

Hegel and Christian Theology

A Reading of the
Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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I

Hegel as a Theologian of the Spirit

HEGEL'S LIFE AND CAREER IN BRIEF¹

The year 1770 was auspicious for art and thought. The spring of that year brought the birth of Friedrich Hölderlin and William Wordsworth, and the winter, Ludwig van Beethoven. Between the two poets and the composer there was born, on 27 August, one who achieved in philosophy a greatness comparable to theirs in poetry and music, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Among the birth-year mates there was a mystical linkage. Perhaps it is not too fanciful to suggest that Hegel became the Beethoven of philosophy, and Beethoven the Hegel of music; for they both sought pattern, harmony, and redemption in and through a world of conflict, disharmony, and suffering. The music of Beethoven, like the philosophy of Hegel, manifests the awesome tragic wholeness of life in strikingly beautiful formulations. Hegel shared something of Wordsworth's nature mysticism, although philosophically he was closer to the greater genius of Wordsworth's companion and rival, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, born just two years later. As for Hegel and Hölderlin, there is sad irony in the fact that the latter's youthful genius came to a tragic end in madness the same year that the former's greatest work of genius was published, 1807.

¹ This chapter and the next draw upon the editorial introduction and textual annotations written by the author for *G. W. F. Hegel: Theologian of the Spirit*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997). Used by permission of Augsburg Fortress Publishers. The definitive biography is by Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For this first section, see also Franz Wiedmann, *Hegel: An Illustrated Biography*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Pegasus, 1968); Jacques d'Hondt, *Hegel in His Time*, trans. John Burbidge (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1988); Stephen Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth and History: An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991); and Richard Kroner, 'Hegel's Philosophical Development', introduction to *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

The son of a Württemberg civil servant, the young Hegel attended the Stuttgart *Gymnasium* from 1777 to 1788, where he proved to be an exemplary student and read the classical authors along with Shakespeare, Rousseau, Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller. He seemed headed for a career in ministry, so he entered the theological seminary of Tübingen in 1788, where he formed a close friendship with Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich Schelling. Schelling was five years younger than Hegel and Hölderlin but entered the seminary as an exceptionally precocious student only two years after them. These three, finding the theological orthodoxy of their professors stultifying, educated themselves in the political, literary, and philosophical literature of the Enlightenment, and they embraced the ideals of the French revolution with enthusiasm. They also imbibed deeply of the German and Swabian mystics. During this period Hegel began writing fragmentary essays for his own edification, in which among other things he explored the possibility of creating a new folk religion that would integrate all aspects of life.²

Hegel completed his studies in 1793, but he did not take up a career in ministry. Instead he accepted a position as house tutor for a wealthy family in Bern, Switzerland, where he had considerable free time and access to a rich library. Here he broadened his knowledge of modern philosophy and studied Immanuel Kant seriously for the first time. He produced more exploratory essays in which he was severely critical of the ‘positivity’ of Christianity while extolling a Kantian religion of morality. In the fall of 1796, with the assistance of Hölderlin, he obtained a similar tutorial position in Frankfurt, which brought him into closer proximity with his friends. Here he began to explore the possibility of combining the beauty of Greek folk religion with the moral law of Kantianism in the shape of spiritual beauty or love, which he now saw to constitute the heart of Christianity as a religion of spirit. Spirit unifies opposites in a pantheism of love. Several of the fragments written during this period were given the title ‘The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate’ when they were published, along with Hegel’s other early writings, in 1907 by Herman Nohl.

Upon his father’s death in 1799, Hegel received a modest inheritance that allowed him to accept a position as an unsalaried

² This and other writings on religion prior to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* are discussed in Chap. 2.

lecturer (*Privatdozent*) at the University of Jena, where he joined Schelling in 1801. Students paid small fees to attend his lectures on logic and metaphysics, the philosophies of nature and spirit, ethics and natural right, and the history of philosophy. These lectures not only provided additional income but also gave Hegel the opportunity to experiment with various elements that gradually evolved into his philosophical system. It was a period of remarkable intellectual fertility for him. His first publications were two book-length essays, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, and a comparative study of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, and Johann Gottlieb Fichte entitled *Faith and Knowledge*. In 1806, as Napoleon defeated the Prussian troops at the Battle of Jena, Hegel finished under considerable duress his most famous work, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a few hundred copies of which were printed early in 1807.

For financial and personal reasons, Hegel found it necessary to leave Jena. He moved to Bamberg to become editor of a newspaper, but a year later, in 1808, he was fortunate to be offered a position as rector of a *Gymnasium* in Nuremberg, where among other things he taught religion and speculative logic to his pupils. In 1811, Hegel married, began a family, and during the next four years (1812–16) published his *Science of Logic*. The latter work sufficiently established his reputation that in 1816 he was offered university professorships in Heidelberg, Erlangen, and Berlin. The Erlangen and Berlin offers were couched in qualifications, so he accepted the offer from Heidelberg. His lectures there, covering a full range of philosophical topics with the exception of religion, proved to be a great success, and he published in 1817 the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, a compendium of the entire system of philosophy intended as a textbook to accompany his lectures.

