spirit recognizes the truth. Spirit is not just the subject but also the object of the recognition. With Christianity the truth about

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[14] I do not present Hegel's justification for this claim, since it does not particularly concern us. In his attempt to demonstrate the necessity of Christianity's appearance as it is presented in the New Testament, Hegel tries to explain why the unity of God and humanity needed to appear in the single figure of Jesus. This explanation seems contrived, especially Hegel's justification for his claim that the truth must appear in only one individual. Cf. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology*, 162, where the author suggests that Hegel here "is bending his argument to accommodate his normative Christian doctrine."

spirit is revealed. Since spirit encompasses both God and humanity, the truth made manifest in Christianity is one that allows us to fully recognize the truth about both God's nature and human nature (*VPW* 431). Let us consider each in turn.

First, from the point of view of Christian faith, Jesus is seen not merely as a human but as God himself who at the same time has human nature. As Jesus, God possesses this human nature in so far as he had the physical form of humans, the same physical needs as a human, etc. By dying on the cross, Jesus as God shared in the very pinnacle of finitude (*VR*$_{21}$ 3: 60/124). For to be finite is to contain the possibility of negation, and inevitably to suffer negation. It is to be limited, and death is "the limit, finitude in its highest extreme" (*VR*$_{21}$ 3: 60/125). When one undergoes other types of negation or change, one is no longer *as one was*, but one still *is*. With death one is negated in an absolute sense. One passes a limit in which one becomes what no longer is at all. Thus, in Jesus' death the humanization of God is complete. It is "the most complete proof of humanity, of absolute finitude" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 247/323).

The death of Jesus leads to a second determination in which the truth about God is revealed, a negative determination or one of despair, like the period of time between Good Friday and Easter. If Jesus is the God-man and if Jesus has died, then God is dead. This is a frightening thought, because by becoming human God has become finite just like us, and so, as it stands now, the infinite no longer *is*; "everything eternal and true *is not*" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 247/323). But this is not the end of the story, since the crucifixion is followed by the resurrection. In the third step, God returns to life, and death itself is banished. In this way the resurrection is the death of death (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 247/323). When God makes himself human and undergoes death, we

see that negation or the finite is not something that is foreign to God or other than God. However, when God rises from the dead or negates death itself, we discover that negation is sublated within God or is only a moment of the infinite. We see that the infinite is able to be finite in a way that does not stop it from being infinite. God is God no longer now as the father, as the infinite that stands opposed to the finite, but as spirit or the infinite that embraces finitude within itself and that maintains a relationship of identity in difference with this other.

Thus it is from the story of the death and resurrection of Christ that the Christian community draws its concept of God as the trinity or as spirit.

> The reconciliation in Christ, in which one believes, makes no sense if God is not known as the triune God, [if it is not recognized] that God *is*, but also is as the other, as self-distinguishing, so that this other is God himself, having implicitly the divine nature in it, and that the sublation of this difference, this otherness, and the return of love, are the Spirit. (VR_{27} 3: 251/327)

At the beginning of the story, before God has appeared as the son, God is the father, i.e. the God that is opposed to human finitude or the God that is purely other. As Jesus dying on the cross, God is the son, that which is thoroughly finite although implicitly the infinite, the complete other of God the father. Finally, as the resurrected Christ, God is spirit or the differentiated unity of the previous two moments, the divine as it is present in humans themselves.

However, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ has ramifications not only for humanity's understanding of God, but also for humanity's own self-understanding. Here there are two important lessons. First, in Christianity we recognize from Jesus' divinity that the human is God. This first lesson, although perhaps not explicitly stated by Jesus, is one that is implicit in his concept of the kingdom of God. Here the

individual becomes God by becoming a pure universal and by removing herself from the finite world. In Christianity the same applies, since it recognizes the truth demonstrated in the Biblical story of the fall, namely that humans in their natural state are evil or ought not to be. The selfish individual, the human that is motivated solely by inclination or that treats the fulfillment of her particular desires as an end in itself, is separating herself from the good or the divine. It is only by breaking the bond with the natural or by overcoming one's natural side that the unity of human nature with divine nature is established in actuality.

> The essential determinations in all this are that the human being, the finite spirit, does not find himself in this unity with the divine essence as he naturally is, in the way of the flesh, or that a human in his pure naturalness is not good, is rather void of spirit. Only through the renunciation of natural being and through its elimination – that is only through the negation of the natural which for him should not however be there, should be a non-entity and hence something evil and not good – only through this does a human first comes to the assurance or certainty of the unity with God and achieves faith. (*VPW* 428)

This break with nature is represented by the death on the cross. Like the son who breaks with his natural being in death so that he can reveal himself to be the concrete infinite or spirit, humans must also die to their naturalness in order to be like God. "On the one hand, the meaning attached to death is that through death the human element is stripped away and the divine glory comes into view once more – death is a stripping away of the human, the negative" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 250/326).

