Chapter Ten

The Secret of Hegel (Kierkegaard's Complaint): Hegel's Philosophy of Religion

> No human being can ever have been in such distress as Christianity of late . . . The entire Christian terminology has been appropriated by speculative thought to its own purposes . . . The concepts have been emasculated and the words have been made to mean anything and everything. —Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

The Secret of Hegel.[1] With that provocative title, James Stirling launched his extravagant pioneering study of Hegel in English (1865). It has since been commented, wryly and often, that it has been a secret well-kept. But Stirling claimed to have divined the secret, and most British commentators[2] claim to have learned it with him: *Hegel is a Christian*, "the greatest abstract thinker of Christianity"[3] and the aim of his difficult works is to "restore our faith, Faith in God, faith in Christianity as the revealed religion."[4] The "secret" is that "the universe is but a materialization, externalization, of the thoughts of God."[5] So would McTaggart argue at the turn of the century,[6] and only a few years ago J.N. Findlay held that

> [Hegel's] whole system may in fact be regarded as an attempt to see

1. J.H. Stirling, *The Secret of Hegel*, 2 vols. (London, 1865).
2. But not only British commentators: cf. Emile Brehier, in his *Histoire de la philosophie*; "What is religion for Hegel? It is essentially Christianity with its dogmas of the incarnate Word and the remission of sins" (vol. 4, p. 167). See also, Pannenberg in *Hegel Studien* (1970) and of course, B. Croce, *Cio che vive e cio che e morto della filosofia di Hegel* (Bari: Laterza, 1927).
3. Stirling, vol. 1, p. 78.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 85.
6. J.M.E.M. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1901).

> the Christian mysteries in everything whatever, every natural process, every form of human activity, and every logical transition.[7]

For the reader who has troubled to read through Hegel's two-volume *Science of Logic*, or worse, through Stirling's two-volume *Secret*, this conclusion must be a bitter disappointment. On the contrary, Hegel's Christian apologetics would appear to be one of the best known "facts"about him, well-known even to those who would not think of reading him. Hegel took great pains, at the cost of great obscurity, to remind us of his ultimately religious intentions. The beginning of the *Logic*, for example, makes this difficult work all the more so with its abstruse suggestion that the truth of logic is nothing other than God. ("God and God only is the truth."[8]) Similarly, the *Phenomenology* (and the later *Encyclopaedia*) is peppered with references to Divinity in the most unlikely places. The sections on "Religion" appear to have been gratuitously and inappropriately but prestigiously placed at the penultimate stage of the dialectic (somewhat like Napoleon's mother in the chronicles of the coronation). Hegel insisted that he was a good Lutheran until his death, and in his lectures, he apparently defended the traditional doctrines of the Christian faith. One might say that Christianity is as much of a secret in Hegel as class conflict is in Marx.

But is Hegel "the greatest abstract thinker of Christianity"? There is good reason to think otherwise. Let us first consider an unsolved puzzle; in the years 1793–99, Hegel wrote but did not publish his early manuscripts on Christianity. Some are virulently anti-Christian, with Nietzschean contempt for the church and its priests, for Christian doctrines and authority. He even criticizes and parodies Christ himself. These essays have been argued to be of great importance for understanding the "mature" Hegel (e.g. by Dilthey (1905),[9] Kaufmann (1954)[10]). Yet it is generally agreed that Hegel underwent an abrupt shift in his attitude toward Christianity about 1800. Even Kaufmann, who has been most responsible for familiarizing English readers with these essays and their import for Hegel's later work, refers to them as "Hegel's anti-theological *phase*."[11] But why this abrupt

7. J.N. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 130.

8. *Logic*, sect. 1, p. 3.

9. W. Dilthey, "Hegels Theologische Jugendschriften" (Berlin 1905), edited by Nohl (Tübingen, 1907), trans. T.M. Knox, as *Early Theological Manuscripts* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948) (*Early Theo. Mss.*).

10. W. Kaufmann, in *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1959), ch. 8.

11. "Where he had previously condemned Christianity for its irrationality, Hegel later celebrated Christian dogmas as ultimate philosophical truths in religious form. Instead of achieving a crowning synthesis, he unwittingly illustrated his own dialectic by overreacting against the views of his youth and by going to the opposite extreme" (p. 161).

shift? What explains the radical difference between the young and the "mature" Hegel? ("Maturity" signifying, as usual, the more conservative position.) The answer I should like to pose to this puzzle (and several others) is unusual, for I believe that Hegel really did have a secret, and that it has been well-kept, at least by most orthodox Hegelians, including Sterling, McTaggart, and Findlay. The secret, abruptly stated, is that Hegel was essentially 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. Is it only coincidence that the year of Hegel's "great conversion," 1800, is also the beginning of his professional philosophical career, and that the writing of the *Phenomenology* (1806) is simultaneously the time of his first professorship? 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. He was not the great abstract thinker of Christianity but rather the precursor of atheistic humanism in German philosophy. While holding a series of lucrative and powerful professorships under state auspices and with church approval, Hegel formulated the very doctrines which would soon undermine the Christian world-view, preparing the way for Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. But the "secret" was a prudential necessity for Hegel, much as we might think of Plato burying his Pythagorean formulae in anagrams to escape the fate of his illustrious teacher, or of Descartes, struggling in double-meanings to pass church censorship with his *Meditations*.

The poet Heinrich Heine, once a student of Hegel, confessed,

> I was young and proud, and it pleased my vanity when I learned from Hegel that it was not the dear God who lived in heaven that was God, as my grandmother supposed, but I myself here on earth.[12]

Heine, a Jew and already an outcast, felt little of the usual timidity in calling a spade a spade. There is no God, only man. But to defend that conclusion in a respectable way, Hegel used religion and religious vocabulary as his instruments, as if the last logical consequence to be drawn from Christian doctrine is humanism, and the final meaning to be given to theological terminology is a meaning which refers strictly

12. Quoted in Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 366.

and exclusively to man's conception of himself. In other words, to solve our puzzle, there is *no* change in Hegel's attitude to Christianity, only in his sense of prudence and his ability to use what he rejects as the tool for its own rejection. What he hated in the early manuscripts, he still despises in the *Phenomenology* and his late lectures on Religion. What was false is still false, and what was repulsive to him was still repulsive. There is no turn from the "young" Hegel to the "mature" Hegel, except in style. Hegel may have despised Christianity, but he recognized its social power. Heine tells us of an incident:

> One beautiful starry-skied evening, we two stood next to each other at a window, and I, a young man of about twenty-two who had just eaten well and had good coffee, enthused about the stars and called them the abode of the blessed. But the master grumbled to himself: "the stars, hum! hum! the stars are only a gleaming leprosy in the sky." For God's sake, I shouted, then there is no happy locality up there to reward virtue after death? But he, staring at me with his pale eyes, said cuttingly: "So you want to get a tip for having nursed your sick mother and for not having poisoned your dear brother?"— Saying that, he looked around anxiously, but he immediately seemed reassured when he saw that it was only Heinrich Beer, who had approached him to invite him to play whist.[13]

The idea that Hegel was a humanistic atheist was briefly defended after Hegel's death by the "left" Hegelians (e.g. Bauer and Marx), who saw him as a subtle subverter of Christian faith, against the "right" Hegelians, who took Hegel at his word as a Lutheran and as a defender of the faith. But this essentially religious dispute between the "left" and the "right" had political overtones, and soon the antagonism moved from the theological to the political arena, where it remains today. The atheistic Hegelians, including the young Marx, were far more concerned with changing the world than haggling with academic theologians. Accordingly, they left Hegel's religious position to the "right," who retained domination within the small circle of scholars who cared one way or another, at least until recently.[14] Using Hegel's own public declarations, his explicit celebration of "revealed religion," and his consistently religious vocabulary, any theologian with a first degree in pedantry can prove that Hegel was a Christian. What is more difficult, however, is to understand just how limited the "religious dimension" of Hegel's thought really is, how nominal and how

13. Heine, ibid., p. 367.

14. See for example, the variety of essays in D. Christensen, ed., *Hegel and the Philosophy of Religion* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970). The atheistic interpretation is scarcely mentioned, much less defended there. The Hegelian "left" has had its modern promoters, however, principally in Kojève's lectures (*An Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*) and in *Dieu est mort: Etude sur Hegel.*

ironic.[15] By the nature of the case, our thesis can have no public declarations to rely upon, and must argue against the explicitly religious doctrines and unquestionably exalted position of "religion" in Hegel's dialectic on the basis of conjecture and indirect evidence. But there are many clues, not the least of which are to be found in Hegel's curious statement of those doctrines and his structuring of those positions.

It is Hegel, before Nietzsche, who tells us (through the "unhappy consciousness) that "*God Himself Is Dead*" (785). It is a phrase that far better summarizes Hegel's philosophy of religion than all the abstruse speculation about "the externalization of thought" and the divinity of Spirit. In his early published essay ("Faith and Knowledge") Hegel invokes the image of "the Good Friday of speculation," which replaces the naïveté of Christianity with "the cheerful freedom of Godlessness."[16] And readers of the *Phenomenology* have long been puzzled by its closing imagery, "The Calvary of absolute Spirit (808)."[17] What is Calvary other than the death of God? But where the New Testament Calvary murders a man, returning Him to God, Hegel's Calvary murders God and returns him to man (763,779,781,785). A bizarre image, if the *Phenomenology* were in fact a religious treatise, but a fitting image for an elaborate and elusive defense of humanism. With a touch of perversity, Hegel uses the language and imagery of Christianity to establish the blasphemous position for which Spinoza was condemned and Fichte fired. It was as if a perverse Menshevik had published John Locke's second *Treatise* using Marxist terminology and the pen name of Karl Marx, then laughed as pedantic Bolsheviks attempted to integrate its doctrines with their own. If there is comedy to Hegel's work, as Jacob Lœwenberg[18] has so long argued, then surely it is here. Hegel's secret has been well kept. Only a few suspected, particularly an eccentric in Copenhagen who discovered the secret early on, but found the joke not at all amusing.