In the next year, 1818, Hegel was recruited by the Prussian Minister of Education, Karl von Altenstein, to become professor of philosophy at the University of Berlin, filling a chair left vacant by Fichte's death in 1814, and there he remained until his death. Through the impact of his books and lectures, Hegel's fame spread throughout Europe, and Hegelianism began to form as a philosophical school. In 1820 he completed a textbook on political philosophy, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*; it was to be the last book he published (except for revised editions of the *Encyclopedia*). The *Philosophy of Right* generated considerable

controversy because in it as well as in his public activity Hegel attempted to steer a middle course between revolutionary and restoration politics. There was considerable political turmoil in Prussia at the time, and Hegel found himself in the delicate situation of being supported in his office by the aristocratic establishment while sympathizing with liberal reform movements. Consequently he had numerous enemies on the right and the left, and his position in Berlin was never completely secure.

In the summer of 1821 Hegel lectured for the first time on philosophy of religion, which was the final major element of his system to be elaborated in detail. When these lectures were repeated in subsequent years—1824, 1827, and 1831—they varied greatly in structure and content, indicating the fluidity and openness with which Hegel approached this and other topics. He was constantly appropriating new material and responding to specific issues and challenges.

In a strict sense the Hegelian system came into existence as a fixed entity only after Hegel's death, which occurred suddenly on 14 November 1831, during an epidemic of cholera. In little over a month following his death, his wife, students, and friends had arranged to publish his collected works, including lecture manuscripts and auditors' transcriptions (*Nachschriften*) on the major topics covered in Berlin—history of philosophy, logic and metaphysics, and the philosophies of history, art, right, and religion. With Hegel's voice silenced, his former students and disciples within a few years fell into warring factions; and the controversy over Hegel's thought continues to this day.

SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY AND THE LOGICAL DEEP STRUCTURE

What Hegel came to call 'speculative philosophy' was indebted to yet distinct from the 'reflective philosophy of subjectivity'—the phrase he used to describe, in his early work, *Faith and Knowledge*, the philosophies of Kant, Fichte, and Jacobi.³ Speculative

³ The full title of the work is *Faith and Knowledge, or the Reflective Philosophy of Subjectivity in the Complete Range of Its Forms as Kantian, Jacobian, and Fichtean Philosophy*. See *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 53.

philosophy did not avoid the Kantian critical philosophy but attempted to move through and beyond it. Hints toward this end were provided by Fichte and especially Schelling, but Hegel eventually moved in his own direction through an act of high philosophical creativity.

Kant's philosophy starts with empirical, sense experience, received in the form of intuition (*Anschauung*). By application of a priori categories (time, space, causality, substance, etc.), mind constructs these intuitions into a picture of reality. We can never, Kant insisted, get beyond these constructions to know reality or the world as it is in and for itself. The constructed object simply reflects mind back to itself. Nor, obviously, can we have theoretical knowledge of any transcendent, metaphysical ground of reality. The price of (vainly) seeking such knowledge is what Kant called 'transcendental illusion'.⁴

For Hegel there is a 'getting beyond' in the form of a turn, a reversal, such that what is constructed also shows or manifests itself, gives itself on its own terms, which partly correspond to but also enrich and correct consciousness. Something new is known beyond self-knowledge; there is a spiralling ahead, and consciousness proves to be participatory and receptive as well as critical and constructive. Reality is, to be sure, a mirror of consciousness; but *consciousness is also a mirror of reality*. 'Speculation' (from the Latin *speculum*, 'mirror') involves a relationship of double mirroring in which there occurs a reversal in the flow of meaning—from object to subject as well as from subject to object.⁵ Where Kant's philosophy ends by imposing strict limits on reason, Hegel's moves on to a science of logic, a philosophy of the categories of thought. Thought is the medium in which the mirroring occurs.

The condition of possibility for this reversal is that subject and object, self and world, the same and the other, participate in, are moments of, an encompassing whole, which Hegel calls variously 'truth', 'actuality' (*Wirklichkeit*), 'the universal', 'the absolute', 'spirit' (*Geist*)—or 'God'. In addition to a first and a second, there is a third, which overreaches the first and the second and is the relationship between them. This relationship or whole is not

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), 300–3 (B 355–9, A 298–302).