In the story of the death and resurrection we see not only that the human is God, but also that God is human. Herein lies the second lesson about human nature. For in God's appearance as a human, and in particular in his death on the cross, we see that finitude or the natural are not alien to the divine.

> "God himself is dead," it says in a Lutheran hymn, expressing an awareness that the human, the finite, the fragile, the weak, the negative are themselves a moment of the divine, that they are within God himself, that finitude, negativity, otherness are not outside of God and do not, as otherness, hinder unity with God. Otherness, the negative, is known to be a moment of the divine nature itself. (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 249-50/326)

It is at this point that Christianity sets itself apart from, or advances beyond, Jesus' teaching. Jesus maintained that to break with the natural one must withdraw from the world or eliminate one's particularity. To be the universal, one must try not to be a natural being. But if finitude or the natural is itself a moment of God, then one need not eliminate or suppress one's own naturalness, one's desires and appetites, in order to be one with God or in order to share in the divine nature. It is possible to eliminate the problem of anguish without in turn creating another antithesis between the human's universal nature and the world.

At first glance these two lessons appear to contradict each other or, at the very least, to be in tension with each other. On the one hand, Christianity claims that to be united with God one must negate one's naturalness, while on the other it tells us that the human as a natural being can be one with God. This apparent conflict is resolved when one recognizes that Christianity demands that the natural be a *moment* of the spiritual, or that the particular be a *moment* of the universal. For Hegel, the moment of a whole has a two-sided ontological status, depending on whether it is viewed either independently or as a necessary part of the whole. On the one hand, when it is taken strictly on its own, a moment is finite and hence ideal. It is that which does not subsist on its own (*VGP* 1: 398) or is that which lacks veritable being, since the finite necessarily has the ground of its being in another and not itself. On the other hand, when viewed not on its own but as a necessary part of a whole, the finite shares in the

being of the whole and thus it does have veritable being. As Hegel points out, a moment is distinct from an accident or a mode (*VPW* 480), since a moment is an expression of the universal and as such it has its ground in the universal. Thus, in so far as it is a moment of the infinite or the substantial, the finite is both insubstantial and substantial, depending on whether it is taken in isolation or as a necessary part of what is substantial.

When Christianity claims that humans must break with the natural or overcome their finitude, this means that they must no longer view their finite ends and desires as absolute or as demanding fulfillment in and of themselves. The break with one's naturalness involves recognizing that one ought not to treat one's particular ends as valid simply because one happens to have them. It is to recognize that, as finite, these ends on their own have no substantial being and hence make no demands on us. However, this does not imply that in order to achieve unity with God – in order to achieve the freedom and reconciliation promoted by Christianity – one must abandon's one's naturalness altogether. The break with nature that Hegel attributes to Christianity is absolute, but the life of the universal in turn involves the natural. In so far as the finite is a moment of the infinite or divine, the pursuit of particular desires and the expression of one's subjectivity is consistent with, and even required by, unity with the divine. The pursuit of one's particular desires is part of being one with God as long as these particular ends are themselves an expression of the infinite, i.e. in so far as they themselves promote human freedom.

> But with Christianity the particularity, too, which earlier appeared only as corruption becomes free… The point here is that everything is mediated through the free will, both by virtue of the mind in general and of the particular will, equally through advantage and universal interests.

> Individuality should no longer be sacrificed; the particularity of restricted purpose should have a validity of its own. But the spiritual, the higher interiority is also present, and true interiority makes yet higher demands for its right. (*VPW* 433-4)

Unlike the Stoic, the Christian is free for Hegel not as the abstract universal but as the concrete universal; not as a thinking being that abandons his particular desires but as one with desires, the pursuit of which in turn promotes and preserves his existence as a concretely universal or free being.

We are now in a position to consider how the central truth of Christianity provides a response to the two antitheses from which Christianity arose. First, Christianity addresses the problem of anguish because it reveals that humans need not stand in opposition to God or, to put the same claim in another way, need not be divided within themselves. For in Jesus we see that the human is God. We can overcome our anguish or our alienation from the divine by dying to our natural selves, i.e. by abandoning the pursuit of our particular desires *for their own sake* and by identifying with the universal. Second, Christianity also addresses the problem of unhappiness, because it tells us that God is also to be found in human natural existence. Reconciliation with God does not establish a new antithesis with the natural by requiring that one renounce one's particularity altogether. It does not demand that one oppose oneself to the natural in an absolute way. Rather, Christianity provides a framework for overcoming unhappiness because it claims that certain forms for expressing one's particularity are consistent with human freedom. Moreover, Christianity ultimately *demands* that humans express their particularity – e.g. by pursuing particular desires, owning property, acting according to conscience, etc. – because these activities play a role in promoting human freedom. Thus,

Christianity requires a form of social life structured in such a way that it allows humans to pursue the right kind of particularity. It addresses the problem of unhappiness because it demands that the political environment come to be in actuality the way that rational individuals like the Romans instinctively knew it should be.