Hegel's Philosophy of Religion

Hegel's interest—and his writings—in the philosophy of religion span his entire career. He studied theology in Tübingen, and his first known

15. E. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Philosophy* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1967).

16. "Faith and Knowledge" (*Glauben und Wissen*). See Ch. 3.

17. Hegel: "*die Schädelstätte des absoluten Geistes*." Baillie trans.: "Golgotha."

18. For example, in his much-read introduction to the Scribner *Hegel: Selections* and in his own dialogal book, *Hegel's Phenomenology*.

writings are the early "theological" (or "anti-theological") manuscripts of the years 1793–99, the years of his fascination with Kant's *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (1793). In 1802, he published "Faith and Knowledge" in the second volume of the journal he edited with Schelling. In 1807, *Phenomenology* appears with "revealed religion" ("*Offenbare Religion*") standing conspicuously at the end of a long historical "dialectic" of religious forms. In his *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel omits the historical dialectic, mentioning only "revealed religion" ("*Die geoffenbarte Religion*"), again at the end of the dialectic but adding a polemical attack on alternative contemporary religious conceptions.[19] Finally, there are Hegel's Lectures on *Philosophie der Religion*, delivered and reworded in 1821, 1824, 1827, and 1831 (the year of his death), collected together by his students.[20] From the *Phenomenology*, in fact from "Faith and Knowledge," until the *Philosophy of Religion*, the content, structure, and strategy of Hegel's arguments change remarkably little. And though the structure and strategy of argument are surely different in the early manuscripts and the published work, it can be argued that the content remains the same. Underlying the polemical "anti-theology" of the manuscripts of the 1790s and the alleged rationalization of Christianity that are to be found in the *Phenomenology*, the *Encyclopaedia*, and the *Philosophy of Religion* is a continuity which must not be overlooked.

We have already seen how the early manuscripts are decidedly anti-Christian, sometimes viciously so, e.g. "the system of the church can be nothing but a system of contempt for human beings," which provides "debasing monuments of human degradation."[21] This opinion of the church never varies, but the strategy changes. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel argues that, in the Middle Ages

> thought begins within Christianity, accepting it as absolute presupposition. Later, when the wings of thought have grown strong, philosophy rises to the sun like a young eagle, a bird of prey which strikes down religion. But it is the last development of speculative thought to do justice to faith and make peace with religion.[22]

Hegel does make peace, but only that peace which emerges after a decisive battle and a devastating victory. Enemies alive are objects of scorn, but enemies defeated are not only accepted but may be safely

19. *Encyclopaedia*, pp. 564–71.

20. Translated and edited by E.B. Spiers and J. Burdon Sanderson (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), 3 vols. (From Schulze, *Sämtliche Werke*, vols. 11 and 12.) Abbreviated hereafter: "*Philosophy of Religion*."

21. These comments are from the Positivity–essay and the Tübingen essay, respectively.

22. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Introduction, published separately as *Reason in History*, trans. R.S. Hartmann. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), p. 21.

celebrated in praise. The *Phenomenology* constitutes such a thorough victory over the forces of Christian theology that Hegel can easily afford to allow its emaciated veterans to sit at the foot of absolute Truth, honoring them only so that he may be seen as merciful as well as victorious.

In the early manuscripts, Hegel had attacked Christianity "from the outside," from the side of the Enlightenment (even though Kant, with those same Enlightenment instruments of intellectual warfare, had served the church without serious complaint). But the church had long weathered such attacks, and the priests were well-fortified against them. In the *Phenomenology*, however, Hegel no longer challenges the stony walls of theology, but rather enters these walls as a gift, offering his philosophy to the battle-weary theologians. Forty years later we will hear the cry of Kierkegaard's *Laokoon*:

> If this effort were to succeed, then would it have the ironical fate that precisely on the day of its triumph it would have lost everything and entirely quashed Christianity.[23]

In the *Phenomenology* (and also in the *Encyclopaedia* and the *Lectures*), Hegel argues that the short step from "revealed religion" to absolute truth consists in the simple alteration of form, the content remaining the same;

> The Spirit of the revealed religion has not as yet surmounted its consciousness as such. . . . Spirit itself as a whole, and the self-differentiated moments within it, fall within the sphere of picture-thinking, and in the form of objectivity. The *content* of this figurative thought is absolute Spirit; and all that remains to be done is to supersede [*aufheben*] this mere form, . . . (788)
>
> Faith has true content; still lacking in it is the form of thought.[24]

And in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel tells us that "Religion and Philosophy have a common object, God in and for Himself," but that these have different "modes of appropriation." What are these different modes? Religion occupies itself with images and "picture-thinking" (*Vorstellungen*)—unsystematized, quasi-empirical spatio-temporal imagery. Philosophy abandons such mythology and restricts itself to what is essential to thought, that is, the Concept (*Begriff*). Thus the step from "revealed religion" in *Phenomenology* (chapter 7) to "Absolute Knowing" of chapter 8 is accomplished by "simply" replacing *Vorstellungen* by *Begriffe*.

Throughout his works, Hegel warns us of the dangers of such glib

23. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1941) (CUP), p. 326.

24. *Philosophy of Religion* vol. III, 148.

distinctions as "form" versus "content." Let us be suspicious, therefore, of the glib suggestion that the difference between religion and philosophy is one simply of form, while their contents are identical. What is the "content" that remains the same?—*Absolute Spirit* or *God in and for Himself*. But Hegel has told us throughout the *Phenomenology* that Spirit is actual or "in and for itself" only when it has *comprehended* itself as a Spirit, and that the object or content of consciousness *changes* with its different forms (or "modes of appropriation"). The difference between Spirit as a represented *object* of awareness and spirit aware of itself is not merely a difference of form; it is the most essential difference of the *Phenomenology*, the difference between otherness, alienation, negativity and inadequacy, on the one hand, and absolute harmony and total comprehension on the other. God as object is the fateful disharmony of the early essays; God as subject is a conception which is out of reach of orthodox Christianity. So it is clear that this "mere" alteration in *form* must be far more than a simple "mere." The replacement of religious *Vorstellungen* with philosophical *Begriffe*, even while retaining *something*, is in fact the rejection of everything significant to Christianity.

What is Christianity, "revealed religion," divested of its "picture-thought" (787)? It is a faith without icons, images, stories and myths, without miracles, without a resurrection, without a nativity, without Chartres and Fra Angelico, without wine and wafers, without Heaven and Hell, without God as judge and without Judgment. With philosophical conceptualization, the Trinity is reduced to Kant's categories of Universality (God the Father), Particularity (Christ the Son), and Individuality (The Holy Spirit).[25] The incarnation no longer refers to Christ alone, but only to the philosophical thesis that there is no God other than humanity. Spirit, that is, humanity made absolute, is God. This is in fact *all* that is left of religion, the conception of humanity as God, which is to say that there is nothing other than humanity.

> One may have all sorts of ideas about the Kingdom of God; but it is always a realm of Spirit to be realized and brought about in man.[26]

God and incarnation become nothing more than the human community, Original Sin becomes human moral responsibility[27] and immortality, Heaven and Hell, are reduced to nothing more than the survival of the human Spirit in others after our individual deaths, a sense in which any animal is immortal insofar as it is survived by its

25. See, e.g., *Encyclopaedia* 567–71.
26. *Lectures in the Philosophy of History*, "Reason in History," p. 20.
27. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, pp. 45–48.

species.[28] What is left after the philosophical conceptualization of religion? To the orthodox Christian, *nothing* is left, save some terminology which has been emptied of its traditional significance. From Hegel's gutted Christianity to Heine and Nietzsche's aesthetic atheism is a very short distance indeed. Even McTaggart, who takes such considerable pains to save Hegel's Christianity for Christendom, is forced to concede,

> Hegel supports Christianity against all attacks but his own, and thus reveals himself as its most deadly antagonist.[29]

And Findlay, who elsewhere remarks that Hegel's exegeses "catch the very spirit and savour of the New Testament," finds it necessary to say that Hegel

> has defined religion . . . in a manner to suit himself, his main motive being to secure for the difficult theses of his philosophy the approval normally accompanying the words "religion" and "religious". . . . Hegel, it may be claimed, is simply "cashing in" on this widespread approval, and securing its advantages for his own system.[30]

There is a vital difference, of course, between mere atheism and irreligion, and it is to Hegel's credit that he constructs a humanist position transcending both. Similarly, there is a difference between not being a Christian and not being religious in some broader sense. It must not be thought that Hegel was not religious because he was not a Christian. In fact, his atheism was bolstered by his religiosity, the same religiosity that sustained him through the cynicism of his theological studies at the *Stift*, the same striving for *übermensch* status that characterized Goethe's Faust and Nietzsche's Zarathustra. They too might be called "religious" thinkers, but surely there was little that was Christian about them. For Hegel too, "religion" is an appeal to what is "above," but not what is better *than* humanity, rather what is potentially best *in* humanity: he tells us throughout his writing that "every person brings into the world not only the right to a mere animal existence but also the right to develop capacities, to become a human being." It is a position that might have come directly out of Goethe or Schiller. (Compare Schiller's remark: "Every individual human being carries within himself, as his potential and his destiny, the pure ideal image of man.") By "religion" Hegel means a striving for the infinite, not the "bad infinite" of endless Faustian dissatisfaction but the "genuine infinite" of total comprehension and participation

28. *Logic*, II, 24.
29. McTaggart, *Studies*, p. 251.
30. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 131.

in the world. Thus Hegel's concept of religion fits squarely into the French Enlightenment of Voltaire and Rousseau as well as into the German *Aufklärung* of Lessing, Herder, and Kant. Religion is mankind's impulse to a better life. It is not the lust for "otherworldly" after-life of the Christian Heaven but the "this worldly" aspirations of great artists, philosophers, statesmen, and truly religious people. Anticipating Nietzsche, Hegel tells us that religion is a "reconciling Yea" to the world, not an escape from it.