⁵ On speculative philosophy and theology, see below, Chaps. 3–4.

separable from the component elements but becomes actual, manifests itself, only in their double mirroring. It gives itself in the reversal of relationship between consciousness and object. It is 'transcendental' in the sense of presenting conditions of possibility of their relating; it is not 'transcendent' in the sense of being a supersensible entity or ground apart from them. The whole presents itself in the form of intellectual intuition, which Hegel thought of as analogous to, yet distinct from, Kant's sensible intuition—thus drawing out the implications of Kant's own allusion to intellectual intuition in the *Critique of Judgement*.⁶ We intuit the fundamentally rational structure of the whole as we engage in the critical construction of the contents of sense experience into an intelligible world. Intellectual intuition both follows and precedes sensible intuition. Sense experience is not the absolute starting-point of knowledge; something always precedes it.

So the picture we get from Hegel is that of a spiralling movement, a dialectic of mediations in which cognitive novelty occurs, rather than that of a circle of repetition constantly reflecting back on itself or a linear thinking that moves from one disconnected unit to the next. The question for Hegel is whether the spiral remains open-ended such that the three constitutive moments remain unresolved, or whether the spiral converges on a point of indifference—absolute knowledge, the sheer identity of consciousness and object, thought and reality. The latter is the direction taken by Fichte and Schelling—'the night in which all cows are black' (one of Hegel's famous jibes against Schelling's philosophy⁷). If Hegel resisted this direction, then the focal point of the interplay between self, world, and the truth of the whole (God) cannot be the human self or subject as it was for Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher; nor can it be God as a transcendent entity or supreme being; rather it is the interplay itself, the spiral of mediations among these three elements, which can be represented geometrically as moving in wave-like rhythms (like the helix of the genetic code).

Hegel does make some critical assumptions about this spiral of mediations. The fundamental assumption is that it is essentially rational. This is *his* basic intellectual intuition, shared with

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 2. 66.

⁷ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 9.

Aristotle:⁸ the intuition that thought knows itself (*noēsis tēs noēseōs*) in knowing objects of thought. The condition of possibility of the co-constitutiveness of consciousness and object is the rationality of the whole.

Reason or thought is not something static: it moves and thinks, and it does so in the form of assertions, statements, judgements, arguments, syllogisms. The syllogism (or reasoning to a conclusion) is the basic movement of thought and of life itself.⁹ Thought moves between three moments or elements and brings them into relation with one another: the *universal substance or principle* of a statement (U); the *particular quality* or determinate modification of the universal in the case at hand (P); and the *individual subject* about which the statement makes a predication (I). Consider this example of a syllogism about Socrates, which has the logical form: All U is P; I is U; therefore I is P.

All human beings (U) are mortal (P);
Socrates (I) is human (U);
Therefore, Socrates (I) is mortal (P).

According to Hegel, all valid syllogisms can be varied so that each of the three elements assumes in turn the middle or mediating position between the other two. Hence there are three forms or figures for every syllogism: U-P-I (the order of Hegel's system), U-I-P, and P-U-I (the example given above). The effect is to prevent any one of the elements from becoming foundational and the others derivative; rather they are co-constitutive.

Life-processes involve an analogous set of elements: immediacy or identity (corresponding to the universal), differentiation (corresponding to the particular), and synthesis at a higher level of complexity (corresponding to the individual or subjective). Life is rational, and rationality is alive. Hegel must have thought he had 'cracked a code' with this essentially mystical grasp of the dialectic of life and thought. Is it deep insight into truth or totalizing illusion? Deconstruction argues that there is no such code, or at least no single code but an irreducible multiplicity of codes. For

⁸ See Hegel's reference to the key passage in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, 12.7, 1072^b 18–30, in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, § 577 (*Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 314–15; this passage is translated in *Hegel: Theologian of the Spirit*, 53–4 (see 277 n. 21)).

⁹ *Encyclopedia*, §§ 183–9 (*The Encyclopedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 259–64).

Hegel the one code manifests itself in an astonishing multiplicity of forms through which it undergoes determinate modification; and thus the articulation of it is as diverse as the topics of philosophy.

The three constitutive elements of the syllogism are linked by Hegel with the three main branches of philosophy: science of logic, philosophy of nature, and philosophy of spirit.¹⁰ *Logic* is concerned with the structures and relations of thought itself, for which Hegel uses the term ‘the logical’ or the ‘logical idea’ (as distinct from the idea as embodied or realized in the world and consciousness), and it plays the role of universal principle in relation to the whole of philosophy; by itself it is a principle of abstract identity. *Nature* is identified with the particular qualities or determinate modifications of the universal; it plays the role of differentiation and otherness in the philosophical system. *Spirit* (finite human consciousness) is identified with the individuality or uniqueness that emerges from the union of the universal and the particular; it plays the role of reconciliation or return to a more richly constituted whole as mediated through difference: a movement toward the concrete universal or *absolute spirit*.