5D. The development of Christianity and the problem of unhappiness

With the arrival and establishment of Christianity, the historical process leading to human recognition of the truth has, in one sense, come to an end. The truth of Christianity, once it has been fully formulated, is the whole truth: its content lacks nothing.

> The objective, absolute content of Christianity was fixed through the old church assemblies [and] was finished long ago by the old church fathers. Of this the scholastic philosophy of the middle ages changed nothing, and also the philosophy of our time can only transform the content in the form of the concept. (*VPW* 479)

However, there is another sense in which the development of the truth is not yet complete. As the above quote suggests, there is still room for change in the form of the truth, or, more generally, in the way in which the truth is grasped. In the third and final section of the consummate religion, the section on community, this change is presented as a three-step process. The first stage, referred to as the origin of the Christian community, includes the period of the first followers of Christ and the church fathers. This is the phase in which the unity of the divine and the human is first witnessed in the sensible presence of the resurrected Christ, and the period in which the full significance of the resurrection is grasped and conveyed by the founders of the church in the medium of representation. The second stage, the stage

of the subsisting community, corresponds to Christianity as it existed in the medieval church. By this point, the truth of Christianity has been fully developed and Christianity has become the dominant European worldview. Here Christian truth is no longer something that individuals must discover for themselves, but is something that individuals are born into (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 257/334). Truth takes the form of doctrine (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 256/333) and is conveyed to new generations by teaching (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 257/334). In the minds of individual Christians at this stage, the legitimacy or justification of the truth rests on authority (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 258/335); one accepts the truth simply because it is what the church teaches. The third stage is the realization of the spirituality of the community and corresponds to the period of the Reformation and modern European life. In this stage thinking, or the highest form of the truth, comes explicitly into its own. The development of humanity's grasp of the truth of Christianity is finally completed in speculative thinking or philosophy, which is able to present this truth in a conceptual form and is able to justify or demonstrate its truth in a necessary way.

But Hegel has another task in this final section of the consummate religion: to resolve the problem of unhappiness that was in part the impetus for the development of Christianity. We have seen that for Hegel Christianity arises as a response to two antitheses, and that it provides the conceptual resources to address these antitheses. In the case of the first antithesis, infinite anguish is overcome in the Christian community from the very beginning. Unlike Judaism, Christianity recognizes that human naturalness need not stop us from sharing in God's nature. No longer is there the infinite anguish that results from an unbridgeable gulf between the human and the divine.

This truth is recognized by Christianity at each of its major stages. In the early church, the reconciliation between spirit and the single subject takes place in a relationship of faith. Here all that matters is the individual's innermost will or intentions. To be pleasing in the eyes of God, or to be as she ought to be, she need only ensure that her innermost will be good. The natural side of her existence may lead her to do evil things, things that are contrary to her own good intentions. But this does not hinder reconciliation, since finitude in general and human finitude in particular are viewed as inessential (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 255/332).

> we can exist in a way that is not appropriate to this inward, substantial essentiality, this substantial, essential inwardness. The difficulty is removed by the fact that God looks into the heart and sees what is substantial, so that externality – otherness, finitude, and imperfection in general, or however else it may be defined – does no damage to the absolute unity; (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 255/332)

In the medieval church, this unity of the human and divine is expressed in the various sacraments that Hegel discusses. For example, baptism indicates that a child has been born into a community in which reconciliation has already been accomplished (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 258/335), and Communion, the most important of the sacraments, involves "the feeling of God's immediate presence within the subject" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 260/337). In the period of the Reformation, the reconciliation of the individual with the infinite takes place in thinking and in the practical domain of ethical life. For in ethical life the concrete individual lives in accordance with the demands of God or reason and is therefore as he ought to be.

Unlike the problem of infinite anguish, the second antithesis between humans and the world is not resolved at the outset of Christianity's development. Only in the modern period do Christians achieve reconciliation with the world and only then is

the problem of unhappiness fully resolved. Thus a second task of the final section of "Consummate Religion" is to show how Christianity ultimately allows the human community to overcome the problem of unhappiness that originated with the Romans. Only once this has been overcome is full freedom achieved, since it is only at this point that Christians are actually fully at home with both God or the universal as both thinking and natural beings. It is this second task that will be my focus in the remainder of this chapter.