Our evidence for this thesis can be summarized by five more-or-less distinct considerations, although a thorough defense would have to examine, in detail and as a whole, the entirety of the Hegelian corpus. There are: (1) the now well-known anti-Christian diatribes of the early unpublished manuscripts; (2) the discussions of "Religion in General" in both the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Religion*; (3) the bewildering configuration of religious *Vorstellungen* of the *Phenomenology* and the more carefully developed dialectic of religions of Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*; (4) the appearance and *aufhebung* of Christianity at least twice in the early chapters of the *Phenomenology*; and (5) the demonstrably irreligious interpretation he gives to what he calls "revealed religion" (both in the *Phenomenology* and in the later lectures).

THE NATURE OF RELIGION: THE EARLY MANUSCRIPTS

> The aim and essence of all true religion, our religion included, is morality. —Hegel, "The Positivity of Christianity"

We have already discussed Hegel's early "anti-theological" manuscripts in chapter 3. In his first essay of 1793 ("Folk Religion and Christianity"), Christian gloom and dogma are contrasted with the communal harmony of the Greeks. The "excesses of the bacchanals" are played against Northern "disharmony" and Christian melancholy, and Socrates is juxtaposed favorably against Jesus. The criterion is distinctively Enlightenment—the betterment of humanity—but the sense is Romantic, that familiar sense of unity and communal belonging. Indeed, Hegel attacks the Enlightenment even as he uses it, for it too (as we have seen in chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology*) is "alienating." Hegel attacks knowledge and doctrines in favor of communal rituals and practices, and what emerges is a celebration of a religion which is in every aspect diametrically opposed to Christianity. He praises

religion, but not the "true" religion—"subjective religion is pretty much the same in all human beings."[31]

In 1795 the "Life of Jesus" essay was Hegel's clumsy attempt to integrate Jesus and the Enlightenment, interpreting the Sermon on the Mount as Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, more or less. But Jesus here is not anyone more than an ordinary mortal; the theology of Christianity is thoroughly jettisoned, and the mysteries and miracles of that religion are thoroughly discredited (as they had been by Kant too) as anti-thetical to reason and morality. The Positivity-essay of the same year pursued this theme more systematically and with more of a sense of historical fidelity; but the criterion is the same—that religion serve morality and practical reason—and the conclusion is the same too—that Christianity fails to do so. It is "positive" (authoritarian) and antithetical to rational autonomy; it is degrading and alienating, and therefore harmful to our sense of health and community.[32]

In the "Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," in 1799, one discerns a change of temper, a new sense of conciliation. Hegel's ambition was to found a new religion much more like Greek folk religion, which he shared in the middle of that decade with Hölderlin and Schelling, and which he had so awkwardly formulated in his "Life of Jesus" essay. In the "Spirit" essay, his efforts are aimed more at salvaging what is rational and acceptable in Christianity, its "Spirit" instead of its letter.[33] Whether what is left—which mainly revolves around the concept of "love"—is indeed Christianity is not a matter I want to argue here. But it is crucial to note how much is lost—virtually the whole of Christian theology, the church and even the new theological doctrines of Kantian practical reason—the doctrines Hegel and his friends had debated in the Tübingen *Stift*. What remains is a confidence in reason and the emphasis on unity, and, a few years later, in "Faith and Knowledge;" "Reason" is defined by Hegel as the search for unity.[34] But "unity"—not only between people but with nature, the law, the state, and ourselves—is not the exclusive province of Christianity. One might refer to this, as Hegel and his friends did, as "religion," but religion is not just Christianity, and the search for unity could be as much the ideal of the pre-monotheistic philosophy of Aristotle or the atheistic thoughts of Heine, Nietzsche, Camus, and Sartre

31. Kaufmann, *Hegel*, p. 131.
32. *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 58.
33. Ibid. pp. 182–301.
34. "Faith and Knowledge."

as it was a part of 19th-century Christian theology. With this in mind, we can finally turn to the discussion of religion in the *Phenomenology*.

THE NATURE OF RELIGION IN THE *PHENOMENOLOGY* (AND LATER WORKS)

> The self-knowing spirit is, in religion, immediately its own self-consciousness. (677)

What is immediately striking about Hegel's introduction to "Religion" in the *Phenomenology* (672–83) is that there is not a single mention of "God" or "Divinity" or even "Sacred" but only the familiar terms "Spirit," "Self-Consciousness," "Reason," and "absolute Being," terms which apply just as well to non-theistic religions and non-religious metaphysics. Hegel surprisingly informs us that we have been tracing the various forms of religious consciousness throughout the *Phenomenology*, in the chapter on "Understanding," in the "Unhappy Consciousness" of medieval Christianity, of course, in our investigation of "Reason" and throughout the chapter on "Spirit." "Religion," we now come to see, is nothing other than that search for all-comprehensive unity that has driven the *Phenomenology* from its Introduction onward, the motivating force behind almost all of the various forms of consciousness, whether they (or we) recognized this or not. Accordingly, Fackenheim tells us, "Religion may be one of the forms of spiritual life, but it is also the basis and the condition of the possibility of the system in its entirety."[35]

What sense of "religion" would include not only Greek folk-religion (in *Antigone*, for instance) and "the Unhappy [Christian] Consciousness" but "Understanding" (673) and "Enlightenment" (675) as well? It is the recognition of a supersensible infinity, in some sense "beyond" the immediate finitude of everyday life.[36] Thus "Understanding" recognizes the "*supersensible* or the *inner side* of objective exis-

35. Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Philosophy*. It is Fackenheim, most recently, who might serve as our dialectical complement in this chapter (along with McTaggart, Sterling *et al.*). In his illuminating book, he stresses Hegel's religious affinities, while I want to de-emphasize them. He derides the "idolizers of the early writings," thus eliminating the first of our arguments, on the grounds that one should not trust unpublished manuscripts (p. 156). But if our suspicions are correct about Hegel's covert anti-theology, we should trust imprudent unpublished assertions at least as much as we trust his published works.

36. This question of man as capable of the infinite is one of the main themes Hegel borrowed directly from Schelling, whose religious sensibilities were never so much in question. This allows Hegel, however, to make impressive claims against Kant *et al.* and

tence" (673), but this is "devoid of self" and thus "a long way from being Spirit" (673). If we take Kant to exemplify this "form of consciousness," we can think of that "unknown x" or "noumenon" which lies behind (or "within") the objects of the understanding, the "thing-in-itself" which later appears, in Kant's theory of "Practical Reason" and religion, as the content of morality and religious faith.[37] "Unhappy Consciousness" is quite explicitly aware of a "beyond of self-consciousness" as well as its own "changeless essence," but it is pure "*pain* of spirit," which has not yet come to see its ordinary self-consciousness and this infinite "beyond" as a harmonious and happy unity (Ibid.). "Reason," however, "has no particular religion", because it is so caught up in "the immediate present", whether in the "observing reason" of scientific curiosity or the "rational self-realization" of the search for the good life in pleasure or virtue (Ibid.).

And yet, though "Reason" has no religious forms as such, "Spirit" does, even the godless Enlightenment, which, Hegel charges, recognizes the infinite (of "Understanding") but ignores it, remaining "satisfied in *this* world" (675). This is a curious charge, to be sure, but not entirely original. Hegel had used it before, in "Faith and Knowledge,"

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seemingly for religion—for example, in the following sarcastic passage from "Faith and Knowledge"—

> The fixed standpoint which the all-powerful culture of our time has established for philosophy is that of a Reason affected by sensibility. In this situation philosophy cannot aim at the cognition of God, but only at what is called the cognition of man. This so-called man and his humanity conceived as a rigidly, insuperably finite sort of Reason form philosophy's absolute standpoint. Man is not a glowing spark of eternal beauty, or a spiritual focus of the universe, but an absolute sensibility. He does, however, have the faculty of faith so that he can touch himself up here and there with a spot of alien supersensuousness. It is as if art, considered simply as portraiture, were to express its ideal aspect through the longing it depicts on an ordinary face and the melancholy smile of the mouth, while it was strictly forbidden to represent the gods in their exaltation above longing and sorrow, on the grounds that the presentation of eternal images would only be possible at the expense of humanity. Similarly philosophy is not supposed to present the Idea of man, but the abstract concept of an empirical mankind all tangled up in limitations, and to stay immovably impaled on the stake of the absolute antithesis; and when it gets clear about its restriction to the sensuous—either analyzing its own abstraction or entirely abandoning it in the fashion of the sentimental *bel esprit*—philosophy is supposed to prettify itself with the surface colour of the supersensuous by pointing, in faith, to something higher (p. 65).

But "the cognition of man" is ambiguous between men's knowledge and knowledge *about* man, and so too is the "something higher" ambiguous between something *more than* man and man himself (and his philosophy) as "higher." The language of "the gods," of course, is poetry and obfuscation, and the upshot of the passage—and the essay—is that knowledge itself is infinite and of the infinite. But nothing much follows about the divine stature of that infinity, unless "divine" means simply "holistic."