These linkages seem to be a critical assumption for which Hegel offers no direct justification: there is no prior proof of the truth of a philosophical system. But we can appreciate the alternatives that propelled him to this position. If nature were to become the universal principle, then spirit would be mediated with its particular (now merely logical) qualities by means of nature, and the resulting system would be *naturalism*: Hume, Feuerbach, Marx. If finite spirit were to become the universal principle, then nature would be mediated with its particular (logical) qualities by means of spirit, which would be an instance of *subjective idealism*: Kant, Fichte. Both naturalism and subjective idealism are monisms that tend to reduce everything to one principle: matter or mind. The alternative requires the transcendence of the logical idea as the universal principle rather than its identification with either nature or finite spirit. This transcendence of the idea yields Hegel’s *speculative or absolute idealism*. If nature and spirit are to be mediated in such a way that neither is to be reduced to the principle of the other—and Hegel contends that only this mediation conforms to lived experience—then they must be mediated by a middle term

¹⁰ *Encyclopedia*, § 187 addition (*The Encyclopedia Logic*, p. 263); §§ 575–7 (*Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, 314). See further below, Chap. 11, pp. 267–8.

that is the universal principle of both, the logical idea. Nature, in turn, when it assumes the middle position in the triple mediation of philosophy (as it does in Hegel's own system), prevents finite spirit from collapsing into undialectical identity with pure rationality by disclosing spirit's embodied character and demonstrating that it is not its own principle. Spirit in middle position raises nature to its essence in the sense that it recognizes nature to be the appearance of the idea in the mode of particularity and externality; in nature, spirit slumbers. The natural and spiritual mediations also have the effect of bringing the logical idea into relation with that which is other than itself—of preventing it from absorbing all of reality into itself in a pure metaphysical idealism (such as that of Berkeley).

Hegel insists that 'idealism' is not to be understood as the antithesis of 'realism'. Rather it overreaches and embraces realism. The idea is the absolute unity of concept and objectivity, of the rational and the real. Ideality is not something that is given outside of and apart from reality. Rather, ideality is the *truth* of the finite, of reality. 'This ideality of the finite is the most important proposition of philosophy, and for that reason every genuine philosophy is *idealism*.'¹¹ 'Consequently, the opposition of idealistic and realistic philosophy has no significance. A philosophy which ascribed veritable, ultimate, absolute being to finite existence as such, would not deserve the name of philosophy.'¹² As these quotations suggest, by 'idealism' Hegel means *absolute idealism*. The following comment makes very clear the distinction between subjective and absolute idealism as he understands it:

According to the Kantian philosophy, the things that we know about are only appearances for *us*, and what they are *in themselves* remains for us an inaccessible beyond. The naive consciousness has rightly taken exception to this subjective idealism, according to which the content of our consciousness is something that is *only* ours, something posited only through *us*. In fact, the true situation is that the things of which we have immediate knowledge are mere appearances, not *only for us*, but also *in-themselves*, and that the proper determination of these things, which are in this sense 'finite', consists in having the ground of their being not within themselves but in the universal divine idea. This interpretation must also be called

¹¹ *Encyclopedia*, § 95 remark, § 96 addition, § 213 (*The Encyclopedia Logic*, 152–3, 286).

¹² *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 155.

idealism, but, as distinct from the subjective idealism of the critical philosophy, it is *absolute idealism*.¹³

‘Absolute’ here connotes that which encompasses all relations within itself, including relations with the finite or non-absolute. God as the absolute idea releases or ‘absolves’ the other to be other, but not totally other. With the classical tradition, Hegel affirms that God has only internal relations; nothing can be ‘outside’ of God. But within the divine milieu, external relations occur, including between God and world, for the world shares in nature’s externality.

Hegel’s interpretations of the various domains of experience, while generated out of the logical deep structure, are by no means simply read off from that structure. Rather, experience as it actually presents itself in the realms of history, art, religion, ethics, society, politics, anthropology, and psychology is determinative of the way in which the deep structure concretely appears—and it appears in a rich variety of forms, shapes, variations. The logic functions as a hermeneutical key or paradigm for reading and interpreting experience, but it is a key that must be used experimentally, in the manner of a heuristic device. As we shall discover, of no subject is this truer than Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of religion.

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AS THEOLOGY

Hegel’s intention in addressing religious themes was not clearly understood in his time, and many suspected that he set out to convert the subject matter of theology into a purely immanent, human phenomenon. Or, if that was not the case, then the way in which he reinterpreted Christian doctrines in a strange philosophical conceptuality effectively undercut traditional theism. Hegel, it was believed, was either an atheist or a pantheist.