Although Hegel does not mention the problem of unhappiness by name in the later part of the discussion of Christianity, the problem is addressed implicitly in the first portion of the section on the realization of the community, where Hegel examines the issue of reconciliation between religion and the world.[15] Hegel begins this section by pointing out what Christianity has achieved thus far and what it still lacks after the first two periods of its development. We have seen that in the early church and in medieval Christianity the pure heart is reconciled with God. "It is the pure heart that attains to this partaking [*Genuß*] of God's presence within it, and consequently reconciliation, the enjoyment [*Genuß*] of being reconciled" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 262/339). But the reconciliation that has occurred thus far between God and human is incomplete or merely abstract. The human individual that is reconciled with God is not the whole concrete individual, the individual that has both a rational and a natural side, but only the individual as a one-sidedly spiritual being. The natural finite side of human existence, the worldly sphere in which humans pursue particular aims, is a necessary

[15] When he delivered his *VR*$_{27}$, Hegel began to run out of time towards the end of the semester, and, as a result, his discussion of the last part of the consummate religion is even more condensed than usual (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 328, note 212 in the English). In the discussion that follows I make use of the *VPW* and the *VGP* to supplement Hegel's presentation of the *VR*$_{27}$ and to fill in some of the details.

and inevitable part of being human and of forming a human community. As it now stands, this side of human existence lies outside of the reconciliation with God, deemed either unimportant or positively evil. If reconciliation between the divine and the human is to be complete, then this reconciliation cannot exclude a part of what it means to be human. It must incorporate not only the spiritual but also the natural side of human existence. The state of reconciliation must involve the worldly or the activity of social life as a necessary element in what it means to be reconciled with God. It must be a reconciliation in which human particularity and subjectivity is valued and nurtured.

Hegel offers a second reason for suggesting that there must be reconciliation between religion and the world. Religious reconciliation that excludes the world is not only incomplete, but it neglects to acknowledge the worldly as a necessary condition of its own religious objective: reconciliation with God or the achievement of freedom. Here Hegel claims that the subject's religious vocation is to be free (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 262/340), and that this vocation is carried out in the community "The spiritual is the truth of the worldly realm in the more proximate sense that the subject, as an object of divine grace and as one who is reconciled with God, already has infinite value in virtue of its vocation; and this is made effective in the community" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 262/339-40). Here Hegel is making the obvious point that it is impossible to separate the spiritual entirely from the worldly. Religious activity does not happen in a vacuum but in the physical world and the human community. Conditions in the world will inevitably affect and determine if and how humans are able to pursue their spiritual vocation of freedom. These conditions can either obstruct the pursuit of a

spiritual life or facilitate this pursuit. Thus the right type of worldly existence is the necessary condition for a religious life. But if this is the case, then any religion with a full understanding of itself and its needs should not view the finite world either as evil or as merely insignificant to the spiritual. On the contrary, it should recognize and understand the worldly conditions that are necessary for the pursuit of spiritual aims and it should attempt to promote these conditions as a part of a religious life. In so doing, religion then effects a reconciliation between itself and the world. Religion no longer views the world as something unimportant or to be avoided, but recognizes a particular type of worldly existence and social milieu as a necessary moment of religion itself.

Hegel presents the development of reconciliation between Christianity and the world in three stages. The first is the stage of "monkish withdrawal" in which the individual reconciles himself with God in abstraction from the world or while renouncing the worldly realm (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 263/340). It is instructive once again to make a comparison with the Stoics. Like the Stoic as he is portrayed by Hegel, the monk retreats from the world in so far as he renounces all personal desires and in so doing achieves an abstract form of freedom. For the Stoic this freedom lies in the independence that comes from being an abstract universal, while the monk's freedom comes from having a pure heart and partaking of God's presence. But unlike the Stoic, the monk does not suffer from a form of discontent. As we have seen, Hegel portrays the Stoic's retreat into abstract thinking as a defensive manoeuvre. The Stoic thinks that he should be able to live a life of concrete freedom, but is unable to do so and so chooses the next best option. For him the way the world is, i.e. his political

and social environment, does matter. But the finite world for the Christian at this stage is inessential. All that matters is that his substantial will or his heart be in unity with God. The particulars of the finite world play no role in either preventing this unity or making it the case, and as a result the state of the world does not matter to the monk. Whatever happens in the world, it cannot make her unhappy or discontented. Thus the monk is reconciled with the world in so far as he is not affected by it. But for Hegel this form of reconciliation is merely negative and is not a genuine reconciliation (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 263/340), since it does not allow the individual to be free or at home as an active participant in the world. Moreover, this solution to the problem of unhappiness is historically at best temporary, since Christians cannot ultimately remain in a state of indifference with regard to the world.