37. This was Hegel's charge against Kant, Fichte, and Jacobi in "Faith and Knowledge." He says, for example:

> The idealism of which these philosophies are capable is an idealism of the finite; not in the sense that the finite is nothing in them, but in the sense that the finite is received into ideal form: they posit finite ideality, i.e., the pure concept, as infinity absolutely opposed to finitude, together with the finite that is real and they posit both equally absolutely. (In its subjective dimension, that is, in Jacobi's philosophy, this idealism can only have the form of scepticism, and not even of true scepticism, because Jacobi turns pure thinking into something merely subjective, whereas idealism consists in the assertion that pure thinking is objective thinking.) (p. 64).

and half of the undergraduates in philosophy have used it at one time or another. It is that perverse twist of argument that informs the atheist, much to his or her surprise, that atheism is itself a religious belief, since (in the paradoxical formulation of Tom Stoppard[38]), there must be a God for one to refuse to believe in. In other words, it is enough to be religious, if not honestly and adequately so, simply by having a concept of the infinite beyond everyday experience. It may be "an *empty* beyond," but it is still a "beyond," and this is enough for religion in general.[39]

Religion, in short, is nothing but the recognition of the infinite, and true religion, accordingly, is the recognition of this infinity *as oneself*. Thus Hegel accuses even "the religion of morality" (i.e. Kant's "Practical Reason" and Hegel's own early attempts to reduce religion to morality) of being "bound up with the negativity of the Enlightenment," that is, trying to deny the validity of the religious as such and reducing it instead to some function of the finite, for example, as "postulates of Practical Reason" in Kant (676). Indeed, the problem all along has been that same division of the finite (ordinary, everyday experience) and the infinite, which always escapes us. This was the problem Hegel announced in "Faith and Knowledge" and turned against Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte. And now, in the *Phenomenology*, it is about to be corrected. "Religion" proper is "Spirit knowing itself as Spirit" (677), and the wholesale rejection of this distinction between finite self and finite objects of knowledge and activity, on the one side, and infinite "beyond" on the other. But not even "religion" actually succeeds at this, Hegel tells us, for throughout its long history it has always tended to see itself in only *part* of our existence, in other words, in certain religious objects or persons (678). For Hegel, "religion" must encompass *everything* and here, again, we recognize that grand image of the universal "Spirit" that Hölderlin had formulated back in Tübingen. The religious is not a special realm of objects or concerns but the holistic consciousness of everything in life. Against Hölderlin's poetic image and the whole of Christianity, Hegel also insists that this holistic consciousness cannot be mere "picture-thinking" (*Vorstellungen*). It cannot remain an "image". It must be the "concept" (*Begriff*)

38. Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers* (New York: Grove Press, 1972).

39. Here, of course, we should remind ourselves again of Hegel's classic pre-Kantorian distinction between two senses of "infinite," the spurious infinite of "beyond" (that is, an endless sequence) and the "genuine infinite" of self-containment. Although the distinction is not made here in the *PG* it is clear that Hegel rejects virtually all religious thinking as the former, while preparing to defend his own conceptual formulation of the Absolute as the latter. Religion looks for infinity in "beyond"; Hegel finds it in self-enclosed Oneness (*Logic*, 94ff: on Spinoza and, p. 322n.).

of the whole, and this is what religion has never given us (ibid.). At most, religion has been a movement (in fact, the entire movement traced in the *Phenomenology*) toward this realization (679–80).[40]

Goethe's Faust was warned against saying to the moment, "Stay, thou art so fair!" This was not because the Devil had any fear that Faust would be satisfied; he knew that striving is the very soul of human consciousness. It does not matter whether this "striving" takes on a secular or a particularly Christian content; the striving is essential to every form of consciousness, and this is what Hegel calls "religion" (680–81). It need not concern a sense of mystery or the frustration of never seeing or understanding the goal. It certainly need not be the striving toward some external salvation and judgment. It is rather, Hegel tells us, "the completion of the life of the Spirit," the recognition of its holistic unity. Religion is that sense of striving for unity which, in his early writings, Hegel had said was the very antithesis of Christianity. Indeed it is as if *every* form of consciousness is religious, and so what Hegel calls "revealed religion," terminology aside, resembles Aristotle's metaphysics far more than it does the theology of the Christian church.

The *Phenomenology* provides us with much too little by way of a general account of religion. Under pressure to complete the manuscript, Hegel evidently hurried on to the religious dialectic itself, embedding the general analysis of religion and the criteria according to which religions can be evaluated within this dialectic. The *Encyclopaedia* is also of little help. The brief section on "Absolute Spirit" includes no religious dialectic and simply repeats, in encapsulated form, the principles which were anticipated in the early manuscripts:

> Religion . . . issuing from the subject and having its home in the subject, must no less be regarded as objectively issuing from the absolute Spirit which as Spirit is in its community.[41]

and, more succinctly, "God must be apprehended as Spirit in his community."[42]

Fortunately, Hegel's lectures on the *Philosophy of Religion* contain a laudable account of his conception of religion in general, employing the same terminology and maintaining the same general theses as the *Phenomenology*.[43] We might also say that the lectures maintain the same

40. Thus even "Revealed Religion" is criticized (in considerable detail) for its "picture-thinking" and for its failure to recognize *itself*, rather than the object of its worship, as "absolute being-for-self" (787).

41. *Encyclopaedia*, 554.

42. Ibid.

43. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, pp. 89–258; *PG*, 672–683.

general theses as the earliest manuscript on "Folk-Religion," except, of course, that Christianity is treated far more respectfully—or should we say, prudently. What is of first importance in religion is *feeling* (*Gefühl*), a feeling of awe, of worship, of respect for something greater than ourselves, a feeling of dependence and subordination. But this "something greater than ourselves" cannot be something wholly *other* than ourselves, except at cost of the alienation that Hegel rejected in the "Spirit of Christianity." We may quickly summarize Hegel's religious dialectic in a sentence: the closer a religon comes to recognizing the ultimate religious object as Spirit, the higher it is placed on Hegel's ladder. Christianity is salvaged by a sleight of hand, since Christianity approaches the conception of Spirit by maintaining that at least one historical human being is identical with God. That is one more than other religions (not counting the less celebrated because so much more transient roles played by the various Greek, Roman, and Norse gods and goddesses, who were fond of taking mortal shapes and intruding into the way of the world). Thus Hegel attempts to pull off the most tenuous, if not outrageous, transition in his philosophy.

Hegel's concept of "feeling," which he borrows from Kant's third *Critique*, is worth considering in some detail, not only for its importance in his philosophy of religion, but for its anticipation of certain contemporary issues as well. Hegel's "feeling" is emphatically not merely "subjective" but necessarily takes an object and an objective content. Hegel insists (with Kant) that this notion of feeling overcomes the distinction between "subjective" and "objective." Seventy years later, Franz Brentano (who disliked both Kant and Hegel) and then Husserl (who despised Hegel) would introduce a similar concept of "intentionality." But here in Hegel is the explicit rejection of his old, simple-minded distinction of the first manuscript, yet based on an appeal to its central tenet, the primacy of feeling over theology.[44] Religion begins with feeling, but feeling is not sufficient. Against the dominant Romantic theology of the time, Hegel insisted that feeling be bolstered by thought, and that the object of feeling could not remain an indeterminate something or other. "Religious feeling becomes yearning hypocrisy."[45] (Against Schleiermacher's insistence upon the sufficiency of feelings of dependency for religion, Hegel commented that "a dog would then make the best Christian.") The object of religious feeling must be *represented*, by an image, an icon, an idea. But the objects of religious worship are infinite, while images and

44. See ch. 3, "Freedom, Feeling and Folk-Religion." Harris, *Hegel's Development*, pp. 481–507.

45. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, p. 50.

icons are finite. (Ideas, that is, concepts, need not be finite, and so ultimately are the best vehicles of the Absolute.) But the tension between infinite object and finite representative symbol requires resolution. "Unhappy Consciousness," is precisely the attempt to resolve this tension in the realm of thought alone. But what is required (and here we return to the Greeks) is not thought but practice, not theology but ritual. Where the unhappy consciousness resigns itself to the impossibility of unity (Cf. Kierkegaard's "knight of resignation"), folk-religion resolves the tension through action. Thus Hegel introduces the third essential component of religion, "the *cult*"—the same folk-element that appeared in the first essay. This tripartite conception of religion as feeling, representation, and cult constitutes *faith* in general. Where Kant rationalizes faith as a postulate of practical reason, Hegel makes faith a matter of community spirit. Faith is a shared feeling for the symbolically represented infinite.

In transcending religion for philosophy, Hegel retains feeling and community, but gives up representation. This means giving up image and icon in favor of the idea, and so means giving up art in general as a vehicle of absolute Spirit.[46] Representation served as a vehicle for the religious only until philosophy found its strength. That is, until the mass of men were sufficiently intelligent to understand the bold humanism of Hegel's philosophy and reject the old mythology. But they are still not ready, Hegel finds (like Nietzsche's despairing madman of *The Gay Science*).[47] In the essay on "Positivity," Hegel repeatedly insists that Jesus' reliance on miracles and magic was justified by the conceptual opacity of his audience.[48] In the *Phenomenology* too, there are frequent musings to the effect that men in general are perhaps not yet ready for "science," and even in the *Philosophy of Religion*, there are repeated warnings that "Man in general cannot grasp the idea . . . He needs to *see* it." Thus religion is a primitive groping toward philosophy, a view of the Absolute through finite symbols. It is an *approach* to philosophy, but falls as short of its subject matter as the stories timid parents tell their inquisitive children. Religion earns its high place in Hegel's dialectic only because it encompasses all other forms of consciousness and is essentially community spirit and the collective effort to comprehend the whole. Religious feeling has been driving the dialectic from the first; religious representation, we now find, is nothing other than that variety of inferior attempts to grasp the Absolute which we have followed through the *Phenomenology*. Re-

46. Thus, Hegel parts company with Schelling and the Romantics once again. It is worth noting, however, that art plays virtually no role whatever in this all-encompassing panorama of human experience. For the reason, see "Spirit as Artist," in this chapter.

47. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1972).

48. *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 78f.

ligion earns its high status, therefore, not on the basis of feeling or *Vorstellung*, but on the basis of *cult*.

In "Spirit," we have earned our sense of community, but our communities are still individual and separated nations and states, at odds with each other, sometimes at war with each other. Here is religion's ultimate contribution to human consciousness—religion teaches us universal Spirit, that is, the human community, unlimited by geographical boundaries or epochs of history. Here is the culmination of the movement from the clash of egos in the Master-Slave conflict to the harmonious community and nation-state of Spirit. But if anything, "the slaughter bench of history" has been caused by religious disputes. Thus Hegel's exaltation of religion is distinctly opposed to any particular religion, and it is as antithetical as possible toward those which would designate themselves "chosen people" or "the Way" or "the Righteous." The point of religion is precisely to teach us that there are no special privileges in Spirit, that humanity is One.

The Dialectic of Religions

> The genesis of religion *in general* is contained in the movement of the universal moments. But since each of these attributes was exhibited, not merely as it determines itself in general, but as it is in and for itself, i.e. as it runs its course as a totality within itself, therefore, what has come to be is not merely the genesis of religion *in general*: those complete processes of the *individual* aspects at the same time contain the *specific forms* of religion itself. (*Phenomenology*, 680)

It is no surprise that the chapter of the *Phenomenology* on "Religion" is dialectical, that is, progressive or developmental in form. We should be surprised at the scope of this dialectic, however. It does not begin at the end of the preceding chapter and build upon it: rather, this progression immediately returns to the beginning of the *Phenomenology* and reconstrues the entirety of the book as a series of religious forms. Moreover, the particular entries in this progression ought to disturb us. Each of them is an ancient religion, sometimes grossly mischaracterized, and conveniently stuffed into a dialectical pigeonhole. A moment's reflection, however, coupled with a reading of the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Religion* (esp. "The Relation of the Philosophy of Religion to Its Presuppositions and to the Principles of the Time"[49]) shows that this is not merely a play-off of historical forms

49. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, pp. 6–48.

at all, but that each has a contemporary counterpart. Thus it is important to keep in mind the religious polemics in which Hegel was involved at the time: Enlightenment "deism," Romanticism and intuitionism, the glorification of God as an Artist (Schelling, for example), scientific atheism (e.g. LaPlace's rejection of God as "an unnecessary hypothesis"), the Kantian characterization of religion in terms of morality and practical reason. Moreover, the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* is essentially repeated in the *Philosophy of Religion.*

The religious dialectic of the *Phenomenology* appears in two different yet parallel forms. First, there is the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* as a whole, viewed as a (non-temporal) progression of *religious* forms of consciousness. Hegel reviews these in "Religion" (677–82). Second, there is the actual dialectic of chapter 7, which may be cautiously mapped onto the later lectures that make up the *Philosophy of Religion.*

Hegel has already picked out for us the key "religious" forms of the *Phenomenology* so far—"Understanding," "Unhappy Consciousness," the whole of "Spirit" but especially Greek folk-religion and "the religion of morality," which is readily identifiable as the theology of practical reason of Kant (and Fichte), which Hegel had learned at the *Stift.*[50] In the dialectic of religious forms that occupies the bulk of Chapter 7, however, Hegel does not limit himself to these but treats virtually every "form of consciousness" so far discussed as a possible religious form, albeit in "an arrangement that differs from the way they appeared in their own order" (681). This vast array of possible forms is basically reduced to a general triad, albeit not exactly "thesis-antithesis-synthesis"; there is, first of all, *immediate* or "natural" religion, which looks for its sacred forms in objects outside itself. Then there is religion "of the self," or "the Religion of Art," which "raises itself to the form of the self through the creative activity of consciousness whereby this beholds in its object its act or the self" (683). This is virtually always interpreted by commentators as Greek anthropomorphic religion, but it also contains no small amount of Schelling and Schiller. Finally, there is "the unity of both" as "Revealed Religion," which is "the true *form*" (*Gestalt*, "shape") of religion, which needs only to be made into philosophy. The three categories clearly fit the "Consciousness; Self-Consciousness; Reason" divisions of the *Phenomenology*, and they also fit exactly the divisions of the later *Philosophy of Religion*: "The Religion of Nature," "The Spiritual Work of Art," and "Revealed Religion." But the dominant inspiration of this dialectic, however different its forms, is the *Bildungsreligion* of Gott-

50. See Harris, esp. pp. 57–153.

hold Lessing, for it was he who had argued that the various religions could be seen as a logical progression of realizations of the Absolute, in varying stages of inadequacy.[51]

The very idea of a dialectic of religions deserves some comment, and Hegel provides us with one in his introduction to "Natural Religion" (684). He says,

> The series of different religions which will come into view, just as much sets forth again only the different forms of a *single* religion, and, moreover, of every single religion, and the ideas which seem to distinguish one actual religion from another occur in each one. At the same time, however, the difference must also be viewed as a difference of religion. (Ibid.)

The problem here is a paradox that virtually defined the Enlightenment concern with religion, though Hegel does not talk about it in chapter 6 (where it is the French Enlightenment that is mainly considered). The problem exercised Lessing especially, and it is this: if one insists that "there are no religions, but only religion," that all the particular religions—whatever the differences in their imagery and theology—are actually but different approaches to one and the same subject, "the sacred" or "the infinite" or "God," then one cannot believe that one's own religion is the "true" religion. On the other hand, if a believer does believe in the absolute truth of his own religion, then he cannot also accept the co-validity of other religions.[52] That is, one needs to show that not only the content but the *forms* of these various religions can somehow be brought together. In a sense, this is what Hegel (following Lessing) is doing; but in another sense, he circumvents the problem by rejecting religion in favor of philosophy, which dispenses with religious forms altogether.

NATURAL RELIGION: THE RELIGION OF LIGHT

The first form of religion considered, *Das Lichtwesen*, "the pure, all-embracing and all-pervading *essential light* of sunrise, which preserves itself in its formless substantiality" (686), is explicitly paired with "Sense-Certainty." (Thus "Understanding" is not, as announced, the first form of religion to be considered.) The God of this form is "pure *being*," but also "the many-named One," "clothed with the manifold powers

51. On Lessing's *Education [Erziehung] of Mankind*, see Harris, *Hegel's Development*, pp. 99, 157. Lessing's three stages were the Old Testament, the New Testament, and a new "enlightened" religion.

52. See Fackenheim for a good discussion of this; pp. 126, 162.

of existence and with the 'shapes' of reality as with an adornment that lacks a self . . ." (687). These "shapes" are "merely messengers, having no will of their own, messengers of its might, visions of its glory, voices in its praise" (687). "Its otherness," Hegel tells us, "is equally simple negative, *darkness*" (686).

What is this "religion of Light"? In the *Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel identifies it historically with Zoroastrianism.[53] Yet it is also necessary to wonder whether or not it applies more importantly to Judaism, which Hegel does not discuss at all in the *Phenomenology*, but which receives extended attention in the later lectures.[54] And, more immediately, we should not prevent ourselves from noticing the essential similarity between this "sense-certainty" religion of light with its formless and indeterminate God and the claims of Jacobi and the intuitionists. In our discussion of "Sense-Certainty," we pointed out that this form of consciousness was not only to be construed as empiricist epistemology but as a form which included all forms of intuitionism, religious intuitionism as well. Thus it would not be far-fetched, and would certainly bring this religious dialectic back into the 19th century and avoid our "temporalizing" or "historicizing" it, if we were to take this *Lichtwesen* as an allegorical presentation of one mode of religious theory which Hegel was particularly anxious to refute at this time.

PLANT AND ANIMAL WORSHIP

The second form considered, not surprisingly, is explicitly linked to Perception (*Wahrnemung*), with its religious forms rendered determinate through various creatures of the earth. Like its epistemological counterpart, this form of religion finds itself in an uncomfortable position of being unable to see its diverse forms as a unity. It is worth noting that this form, tailor-made for the dialectic of the *Phenomenology*, does not appear in the *Philosophy of Religion*. It is also worth noting that the dialectic of the later lectures does not begin with the religion of light, which appears only in the *third* section of "The Religion of Nature." Preceding it are discussions of "immediate religions," cults of magic, and then Chinese and other religions which are "conscious of a Substantial Power, . . . and of the powerlessness of the immediate will."[55] Hegel explicitly designates Chinese religion as a form of

53. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, pp. 70–82, esp. 77f.
54. Ibid., pp. 170–219.
55. Ibid. vol. 1, p. 317.

"pantheism," and here in the *Phenomenology* it is clear that "plant and animal" religion is a form of pantheism (the view that God is to be found in everything, or that every creature is sacred). In *The Philosophy of Religion* Hegel seems to ascribe pantheism to virtually all of Eastern religion (as much as he knew of it). Indian religion too is treated as "an abstract unity more nearly akin to Spirit"[56] and Buddhism is mentioned as "the concrete embodiment of this unity living in one individual."[57] But in the *Phenomenology*, he refers to this "plant and animal" pantheism as "impotent" (694).