By contrast with these misrepresentations, Hegel insisted that the proper topic of philosophy of religion is precisely the nature and reality of God. Philosophy of religion cannot properly limit its concern to the phenomenon of religion; rather it must recognize that religion itself encompasses the relationship of human beings to God. Religion intends an actuality that lies beyond it—but this

¹³ *Encyclopedia*, § 45 addition (*The Encyclopedia Logic*, 88–9).

transcendent referent had been rendered problematic by Enlightenment philosophy, history, psychology, and natural science. Traditionally, the question of the reality-status of God had been addressed within philosophy by metaphysics or natural theology. But the claims of these disciplines were severely questioned by Kant's critique of pure reason. Moreover, the authority of scripture and the historical basis for Christianity had been challenged by critics such as Lessing, and the alternative of a purely rational or natural religion favoured by the Enlightenment was undercut by Hume.

Philosophy of religion came on the scene as an alternative to the discredited metaphysics of natural theology, and according to Walter Jaeschke¹⁴ it faced two options. It could, on the one hand, develop a new philosophical theology within itself, or perhaps borrow one from another source, in order to have a foundation for cognitive knowledge of God and thus provide an adequate account of how religion conceives itself. Or, on the other hand, it could conclude that no such foundation is available and thus 'confine itself to regarding religion as a specifically human expression of life. It has then no right to take what appears as divine to be anything other than human.' The latter option is the one that has prevailed since Feuerbach: the divine is nothing other than the essence of the human projected on a screen of transcendence. Anthropological, sociological, psychological, and historical interpretations of religion have come to the fore, and for them the problematic character of God-talk could be regarded as a matter of scientific indifference.

Hegel, however, took the first option, and he regarded the intimations of the latter course that were already discernible in his time to spell disaster not only for religious faith but also for human culture. Since neither classical metaphysics, nor the Enlightenment rational theologies, nor the Kantian doctrine of moral postulates, nor Schleiermacher's orientation of theology to religious feeling were in his judgement satisfactory accounts of faith in God, Hegel set out to recover the conceptual foundations of religion by creating a postcritical speculative theology of his own. That was the true agenda of his lectures on the philosophy of religion.

¹⁴ Walter Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 1-9.

Jaeschke points out that Hegel became aware of this agenda only gradually and through sustained reflection.¹⁵ By the end of the Frankfurt period he was clear about the need for a metaphysical renewal of the doctrine of God and religion, but not about how to accomplish it. God could not be the extrawordly, omnipotent superperson of classical theism, or the abstract supreme being of the Enlightenment, or the preceptor and executor of the Kantian moral law. In Frankfurt Hegel began to develop a theory of the divine as the unification of nature and freedom, finite and infinite, but he had not yet arrived at the decisive category of *Geist* (spirit) to describe it. However, basic conceptual decisions were made during Hegel's tenure in Jena and completed by the time of writing the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. On the one hand, philosophy of religion is placed in the context of a reconstructed system of thought. On the other hand, it does not dissolve into logic or purely philosophical knowledge, nor is it a patchwork of ethical and aesthetic considerations. Rather philosophy of religion is a distinctive sort of philosophical or speculative theology, which claims that a postmetaphysical way of thinking about God is possible and that religion is a unique shape of consciousness alongside psychological, ethical, and aesthetic experience. The place of philosophy of religion in relation to the other human sciences was established in the *Phenomenology*, but not its internal form and content. That was achieved only with the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

At the very beginning of these lectures, Hegel told his hearers:

God is the beginning of all things and the end of all things; [everything] starts from God and returns to God. God is the one and only object of philosophy. [Its concern is] to occupy itself with God, to apprehend everything in God, to lead everything back to God, as well as to derive everything particular from God and to justify everything only in so far as it stems from God, is sustained through its relationship with God, lives by God's radiance and has [within itself] the mind of God. Thus philosophy *is* theology, and [one's] occupation with philosophy—or rather *in* philosophy—is of itself the service of God [*Gottesdienst*, 'worship']. (1:84)¹⁶

Such a linkage between theology and philosophy was once found in the Middle Ages, and the time had come to re-establish it, Hegel

¹⁵ See Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion*, 121–8.

¹⁶ In-text references are to *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 vols., ed. and trans. Peter C. Hodgson *et al.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984–7; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See Chap. 2, n. 46.

argued, since modern theologians have abandoned their vocation of knowing *God*, as opposed to knowing only human subjectivity or investigating only what was *once* believed. Indeed, it is now philosophy rather than theology that preserves and interprets the central Christian doctrines (1:121–2, 154–8, 168).

Hegel returned to this theme at the end of the lectures. ‘The goal of philosophy is the cognition of the truth—the cognition of God because God is the absolute truth. . . . Philosophy knows God essentially as concrete, as the spiritual, realized universality that is not jealous but communicates itself.’ The Enlightenment is not pleased when philosophy defends the rationality of the Christian religion or shows that the truth is deposited in religion. The task of philosophy—or of ‘the [branch of] philosophy that is theology’—is ‘to show forth the rational content of religion [*die Vernunft der Religion*]’.¹⁷ Or, expressed slightly differently: ‘Philosophy is to this extent theology’, that it presents the reconciliation of God with the world, this reconciliation being the peace that does not ‘surpass all reason’ but is itself precisely reason (3:347).