> [M]onkish withdrawal means that the heart is not concretely developed, that it exists as something undeveloped, or that spirituality, the state of being reconciled, and the life of reconciliation are and ought to remain concentrated within themselves and undeveloped. But the very nature of spirit is to develop itself, to differentiate itself even unto worldliness. (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 263/340)

If in the first stage of reconciliation the church simply disregards the world, in the second stage religion actually opposes and dominates the world. Politically this opposition manifests itself as the struggle between the church and the various secular rulers of Europe. At the community or social level, it presents itself as the relationship between the life of the church and worldly life. The church dominates secular life in an ideological sense or in the sense that its worldview prevails: for both clerics and lay people the sphere of church life is taken as holy, while all social life outside the church, i.e. the spheres of the family and public life, are viewed as what is other or unholy. In a culture that promotes celibacy over family life and poverty over

the accumulation of wealth, worldly activities have no real value, and so the individual that lives and functions in the secular world is not at home with herself. Having accepted the church's view of her life as unholy, she sees her own existence as what ought not to be and thus suffers from a form of alienation. Nor does church life ultimately provide an escape from the problems of the worldly sphere, since the church "takes this same worldliness up into itself, including all of its passions" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 263/341). In other words, the church eventually reaches a stage where its members do not remain detached from the worldly pursuit of pleasure and power, but engage in this pursuit as much as any worldly individual would. In this way, the church becomes "devoid of spirit" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 264/341), and the distinction between the spheres of the holy and unholy breaks down. Needless to say, this relationship between religion and the world is "precisely the opposite of reconciliation" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 264/341). When the religious and secular spheres are in opposition to each other, neither can fully be itself. A religious approach that denies and suppresses the individual's natural impulses, as well as her participation in the spheres of the family and public life, proves to be incomplete and in time falls apart, while a worldly existence that is not recognized as contributing to the greater spiritual good leaves the individual in a state of servitude.

The third and final stage of reconciliation is the stage of ethical life. Hegel discusses ethical life in great detail elsewhere, particularly in the *Philosophy of Right*, but in the 1827 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, his account is extremely brief. In this context the term ethical life is to be understood as Protestant ethical life. It refers to both concrete Protestant social life itself, as well as the norms or duties

governing this form of social existence. According to Hegel, the duties of ethical life can be divided into three basic categories: (a) duties towards the family, i.e., the duty of love for one's spouse, parents and children; (b) duties of justice, fairness and goodwill towards others in the public sphere; and (c) the duty of love towards king and country, a duty that in some circumstances can require the sacrifice of one's life (*BS* 45). Protestant ethical life is an improvement over Catholic society in three basic respects: it promotes family life over celibacy, active self-enrichment over voluntary poverty, and obedience in freedom over blind obedience (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 264/342).[16] Unlike the Catholic church in which the individual seeks spiritual fulfillment by removing himself from the world, Protestant ethical life, by promoting family life and the pursuit of wealth, validates worldly activities and pursuits.

It may appear odd that Hegel discusses modern social and political life in a series of lectures on religion, but for Hegel ethical life is the culmination of Christian development. It is, as we have noted, the most genuine cultus.[17] In the 1827 lectures, Hegel does not discuss the emergence of ethical life in Christian culture, but he gives a good account of its origins in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*. Protestant ethical life springs from two sources. The first source is the beginning of bourgeois culture prior to the Reformation, which has its origin in the limitations of the medieval worldview and the lessons of the crusades. For Hegel the major shortcoming of the Catholic church, especially in the pre-Reformation era, is its tendency to take the particular or the 'this' as what is divine (*VPW* 483), thereby giving the divine an inappropriate form. We see this tendency, for example, in the

[16] One also finds a very similar critique of Catholic holiness in *BS* 45-51; and *VR*$_{31}$ 1: 342-3/455-6, 361-2/473.

importance that medieval Christians placed on relics or on the saints, but this tendency is perhaps best represented in the Catholic interpretation of the host in which God is present as a finite thing (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 260-1/338). In these examples, the divine is found not in the universal but in a particular individual or in an empirical object. This desire to find the divine in the finite particular led Christians to embark upon the Crusades, since Christians thought that they could achieve religious fulfillment by occupying the Holy Land and by taking possession of Christ's grave (*VPW* 484-5). For Hegel, the turning point in medieval culture occurs when the crusaders achieve their military objectives and are disappointed by what they find. Through this experience, some Christians learn that the meaning of Christianity is not to be found in finite worldly objects.