In the later lectures, when Hegel is no longer concerned with an exact mapping of religion onto the *Phenomenology*, the religion of light (which is there also referred to as the "religion of the Good," bringing it closer to historical Zoroastrianism) is succeeded by "the Syrian religion of Pain" and religions of "Mystery." The differences between the books make us wonder just how much the religions of the *Phenomenology* are forced into the shape of the preceding dialectic without regard for historical accuracy or their conceptual relationship to each other, free from extraneous "architectonic" considerations. If there is any section of the *Phenomenology* against which the charge of "arbitrariness" (or manipulativeness) may be levied, it is this section on religion.

THE TASKMASTER ("ARTIFICER")

It is at this point that a religious form comparable to "Understanding" appears, and once again, we are tempted to accuse Hegel of squeezing in historical forms for the convenience of his chapter, rather than "letting the concepts develop themselves" as he insisted in the Preface. This new religion is entitled "the Taskmaster" (*die Werkmeister*) who enjoys producing "pyramids and obelisks" (692). Here is the beginning of art-religion, the expression of Spirit in material images. It is the difference between this attempted expression of the Absolute in images and the impossibility of such expression of the formless God of *das Lichtwesen* that adds to the possibility that, historical order aside, the most significant historical interpretation of that first section is Judaism, which in fact proscribed artistic representation of God. It is a transition of considerable interest—but not for us here—as this ancient art-religion of Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom Egypt turns

56. Ibid., p. 318.
57. Ibid., p. 320.

to increasingly anthropomorphic images and "statues in human shape" but which do not speak (697).[58] Hegel is obviously fascinated by hieroglyphics, which were just being translated by Napoleon's archaeologists after he found the Rosetta Stone in 1799. (The three languages were Greek, hieroglyphics, and a simpler, reduced, demotic writing.) Hieroglyphic representations were for the most part pictorial, and the demotic inscriptions were already a move toward an alphabet and possibility of conceptual thought, or as Hegel puts it, "the hieroglyph of another meaning, of a thought" (695). He comments on the general integration of more primitive plant and animal forms into "more rigid and universal forms of thought" (694) and credits the Egyptians, in particular, with the attempt to overcome the dualism between mind and body (an odd claim, since that distinction was hardly apparent even in the Greeks, and more than a few philosophers have claimed that its origins are only in the 17th century).[59] But, in any case, this religion of the "taskmaster" *creates* its sacred images through art instead of simply finding them growing and running around in the woods, and this, in Hegel's anthropomorphic view, is a grand conceptual advance. The sacred object is no longer something found but something made by us, and from this, it is a short step to the realization that one is oneself sacred, not only as object or object-maker but, more essentially, as subject.

But, if we are to keep our parallel with the rest of the *Phenomenology*, how is "the taskmaster" to be understood with reference to the chapter on "Force and Understanding"? I think the answer is that the object so interpreted is but an "outer shape" which contains in its possession "an inner being" (696). Just as a scientific theory is constituted by us in order to discover (but in fact postulating) an inner "force" in the phenomena of nature, the "taskmaster" builds a pyramid to hold the soul of the Pharaoh, or creates a holy object to contain the soul of a god. Hegel's reference to "the black formless stone" is significant. Miller interprets this as the Black Stone of Kaaba (696n.) but the practice of worshipping stones is an extremely general practice to be found in many primitive religions, in ancient Greece and Rome as well as in Islam.[60] (The Kaaba Stone was in fact a meteorite, which was naturally taken to be a gift from Heaven. It is also a part

58. Hegel is not just referring to the general fact that statues do not speak; he is referring specifically to the Sphinx, whose silence plays a special role in ancient Greek mythology, in Oedipus in particular.

59. E.g., Gilbert Ryle in his *Concept of Mind* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1949) and Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Mind* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980).

60. John B. Noss, *Man's Religions* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 20.

of Jewish mythology, however; it was Abraham who found the stone and the legend takes it back to Adam.)[61] In worshipping stones, the distinction between the outer lifeless form and the inner spirit is far more obvious than in the worship of plants and animals, and it is in this distinction too that the effort to "unite the two moments of Spirit" (697) must be understood. This resembles in its basic form, at least, precisely what we found in the chapter on "Force and Understanding"—our own (conceptual) activities creating the distinction between inner and outer, postulating the inner, and then finding ourselves without an adequate conception of either the inner supersensible force or the role of our own contribution.

It is clear that the section on "the Taskmaster" is not intended to include only a single religion, although the religion of the ancient Egyptians is surely in evidence there. But Islam also seems to be included and so too any number of religions which worship things or idols of any kind and any size, and this would include Christian icon and relic worship just as much as the spectacular colossi created by the Pharaohs. Just as the first section on "light-religion" might most helpfully be interpreted to include an entire range of religions whose God is some Heavenly cosmic force—including Zoroastrianism and Judaism, and as "plant and animal" religion should be interpreted as including an entire range of religions whose objects are living creatures—or *all* living creatures—this section includes all of those religions (notably *excluding* Judaism in particular) which worship idols of their own making. Spirit is to be found in art, but this is not yet Spirit as Artist, in which it is the creative activity itself, rather than its lifeless object, which becomes the focus of religious enthusiasm.

The progression from the religion of light (Zoroastrianism) to the worship of plants and animals (Eastern pantheism) to the worship of man-made idols and then Greek art-religion has, as anticipated, a second kind of interpretation. Through the language darkly one can envision a set of forms more modern than the ancient religions; "light-religion" includes strong indications of a reference to modern Judaism as well as to Romantic intuitionism. The attack on pantheism is surely not confined to the ancient Eastern versions, and in the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel advances precisely the same arguments against Hinduism and, one surmises, against all those modern pantheisms derived from Spinoza. The rejection of the "taskmaster" and art-religion too is surely not to be wholly dissociated from Schelling's philosophy

61. Ibid. 688. In the context here, however, it may not be insignificant that the Rosetta stone, just alluded to, is also, in its general shape, a "black formless stone." (It now resides in the British Museum.)

of art and religion, and Hegel's reconsideration of Greek religion is surely connected to his and Hölderlin's own prior enthusiasm. The rejection of that "Reason" which has no religious significance surely includes Deism, that heretical reduction of God to a hypothesis of physics, which Hegel had studied and rejected in school, and the chapter as a whole, written with its intentional vagueness, can be read as a survey and dismissal of contemporary rather than ancient religious views. Of course, as always, Hegel is concerned with conceptual forms, and it is not to be supposed that any one religion will fit into a single form precisely. (Judaism, for example, has elements of "light-religion," but it is surely partially contained in "revealed religion" too.) In turning to "art-religion" and the Greeks, it will be particularly important to keep in mind Schelling and Hölderlin, who only a few years before had joined with Hegel in resurrecting a renewed Attic art-religion of their own.

Spirit as Artist: Religion as Art

The turn to art-religion is, first of all, a turn from the Egyptian taskmaster who has his images built for him to the Greek artist who creates his own. This proletarian shift is paralleled by a number of theologically significant changes as well; the most important is the shift from silent idols (including the quasi-human sphinx) to the spoken word, which allows a consequent shift to self-conscious activity and expression. Hegel defines *language* as "an outer reality that is immediately self-conscious existence" (710). It is by now a familiar image—language as a self-existent system which we internalize to give expression to ourselves. (Heidegger: "language is the house of being" and "language speaks through us."[62]) It is through the verbal arts, drama, and poetry, that we come to express ourselves as Spirit. (Hieroglyphics, on the other hand, are not yet language insofar as they are not yet "blended with the shape of thought" (695).) This suggests an extremely important shift that is too often overlooked by readers of these passages.[63] Hegel is not here merely contrasting the Greek visual arts, especially the magnificent sculpture of the Greek gods and goddesses, with the more primitive decorations of the Egyptians. The triumph of Greek art and religion is distinctively verbal. Hegel does

62. See, for instance, J.L. Mehta, *The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971), esp. pp. 223–43; and Charles Guignon, "Heidegger on Language," in *The Monist*, 1981.

63. E.g., John Findlay in his "Analysis," p. 590.

include and discuss the visual arts, but as a distinctively inferior and "abstract" form of art. It is Sophocles, not Polyclitus, who gives Spirit its shape here.

It is important to avoid thinking of art as an instrument or a vehicle of expression which sometimes *happens* to be used for religious feeling. Throughout his career, Hegel treats art as *essentially* an expression of the Absolute and therefore tied to religion.[64] It is not as if art were one form of human activity which, in Greece and the ancient world, became enlisted in the service of religion. Art as such, as Schelling had argued too, was the expression of Spirit, whether or not this was appreciated by the artist.[65] And though it is not discussed in the *Phenomenology* in any detail, it is clear that art too is to be "transcended" in favor of some "higher representation", that is, through concepts as such (702). This means that the functions of art give way to philosophy, and art presumably loses a dominant place in our lives. In our times, this is indeed a very real question—what apart from decoration and a peculiarly profound form of entertainment, should the arts be? But for Hegel, the arts were not at all "aesthetic," much less simple craftsmanship ("instinctive fashioning of material" (ibid.)); art is spiritual expression. In a society fulfilled by "the Concept," art no longer has a primary spiritual function. *Exit* "art as reason itself" (Delacroix). *Incipit* commercial art, Muzak, and "art for art's sake."