Theology, then, is a branch of philosophy that concerns itself with the knowledge of God and exhibits the rational content of religion. It does this by raising the symbolic, metaphorical, representational language of religion into a conceptual, scientific terminology—and precisely this is the agenda of Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of religion. Theology, in brief, is a ‘science of religion’ and ‘the intellectual science of God’ (2:252).

In the controversies following his death, Hegel would have aligned himself with the theologians of the Hegelian middle who sought to carry forward the agenda of a scientific theology (Karl Daub, Philipp Marheineke, Karl Rosenkranz, Ferdinand Christian Baur),¹⁸ as opposed to the radicals of the Hegelian left who rejected all religion as mythological and illusory (Bruno Bauer, David Friedrich Strauss, Ludwig Feuerbach, among others), and the conservatives of the Hegelian right who sought to restore orthodoxy or establish a speculative theism or a ‘positive’

¹⁷ 3:246–7. The variant referring to the ‘[branch of] philosophy that is theology’ derives most likely from Hegel’s marked copy of Griesheim’s transcript of the 1824 lectures. In this Hegel is drawing on a tradition that goes back to Aristotle, who conceived his ‘first philosophy’ as theology.

¹⁸ Hegel praised Daub and Marheineke specifically in this connection at the conclusion of his Foreword to Hinrichs’s *Religion* (see Chap. 2, n. 41, and *Hegel: Theologian of the Spirit*, 171).

philosophy of mythology (such as I. H. Fichte, C. H. Weisse, and Friedrich Schelling in his later writings).¹⁹ In the subsequent history of philosophy and theology, however, right down to our own time, the deconstructive critics of the left and the neoconservatives of the right have prevailed against the Hegelian middle. The speculative theology of the latter has been derided as ‘ontotheology’ by the left and as ‘heterodoxy’ by the right.

THEOLOGIAN OF THE SPIRIT

We can with some justification, then, speak of Hegel as a ‘theologian’—but why a ‘theologian of the spirit’? The answer is that ‘spirit’²⁰ identifies for Hegel the distinctive ontological quality of God. The charge of ‘ontotheology’ levelled against Hegelianism is correct so long as the term is defined in accord with Hegel’s innovative, indeed ‘heterodox’ approach: these terms of derision can be turned to good effect. According to Cyril O’Regan, Hegelian ontotheology contends that the shared content of theology and philosophy is truth or God, and that this content can be known, but also that the dominant form of knowledge encapsulated in the Christian metanarrative is seriously deficient. Thus Hegel undertook a speculative redescription of the narrative, oriented to the trinitarian self-manifestation of God in ‘moments’ or ‘epochs’ that can also be grasped in logical or conceptual form as the foundational structure of reality itself. The being of God (the *ontos* of *theos*) discloses itself to be not pure immediacy or abstract substance or ‘supreme being’ (*höchstes Wesen*) but rather ‘spirit’ (*Geist*) in the sense of energy, movement, life, revelation, differentiation, and reconciliation.²¹ Spirit designates a God who is intrinsically self-revelatory, self-manifesting; God is not locked up

¹⁹ For a thorough discussion, see Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion*, chap. 4.

²⁰ I follow the ‘down’ style of the English edition for Hegel’s philosophical terminology. Thus ‘spirit’ is written in lower case (including the philosophical name of God, ‘absolute spirit’) except when preceded by a definite article (‘the Spirit’), which signifies a reference to the (Holy) Spirit of the Trinity.

²¹ Cyril O’Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 3. O’Regan argues that Hegel’s postcritical reconstruction of ontotheology draws upon resources in a heterodox tradition that goes back to Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, and medieval and early modern mysticism (Meister Eckhart, Joachim of Fiore, and Jacob Boehme)—a tradition of which O’Regan himself is critical. Another study, which explores the influence on Hegel’s

within godself but is knowable and related to the world. Spirit is not an aspect or person of the divine Trinity but the Trinity as such and as a whole, considered as an encompassing act or process of creating, communicating, consummating—an act by which God's own being is engendered and accomplished as well as that of the world.²² Such a position represents a sharp break with traditional metaphysical theology, the Kantian critique of which Hegel shares, but he insists that God is the most actual of subjects—absolute intersubjectivity—rather than being merely a human projection or an ethical postulate. Any theology worthy of the name is in this sense an ontotheology.