> This is the result, the significance of the crusades. The grave disappointed them about the significance of the 'this', and for this reason the holy grave, Canaan, had to be lost again for the Christians. This is the blessing of the crusades … The result of the crusades was the blessing, the spirit which only is by coming to itself through the negation of its immediate present; the result is that even spirit is present only in the negation of sensibility, immediacy." (*VPW* 486)

Those Christians who have learned their lesson now view sensible objects as external to spirit (*VPW* 486), and, in so doing, have set nature free by allowing it to be what it truly is, the other of spirit. Moreover, they have also set themselves free since they have established a "peaceful relationship with the external" (*VPW* 487). For these Christians the things of nature have become disenchanted, and are now seen both as objects of investigation in their own right and as a means that humans can use and transform to serve their own purposes. And so as a result of this shift in worldview, major technological discoveries are made (e.g. the invention of gun

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[17] See chapter 3, p. 101.

powder and the printing press), while industry and trade expand and develop (*VPW* 487-8).

This shift in the Christian view of nature contributes to the individual's freedom in so far as it brings about a certain reconciliation or peaceful relationship between the individual and nature. Christians are no longer driven to find themselves or to find spirit in natural particulars that are alien to spirit, but are free now to use things as the material with which they can make their imprint on the world. This, however, is not the only way in which this shift in worldview promotes freedom. When he engages in industry and seeks to transform nature, the individual is forced to adopt a universal standpoint. He must set aside his own arbitrary wishes and submit to the reality of the material that he is shaping or of the activity that he is engaging in. In this way, industry provides a form of education or *Bildung*. It involves a discipline that trains the individual to set aside her own particularity and to act in a universal or rational manner (*VPW* 490). This promotes freedom, since for Hegel, as I am arguing in this dissertation, to be free is to be a rational or universal agent by transcending or gaining control over the influence of immediate inclination.

These gains in freedom that have been made by those engaging in industry are entrenched and protected by social and political changes like the establishment of guilds and the development of cities. A new worldview has now been established alongside the feudal worldview and that of the medieval church.

> In this way, a new element, a new world arises within the European world, within European Christianity, a world distinct, on the one hand, from the church, which, as we saw, excluded externality and set it free. Likewise, externality is set in opposition to the relationship of lordship and serfdom, the system of dependence of serfdom [or] the feudal system, that was in effect at this point. (*VPW* 490)

In medieval society lay people shared the dominant Christian viewpoint and saw their own worldly existence as sinful, but in the new bourgeois environment individuals recognize the value of their worldly activity. This alternative to the church's worldview succeeds in integrating nature into its conception of the good life without binding the bourgeois individual to nature. He feels free to engage in the pursuit of wealth or other worldly objects, but these pursuits do not reinforce his animal nature or do not make him a slave to inclination. On the contrary, his worldly activities allow him to rise above the pursuit of particular selfish aims for their own sakes. Thus, it is by being an active participant in the world that the individual develops as a spiritual or rational being.

The second source from which ethical life springs is the Protestant Reformation itself. Here Luther contributes to the establishment of ethical life in two important ways. First, his reforms bring about the reconciliation of religion and the world, a reconciliation that is an integral part of Hegel's view of ethical life. In the period leading up to the Reformation, bourgeois culture has advanced beyond the church in its grasp of the truth (*VPW* 497). The church continues to seek the divine in the sensible particular, while bourgeois society has freed itself of this false view. Luther's first major contribution is that he recognizes and makes explicit this truth that has emerged from secular culture. "Luther's simple teaching is that the consciousness of the 'this' in the present is not something sensible but actual, a spiritual [aspect] of what is actually present, not in the sensible but in faith and enjoyment." (*VPW* 499). Like the *Bürger*, Luther parts with the old view maintained by the church and accepts that the divine or the truth is to be known in spirit.

Moreover, in the Reformation there is a rejection of Catholic ideals of holiness in favour of a more worldly pursuit of Christian life. "A pious life of one's own, soundly lived and even enjoyed, was no longer regarded as something to be renounced; monastic renunciation was renounced instead." (*VGP* 4: 65/3: 98). Luther's recognition of the truth is so important because it comes not from someone who lives a worldly life, but from within the sphere of religion itself. By receiving its legitimacy from religion, the bourgeois lifestyle during the Reformation receives its highest affirmation (*VGP* 4: 61-2/3: 94-5). Luther effectively acknowledges that "the truth of the worldly *is* the spiritual" (VR_{27} 3: 262/339), or that the truth has emerged from the secular sphere, and he incorporates this truth into religion.