In art-religion, "spirit has raised the shape in which it is present . . . and produces such a shape for itself" (699). But here it is clear that we have skipped several stages of the *Phenomenology*, including the whole of "Self-Consciousness" (ignoring for the moment the craftsmanship of the slave) and the whole of "Reason" too, which Hegel has already told us has no religious connections. In art-religion, we find ourselves squarely in the middle of Spirit and *Sittlichkeit*, "the free people ("nation") in whom hallowed custom constitutes the substance of all, whose actuality and existence everyone knows to be his own will and deed" (700). This is where the "arrangement of forms" is indeed varied from the structure of the book in general, in order for Hegel to put in historical order first the Greeks and then medieval philosophy and Christianity. The point to be made, of course, is that the Greeks made their very lives into art and religion, that religion

64. See, e.g., *Hegel's Introduction to Aesthetics* ("*Aesthetics*"), trans. T.M. Knox, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), and the introductory essay by Charles Karelis. Art is the ideal unification of the "universal and particular," and thus its representational content is always more important than its form (esp. pp. 75 ff).

65. Ibid, p. 25f. One can anticipate Hegel's opinion of the "art for art's sake" movement that begins in the later part of his century.

for them was first of all "folk-religion," a community unity rather than a set of doctrines or the worship of anything outside themselves.[66] Even the gods were among them, took part in their ceremonies, and chose sides in battle, not at all like the distant God of the Hebrews and the Persians, who intervened on occasion but by no means was to be thought of in human shape and with human all-too-human weaknesses. Art for the Greeks was the expression of their own community, their legends, their heroes, their feasts and good fortunes. Religion too was an expression of community, and so art, religion, and tribal life were all of a piece, not, as in modern times, separate human concerns with "specialists" in different, often antagonistic, disciplines. Life was "absolute levity" and "joyfulness," "the consummation of the ethical sphere" (701).

It was not out of "joyfulness," however, that the Greeks became the master artists and the most profound spokesmen for Spirit. In a precociously Nietzschean analysis, Hegel argues that Greek art and religion become self-consciously realized only when that mythical unity had been lost.[67] "Spirit, inwardly sure of itself, mourns over the loss of its world" (ibid.). Art thus becomes a form of salvation, a striving after a unity that has been lost, the translation of misfortune into *pathos* and pathos taken up as the material for art (702). "How much these people must have suffered," Nietzsche exclaims years later, "to be so beautiful".[68] Greek art, Hegel tells us, truly begins as "absolute art" only with the breakdown of community, in which "out of the purity of self it (Spirit) creates its own essence which is raised above the real world" (701). *Antigone* thus becomes the representation of Greek life as such (704), and it is in this light that we should remember Schiller's rhetorical query—"How is it that the individual Greek was able to be the representative of his [her] age?"[69] In Greek tragedy, and comedy too, every individual has "the positive power of universality" (704), and it is thus that the Greeks approach, but do not yet reach, that absolute sense of unity that Hegel, with the Greeks as his ideal, spends his life trying to find.

The discussion of art-religion is divided up into three separate stages, whose logic is strange even within the context of the *Phenomenology*. The three divisions are "the abstract work of art," "the living work of art," and "the spiritual work of art." Only parts of the first and third

66. See Harris, *Hegel's Development*, p. 390f.

67. Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966).

68. Ibid. Also, "Homer's Contest" (1872) trans. W. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1954).

69. *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind*, p. 322.

divisions are ostensibly about "art" as such; the second division is about festivals and Dionysian revels, Greek warriors and athletes, "art" only in that very general sense in which anything of beauty, whether man-made or not, might be called "art." In Hegel's later *Philosophy of Religion*, the parallel chapter "Spiritual Individuality" is divided up as "the religion of sublimity," "the religion of beauty," and "the religion of utility or of understanding."[70] These correspond more to the movement in the first stage than to the three divisions of the *Phenomenology* as such. In Hegel's later lectures on art, however, he divides up the arts into three general categories: *architecture* (making the world comfortable to us); *sculpture* (which gives shape to inert matter and makes it like us); and what he calls *community* (which includes music, painting, and poetry). Poetry, finally, is "the most spiritual presentation of romantic art," "the highest stage" in which "art transcends itself" and "passes over from the poetry of the imagination to the prose of thought."[71] Since Hegel here is discussing not only his view of Greek religion but his analysis of the arts and Greek culture as well, these later writings may be of some help to us.[72]

The first thing to be said about "abstract art" is that its meaning for Hegel is the very opposite of its meaning for us. "Abstract" art is art that is too particular, that does not fit in with the rest of human life except as an *object* for devotion or appreciation. Thus a Greek statue is a clear example of "abstract art," though in our terms it would not be abstract at all. Hegel argues that, as an individual representation, a single statue of a god or goddess or mythical figure is an inferior work of art—no matter how brilliantly executed—precisely because it is not enough of a reflection of self. It does have human form, which is a monumental advance over the icons and sculptured plants and animals of more idolatrous religions, but it is still too much "other," too silent, too non-conceptual. The argument here is repeated in Hegel's later *Lectures on Aesthetics*—that the "highest" arts are the most conceptually expressive arts, poetry in particular. (Later, the hierarchy will be reversed by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, who will place music at the top, as "most spiritual," just because it is so non-conceptual.) The argument, it is worth noting, resembles the argument in the "zoo" section of chapter 5; the problem of the artist (the sculptor, for example) is that familiar antagonism between "inner" intentions and the "outer" product. But here, unlike the "zoo," the problem is one of expression of the truly universal, the creation of an art-work

70. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, pp. 170–219, 224–88, 288–323.
71. *Aesthetics*, p. 89.
72. Harris, p. xxviii.

that is wholly "selfless" (in the individual sense), inspired by the Absolute as its own expression and not the particular work of a particular artist (708). The limitation is the limitation of the medium, not the artist or his abilities. A statue is always just a statue. It is always "out there," a mere object. And thus the search for an expression of unity—the aim of absolute art—moves to the verbal arts. (Not surprisingly, we might add, Greek mythology itself is filled with statues that speak, come to life, and participate in the lives of their creators. Pygmalion and Galatea provide the most dramatic example.)

A statue may resemble a man, but it is not yet "like himself" (709). For that, we need "another element of existence"—*language*, "an outer reality that is immediately self-conscious existence" (710). The first role of language in art is the *Oracle*, and here it is clear that "art" is no longer confined to that somewhat truncated discipline that we (not Hegel) call "the history of art." The Oracle is the language of religion and the Absolute, but as an *alien* voice (ibid.). What is more it is a voice (too much like Hegel) that speaks in riddles and opacities. More important is the use of language in the transmission of epic poetry, Homer in particular. The Spirit speaks through Homer and the Homerids not as individuals but as Greek universality as such. (I read "the spirit of Sunrise" as an opaque allusion to Homer's "rosy fingered dawn" (711).) The epic has a substantial content but is full of details, which "appear trivial to the progressively developing self-consciousness" (ibid.). From Homer's epic poetry the Greeks learned to distinguish the mere details of the story from the essential human truth within it. Here we find the golden age of Greek theater, concerned not with details but with "the sure and unwritten law of the gods." The oracle becomes "individuality in general," not an alien voice but "peculiar to the god who is the spirit of an ethical people (*sittliche Volkes*)," whose speech "is no longer alien to it but their own" (712). Finally, Greek language becomes fully conceptual in "that wise man of old" (Socrates) who "searched his own thought for what is true and beautiful" (ibid.). Thus it is that the essentials of Spirit are to be found in oneself, and the ultimate wisdom of the (Delphic) oracle becomes "Know Thyself."

At this point, the discussion takes a violent turn. Having summarized the history of Greek verbal representation from Homer to Socrates in a few opaque sentences, Hegel now turns back to what (in his lectures on the *Philosophy of Religion*) he takes to be the basic form of all religion—the *cult*. This is, I think, the "community" (in primitive form) of the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, and in it the various arts are all expressions of and joint activities of the group. Hegel's example is

"the stream of sacred song" (715) which is exemplified by the Judeo-Christian ritual of the "hymn" but in this context more likely refers to the song of the Greek chorus, the theatrical device for representing the voice of the community in Greek drama.[73] The chorus, as opposed to the statue, is no longer "out there" but is identical to the activity of the community as such (713–14). (It is of some significance that the chorus itself is not the composition of any particular writer, and even in the plays, the lines of the chorus are usually familiar warnings and judgments of the community (734).)

The discussion of "cult" that is discussed as "religion in general" in the later *Lectures* is transferred here to the realm of the Greeks. What Hegel takes to be the essence of all spirituality is this sense of community, but in particular *self-conscious* community. Here in the *Phenomenology* he repeats his early analysis of 1793, of Greek folk-religion as a set of rituals and rites instead of the mere abstract theology of Christianity. In that early essay on "Folk Religion," this cult of rituals emerged clearly superior to Christianity; here, and in the later lectures, this is no longer clear at all.

The "living work of art" seems to be neither religion nor art, as we would understand those terms. Hegel repeats with some relish his early fantasies concerning Greek Bacchanalia and festivals (720–26), complete with the loss of consciousness and giddy whirl that he also celebrated in the Preface of the *Phenomenology* (47), in which each individual loses him or herself in the festivities and in which—one can see Hegel's fantasies flickering—"a crowd of frenzied females" represent "the untamed revelry of Nature" (723). But Hegel ultimately rejects the "mysteries" of these ancient rites and recommends as superior the more straightforward worship of the Greek athlete, as handsome as a statue, perhaps, but not "out there" like a statue; he is one of us. His powers are our own. Art and religion become corporeal but, Hegel adds, too much so. In this sweaty secularism we have lost the spirituality with which religion is essentially concerned, and so we return, under the guise of "the spiritual work of art," to literature, the "highest expression of Spirit" and a form of communion that is wholly "conscious of the universality of its human existence" (726).