Hegel's decisive breakthrough to this insight came in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which assumed the dramatic pattern of a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of formation and development. When the parentheses are removed from the *Phenomenology*, it is clear, says O'Regan, that the ultimate subject of becoming is neither the human individual nor society but God, the transcendental signified—or, in Hegelian terms, neither subjective spirit nor objective spirit but absolute spirit. Thus Hegel gives an ontotheological as opposed to a merely anthropological reading of the metanarrative. The emergent subjectivity of both individual human beings and the human community are elements in the becoming of the divine (inter)subjectivity. This whole process is what Hegel means by *Geist*.²³

The evolution of Hegel's theology of spirit can be traced in writings that precede the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. In one of the essays comprising 'The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate' (1799), hints occur that spirit is the condition of possibility for a nonextrinsic relationship between the divine and the human, which is a relationship of spirit to spirit, a unity that embraces difference. 'The hill and the eye which sees it are object and subject, but between humanity and God, between spirit and spirit, there is no such cleft of objectivity and subjectivity; one is to the other an other only in that one recognizes the other.' In reflecting

pneumatology of Luther and Lutheran pietism, is Alan M. Olson, *Hegel and the Spirit: Philosophy as Pneumatology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), esp. chap. 3. A considerable portion of Olson's study (chaps. 4–6) is devoted to the relationship between Hegel and Hölderlin, and especially to the impact of the latter's madness on Hegel's interpretation of spirit.

²² See O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, 20–1, 29–30, 45–9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 52–4, 56–7.

on John 4:24 ('God is spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth'), Hegel writes: 'How could anything but a spirit know a spirit? . . . Faith in the divine is only possible if in believers themselves there is a divine element which rediscovers itself.' Believers are not illumined by an exterior light; 'on the contrary, their own inflammability takes fire and burns with a flame that is their own'.²⁴ Hegel is employing here characteristically mystical language and spiritual images. The christology contained in this essay is also pneumatological: Jesus is one who is filled by the Spirit, who proclaims the inbreaking kingdom of God as a communion of the Spirit (consisting in harmonious love and renewing life), and who must depart so that the Spirit may come and dwell within the community.²⁵

In *Faith and Knowledge* (1802), the concept of absolute spirit is present—it is the true infinite that includes finitude within itself and overcomes it—but the category 'spirit' itself is lacking. At the beginning of the Jena lecture fragment, 'The Resumption of the Whole into One' (1802–3), Hegel remarks that 'in religion the ideal shape of spirit is real, while its real side is ideal'. This means that the ideality of the divine takes on an empirical reality that reflects spirit back to itself. The goal of religion is 'to let spirit appear in spiritual shape', as opposed to the sensuous shapes of nature and art.²⁶

Spirit is the highest of the stages of consciousness whose odyssey is traced in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807); it appears when reason, which mediates the difference between consciousness and self-consciousness, assumes the shapes of ethical life, art, religion, and philosophy. In the preface to this work a definition of spirit begins to be fashioned. 'That substance is essentially subject is expressed in the notion that represents the absolute as *spirit*—the most sublime concept, one appertaining to the modern age and its religion.'²⁷ The spiritual on the one hand is what is essential, substantial, or has being *in itself* (consciousness); on the other hand, it relates itself to itself, it knows itself as subject in relation to an object recognized to be other than itself, it has being *for itself*

²⁴ *Early Theological Writings*, 265–6 (see chap. 2, n. 5).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 271–3.

²⁶ *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*, p. 179 (see Chap. 2, n. 15).

²⁷ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 10–18. Page references are to the Miller translation, but passages quoted in the following paragraphs are from the translation found in *Hegel: Theologian of the Spirit*. See Chap. 2, n. 18.

(self-consciousness). Yet in its being outside itself it remains within itself, that is, it has being *in and for itself*, and as such it is reason or *spiritual substance*. *Absolute* spirit is that spiritual substance whose recognitive relationships are all internal to itself: it is the whole that embraces all otherness, everything finite and determinate, indeed exteriority as such, within itself. *Finite* spirit, by contrast, recognizes otherness to subsist outside it, and it finds itself involved in relationships that limit and restrict it; just this is the meaning of its finitude. Common to absolute spirit and finite spirit is that both entail relationships of consciousness. Spirit is free, pure, rational relationality, which presupposes sense as the soil of objectification and difference but is itself metasensual.