In this way, Luther brings about a reconciliation of the religious and the secular. The goal of religion is to know, experience and act according to the truth, and with Luther religion now recognizes that the duties and social structures associated with secular life are themselves an expression of the truth. In other words, to live in accordance with the truth *is*, at least in part, to obey one's worldly duties towards family, neighbour and state. With the recognition of the church, the *Bürger* is no longer forced to pursue his lifestyle in opposition to the ideals of religion. Rather, this lifestyle itself becomes part of what it means to be religious.

Luther's second contribution to the establishment of Protestant ethical life is the criterion of truth that is implied by Luther's message. Luther taught that Christians are justified not by works but by faith. By making this claim, Luther put subjectivity at the centre of humanity's relationship with God. For Luther, the only genuine relationship with God is one involving my innermost being, one in which I as

an individual genuinely believe in Christ and feel remorse in my own heart (*VGP* 4: 63/3: 95-6). Good works that are done by someone lacking this subjective disposition, that are not done from faith, contribute nothing to a person's relationship with God. A consequence of this view is that the distinction between priest and lay person is abandoned. For if the relationship with God is essentially a subjective one, each individual is able to have a direct relationship with God, and does not require a priest to mediate between himself and the divine. In this way Luther's teaching represents a new level of religious empowerment and freedom. But with this new freedom also comes responsibility: each Christian is now judged by his own faith, and no external circumstances can alter this judgement.

If in the Reformation the role of subjectivity is first stressed in the context of humanity's relationship to a personal God, it becomes in Protestant culture an important component in more general knowledge of the truth. Truth is to be understood not in the ordinary sense of particular contingent facts, but in the Hegelian sense. Here truth is *the* truth: it involves both some form of theoretical recognition of the fundamental tenets of religion in general and Christianity in particular, as well as a practical recognition of the duties that stem from religion. From the Reformation emerges a new norm governing the way in which the truth should be known and what should count as the truth for me. In the modern Protestant world, an individual should not ultimately accept something as the truth simply because an authority says that it is the truth. Although authority still has a necessary role to play in the process of learning the truth, the goal of this process is that the individual no longer rely on the authority as grounds for accepting this truth, but come to see and feel the truth for

herself. The subject should eventually be capable of recognizing the truth on her own, and should only acknowledge something as true if this recognition occurs. Hegel refers to this recognition as "witness of the spirit".

> In this principle of the Reformation the religious content of the Christian church is on the whole preserved. But it is preserved in such a way that this content receives its authentication from the witness of spirit, that it is to be valid for me to the extent that it asserts validity within my conscience or my heart. This is what Christ said: "If you keep my commandments, it will come home to you that my word is true." The criterion of truth is the way that what is true authenticates and evidences itself in my heart. (*VGP* 4: 67/3: 99-100)

The witness of the spirit has an important role to play in ethical life because it makes it possible for individuals to obey their duty in freedom rather than blindly. If an individual is witness to the truth, then he accepts the truth or the good because he sees the truth for himself and feels that it is good. In this case, the duties that the good demands of this individual will not be duties that are imposed upon her by an alien other, but duties that she recognizes are good to obey, duties in which she believes with her mind and her heart. In this way the individual identifies with her duty and is at home in it. Her obedience is free.

Having examined the nature and origins of ethical life, we can now try to understand the significance of ethical life in Hegel's philosophy of religion. Why then does Hegel claim that in the ethical realm "the reconciliation of religion with worldliness and actuality comes about and is accomplished" (VR_{27} 3: 265/342)? As we have seen, in Protestant ethical life the religious duties of the individual are not duties that demand a renunciation of the world, but ones that require active participation in the world. Thus practicing religion is no longer, as it was earlier in church history, an activity that is indifferent or opposed to worldliness. In ethical life

worldly existence is a moment of the religious or the spiritual. In other words, to live as God or the truth requires of us, one can, indeed must, engage in worldly activities like raising a family, acquiring private property, going to war, etc. The two spheres of the religious and the worldly do not exclude each other and one is no longer forced to choose between them. To live the right kind of worldly life *is* to be religious, and to be religious *is* to live the right kind of worldly life. It is for this reason that the institutions of ethical life are "divine institutions" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 264/342). In Protestant ethical life the individual can be fully at home with herself because she is able to satisfy both sides of her nature. She is able to fulfill the demands of her spiritual nature in so far as ethical life promotes her existence as a thinking, objective universal individual. Yet she is able to do so without completely suppressing or doing violence to her natural side, since ethical life still leaves plenty of room for the individual to pursue her own projects and desires.

We have examined the appearance of ethical life in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, in order to see how it provides a solution to the problem of unhappiness, and we can now turn to this solution. The Roman is unhappy because he is unable to be concretely free. He is able to achieve a certain abstract freedom or independence vis-à-vis the world, but his social milieu does not make it possible for him to act in the world as a fully rational agent should act. The Romans lack a society that was structured according to the norms of ethical life, a society in which the individual is able to express his individuality *as* a valuable moment of the social whole. Because the social world restricts his freedom, the world is not as the Roman thinks that it should be, and so he is unhappy. But with the appearance of modern

ethical life this need has been addressed, since the social world is now rationally structured to promote freedom. For in ethical life we see that "the principle of freedom has penetrated into the worldly realm itself, and that the worldly, because it has been thus conformed to the concept, reason, and eternal truth, is freedom that has become concrete and will that is rational" (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 264/341-2). There is no longer any cause for the rational agent to be unhappy. For her the world (i.e. her social environment) is as it ought to be.

With Protestant ethical life, we have hit the high point in the development of Christianity. Spirit has reached a form of social existence in which full reconciliation and full freedom are possible. In it the purpose of religion has been actualized. But in Hegel's presentation of the consummate religion in the 1827 lectures, the story is not yet over. With the Reformation thinking flourishes and in the form of the understanding it turns against the concrete content of religion, threatening to undermine the knowledge that makes religion and ethical life possible. In the final pages dealing with the consummate religion Hegel addresses this difficulty, arguing that thinking must solve the problem that thinking itself creates (*VR*$_{27}$ 3: 268-9/346-7). The solution to the difficulty is speculative philosophy. However, the practice of philosophy is not a yet more perfect form of Christianity than ordinary ethical life. The philosopher is not necessarily more free for Hegel than the ordinary citizen engaging in ethical life. Rather, the function of philosophy is to protect ethical life. It provides a conceptual justification for ethical life and religious faith, thus warding off the threat posed by the abstract thinking of the understanding by beating it at its own game.

Conclusion

In my introduction, I claimed that Hegel's philosophy of religion offers us an interesting and original idea of what religion is. In concluding I wish briefly to outline and summarize what this conception of religion as a practice involves.

Hegel agrees with Schleiermacher that religion is not morality. Although to be religious is to follow duty, religion distinguishes itself from morality in an important sense that I discuss below. Nor does religion require belief in a transcendent being of the kind whose existence cannot be known but can only be the object of faith. Finally, in contrast to Schleiermacher, religion is not primarily about feeling or immediate experience of the divine. Above all, religion is practical. In religion my primary goal is to rise above my attachment to my own personal desires and to assume a universal or objective standpoint. Religion requires that I know the truth in some form, whether in traditional religious representations or as philosophical truth, but this knowledge is ultimately valuable in religion because it plays a necessary role in my effort to be free.

To assume a universal standpoint is to follow duty. More specifically, it is to see myself as part of a community that is bigger than myself: to be an active member in family life; to act morally and follow my conscience when dealing with others; and to play a role in the state, even to the point of sacrificing my life for the whole when this is required. But the universal standpoint demanded by religion also demands that I develop my particular personality and seek to satisfy my own personal desires, since my particularity is an essential part of my identity as a concrete universal. I should be

involved as a responsible participant in the free economy, acquiring property, pursuing my own interests, developing my talents, and expanding my knowledge. This pursuit of my particularity is permitted and required of me not because it is an end in itself, but because it is a moment of the good life. The pursuit of my own desires is an important part of a way of life in which I and others can be free, i.e., one in which we are best able to be and act as concrete universals, and in which this kind of free life is most sustainable. I must always bear in mind that herein lies the value of my particularity, and this will shape and determine the way I choose to pursue my own personal interests.

But although being religious for Hegel involves following various forms of duty, religion for Hegel is not reducible to mere morality. In religion I do not follow duty merely for duty's sake, nor do I do so because it helps to make the world as happy a place as possible (although a society in which people follow the law is perhaps one in which happiness is promoted). Rather, I strive to overcome my particularity and to follow duty because in so doing I am free and I help to create an environment in which others too can be free. I am free when I follow duty because in acting this way I am autonomous: my decisions are not determined by external impulses but are guided by my reason. But I am free also because by setting aside attachment to my particularity I am able to let go of my needs and desires when they are not fulfilled and when there is nothing that I can do about it. In this way, I maintain an independence vis-à-vis the world or am reconciled with the world. No matter what contingent circumstances I encounter, if I am free then the world can make me sad and it can make me suffer, but it cannot make me bitter or discontented.

Religion for Hegel allows me in this respect to transcend nature, and to attain the peace that comes from accepting my situation. It is in this sense that acting from duty has a religious dimension for Hegel.

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