The etymological and biblical association of spirit with fluid natural forces (wind, breath, light, fire, water) is present but remains below the surface for Hegel. Spirit *is* the vitality or energy that gives and sustains life, but for human life it is the energy and relationality of consciousness that is distinctive. Consciousness is of necessity embodied, just as God is embodied by the world; without the world God is absolute idea but not yet absolute *spirit*. Thus spirit presupposes the sensuous but transfigures it, raises it to pure thought, which is the most concentrated form of energy. The German term *Geist* has at its root the idea of being moved powerfully, as in fear or amazement, a movement associated with the sudden drawing in or expelling of breath. In this way it is linked to the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin words for 'spirit', all of which carry the base meaning of 'breath' or 'wind'. *Geist* also means, in a more restrictive sense, 'mind', and thus it supports the cognitive twist Hegel applies to the concept of spirit. Strictly speaking, one should say 'recognitive', since it is relationships of *recognition* that constitute spirit.²⁸

The interpretation of spirit in the *Phenomenology* is further specified when the Christian or revelatory religion is examined.²⁹ Here absolute spirit is known to be 'knowledge of itself in its divestment: spirit is the being that is the process of retaining identity with itself in its otherness.... Consequently in this

²⁸ For the etymology of *Geist*, see Steven G. Smith, *The Concept of the Spiritual: An Essay in First Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 9–11. On the connection between spirit and recognition, see Robert R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992). My reading of Hegel has been influenced in a number of ways by Williams.

²⁹ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 453–78.

religion the divine being is revealed. Its revelatoriness consists manifestly in this, that what it is, is known.' It is known as *spirit*, 'as essence that is essentially self-consciousness'.³⁰ Something is hidden from consciousness if its object is only an alien other and if consciousness does not know its object as itself. The true shape of spirit is to be revelatory self-consciousness; and God is manifest as the universal self or self-knowing subject, which encompasses within itself all finite subjects.

Another striking formulation is found when Hegel turns in the *Phenomenology* to the third of the trinitarian figures.³¹ The truth is neither identity (sameness) nor difference but the movement between them, the process by which they turn into each other. With respect to God and the natural world, we can say that the divine is natural and human to the extent that God is *not*, or does not *remain*, merely essential being (*Wesen*); while nature and humanity are divine precisely *in* their essential being, as distinct from their determinate and finite being (*Dasein*). But in *spirit* 'the two abstract sides are posited as they are in truth, namely as sublated', both annulled and preserved (*aufgehoben*). Thus spirit designates the relationship of the divine to the human and the human to the divine, and in this way it acquires a religious as well as an epistemological and ontological connotation. With respect to the divine Trinity, the 'Holy Spirit' is the third moment or element, in which the first two elements, the abstract being of the 'Father' and the concrete, crucified being of the 'Son', are annulled and preserved. Reconciliation occurs in the third moment as spiritual unity in which distinctions are present as sublated moments; reconciliation is the substance of spiritual community, the community constituted by the indwelling of the Spirit.

Hegel's later writings do not advance beyond the *Phenomenology* as far as a theoretical conception of spirit is concerned, but the language in which this conception is formulated is often simpler and clearer. At the beginning of the treatment of 'Absolute Spirit' in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (§ 554), there occurs the following concise statement: 'Absolute spirit, while an identity that is eternally self-contained, is likewise an identity that is returning and has returned into itself [from difference].' It is this return that evokes religion, which 'is to be seen as proceeding from and located in the subject no less than as proceeding from absolute

³⁰ *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 459.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 471–8.

spirit'. The religious relationship is not merely a human product but the doing of absolute spirit itself, 'which is present as spirit in its community'.³²

Spirit is obviously a central theme of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and of the reading of these lectures in the chapters that follow, especially Chapters 6 and 9. For the moment it is worth noting a passage in the 1824 lectures that seems to gather up much that Hegel strives to say about spirit, and says it with striking imagery: 'Spirit is an eternal process of self-cognition in self-consciousness, streaming out to the finite focus of finite consciousness, and then returning to what spirit actually is, a return in which divine self-consciousness breaks forth' (3:233). The image of 'streaming out' captures the fluid quality that spirit quintessentially is. A variant to this passage from Hegel's miscellaneous papers (3:233 n. 191) contains even more vivid imagery:

Spirit is an eternal process of self-cognition, dividing itself into the finite flashes of light of individual consciousness, and then re-collecting and gathering itself up out of this finitude—inasmuch as it is in the finite consciousness that the process of knowing spirit's essence takes place and that the divine self-consciousness thus arises. Out of the foaming ferment of finitude, spirit rises up fragrantly.

These passages are notable both for the clarity with which eternal spirit is understood to be the energy suffusing the whole process while remaining dependent upon the process for its self-actualization, and for the use of sensuous mystical images—'streaming out', 'finite flashes of light', 'the foaming ferment of finitude', the 'fragrance' of spirit—that are indebted to Meister Eckhart and Jacob Boehme.

Whether reliance on such sources represents a dangerous heterodox swerve away from the mainstream of Christian theology on Hegel's part, or whether it opens up the possibility of fresh insight into central Christian themes, is a matter to be considered in the chapters that follow.

³² For references to the *Encyclopedia*, see Chap. 2, n. 37.