H.S. Harris tells us in some detail how Hegel devoted much of his youth, most of his studies, and much of his life to Greek literature,[74] and it is with that in mind that we should read "the spiritual work of art" (727–47). Here Hegel gives us in extremely condensed form some

73. See Findlay, "Analysis," p. 581; Harris, pp. 234–38.
74. Harris, pp. 47–48.

twenty years of reading and thinking about the Greek epic, the Greek gods (keeping in mind that Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling once tried to revive a religion with Zeus at its head), the chorus of Greek tragedy and the nature of tragedy itself, the relationship between tragedy and comedy and, specifically, the plight of Antigone and the irony of Socrates. There are even references (so disguised that they are hard to confirm) to *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* (737).[75]

The epic, Hegel tells us, is a kind of "picture-thinking" which (as we have been told in the "abstract art" section) is less than thought and more of a sequence of details which, nevertheless, represent the unity of the whole through a single individual ("the Minstrel," "the Middle Term") (728–31). Gods and men, goddesses and women, battle all together, the various factions in fact representing an underlying unity and each individual in fact represents different aspects of spiritual forces in general. In the epic, Hegel tells us, the real content of the story is to be found primarily on the human level, while the gods and goddesses, for the most part, are largely comic. And behind the seemingly chaotic sequence of events for both mortals and gods, there lurks *Fate* or *Necessity*, in fact "the Concept." In the epic, this necessity—like the minstrel (Homer) who tells the story—is not brought into the picture. The graduation from epic poetry to tragedy, accordingly, is making explicit both fate and the role of the narrator (732–33).

Tragedy, according to Hegel, is about necessity.[76] The chorus, representing the community, express foreboding, horror, and pity, but they are resigned to fate. The individuals in the drama, however, are not so wise or so resigned; they fight against their fate, even as they struggle to find out what it is. Tragedy, accordingly, is this conflict of determination and necessity, the conflict of opposing rights and duties. Hegel is quite openly opposing the standard "tragic flaw" view of tragedy that has come down to us from Aristotle's *Poetics*, but at the same time he is advancing his own theory on a similarly limited basis, the Oedipus cycle in particular. (The clash of duties and the obscurity of fate particularly well characterizes the themes of *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*.) In any case, Hegel's analysis takes this clash of duties, forces equally right, to be the essence of tragedy and the result, inevitably, is the death of the individual, or absolution from guilt, but in either case the return to "the repose of the whole, the unmoved

75. *Hamlet* is explicitly mentioned (vis-à-vis Yorick's skull) in *PG*, 333, but not in this section.

76. On Hegel on tragedy, see Walter Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

unity of fate, the peaceful existence and consequent inactivity and lack of vitality of family and government . . . the return of spiritual life into the unitary being of Zeus" (740).

Opposed to the deep, troubling antagonisms of fate in tragedy, in which Zeus and necessity strike us as alien impositions into human happiness, comedy reduces everything to ridiculousness, even, especially, the gods. Comedy delights in exposing hypocrisy ("the contrast between the universal as a theory and that with which practice is concerned" (745) and exposes both the pettiness of individuals and the contempt of individuals for the universal order (ibid.). The striking role of comedy here in the *Phenomenology*, immediately preceding "Revealed Religion," should give us warning; Christianity for Hegel cannot be the gloomy and certainly humorless schizoid sensibilities of the "Unhappy Consciousness," if, that is, Christianity is the "revealed religion." If we take the order of the dialectic with any seriousness, Greek comedy, this disdain for the gods and rendering them (as well as ourselves) ridiculous, is as close as we have come (so far) to the Absolute. One here senses Goethe's great cosmic joke and the laugh of Mephistopheles far more than the seriousness of the theologians and the sufferings of Christ.

But comedy plays another role in the realization of Spirit, according to Hegel, and, curiously enough, it is also the backdrop against which Hegel presents us with the "wise man of old," the greatest philosopher (in Hegel's early writings)—Socrates. It is the ironic spirit of comedy which allows the Sophists to reject all that has been given to them, to refute all arguments put before them, and expose "the vanishing of the absolute validity previously attaching to [ethical laws and maxims]" (746). It is this same sense of irony that lets Socrates too, far from being the mere opponent of the Sophists, refute even the sophistry of the Sophists and prepare the way for his own positive theories of the Beautiful and the Good.

> Rational *thinking* frees the divine Being from its contingent shape and, in antithesis to the unthinking wisdom of the Chorus which produces all sorts of ethical maxims . . . lifts these into simple Ideas of the Beautiful and the Good. (Ibid.)

Socrates, like the Sophists but going beyond them, recognizes "the movement of this abstraction (as) the dialectic contained in the maxims and the laws themselves" (ibid.). In his dialogues, he uses "Socratic irony" to turn the "pure thoughts of the Beautiful and the Good" into "a comic spectacle." It is not the wisdom of Socrates that is on display here so much as the disintegration of *Sittlichkeit* and naïve

ethical certainty under the onslaught of the Sophists. Socrates' bold questions—like the Sophists' cynicism—was symptomatic of the breakdown of Greek harmony, as Nietzsche later argued too.[77] The laws and maxims of morality are "liberated" from *Sittlichkeit* and become "empty opinions," "the caprice of chance individuality" (ibid.) replaced only by the "clouds" of Socrates' Forms ("Ideas").[78] Hegel is thus once again repeating the key step in his dialectic, from individuality to *Sittlichkeit*, but now it is being played for us in its proper historical order, that is, backwards. It is the split between the individual and the ethical whole—whether in the misery of unhappy consciousness and tragedy or the ridiculousness and mockery of comedy—which destroys that easy innocence. The point of the Sophists—with which Hegel ends this section, is that even the Absolute is at the "mercy" of our own self-consciousness. *We* create our gods and the Good and the Beautiful; thus they are rendered impotent and empty. And so Hegel ends with a warning, that however satisfying this comic attitude may be, it is not the whole of life:[79]

> this self-certainty is a state of spiritual well-being and repose therein, such as is not to be found anywhere outside of this Comedy. (747)

Now *what*, you should ask, does any of this have to do with religion? That is just the point; religion, for Hegel, has little to do with the rather specific and highly speculative doctrines that we call by that honorific name. Greek comedy is just as much religion as Sunday Mass, and Homer is just as much a holy text as the Bible. Religion is that search for unity that characterizes every intelligent society in social and conceptual disarray. "Alienation," in this perspective, is primarily a religious concept, and tragedy and comedy *together* represent the two sides of our remedy for alienation—the one, seeing ourselves as universally determined by one and the same shared "Fate" (or Fates), the other, seeing the ridiculousness of ourselves in our seriousness. But both provide us with a sense of unity, that is, as spectators, at least. But then again, we are not just spectators—in either tragedy or comedy—or in Spirit.

Though Hegel seems to find a certain "levity" in the proposition "The Self is absolute Being" (748), I must confess that I miss the joke.

77. Esp. *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. W. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, pp. 463–564, "The Problem of Socrates," pp. 473–79.

78. The reference to "Clouds" is presumably an allusion to Aristophanes' mocking comedy about Socrates by that name.

79. The warning that comedy is contained within its own sphere might perhaps better apply to that later German genius, Hermann Hesse, who in *Steppenwolf*, at least, tends to pursue a cosmic view of the "comic" in just this sense. Hegel is also so interpreted, attractively, by Joshua Lœwenberg in his *Hegel's Phenomonology*.

But the levity raises the question that confronts him once again, as it had earlier in his career: the question of Christianity. How does Christianity or "revealed religion" fit into human life? How does it fit in the history of religion? How does it serve to unify us all as "Spirit," when its history shows so clearly that its secular consequences have been to divide us and set ourselves against each other? How can Hegel, a German writing at the height of the new secular era, see his way past the horrors and destruction of the Thirty Years War, which had destroyed Germany a century and a half before in its bloody confrontation of Christians against Christians?

In both the *Phenomenology* and the later lectures on the *Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel is obviously attempting to minimize the importance of Greek *Volk*-religion, *vis-à-vis* Christianity, in contrast with his own critical attacks on modern religion in his early writings. Greek religion is now viewed as a primitive anticipation of Christianity ("Spirit has not yet sacrificed itself as *self-conscious* Spirit to self-consciousness, and the mystery of bread and wine [in Dionysian festivals] is not yet the mystery of flesh and blood" (724).

It is at this point that the *Phenomenology* turns to Christianity, as "Revealed Religion" (748). But before we join Hegel in that turn, let us look for a moment at the later lectures, where Hegel divides up "Spiritual Individuality" in quite a different way, as we mentioned before. The three sub-forms there, "the religion of sublimity," "the religion of beauty," and "the religion of Utility or of the understanding" are perhaps more parallel to the structure of the *Phenomenology* than the divisions in the *Phenomenology* chapter, and in any case, more historical and more informative. The three divisions in the lectures correspond, respectively, to Jewish religion, Greek religion, and Roman religion.[80] We have already noted that Judaism is given no clearly delineated position in the dialectic of the *Phenomenology*, surely a curiosity given Hegel's own background. ("Old Testament Religion," for example, finds a most prominent place in Hegel's early model, Lessing's *Education of Mankind*). It is worth noting that, in the lectures as they were delivered in Berlin in 1827, Hegel switched the order of Jewish and Greek religion and treated Greek religion as a step to Judaism. Hegel praises Judaism for its "demythologizing," and the Old Testament is retained as the most important presupposition and anticipation of "revealed religion." Roman religion, on the other hand, is given the optimum position in the dialectic but is treated as religiously empty. It is, in fact, the ancient equivalent of the Enlighten-

80. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, pp. 170ff, 224ff, 288ff.

ment in modern times, a *rejection* of the religious consciousness (which finds itself at a disadvantage in its relations with this powerful secularism), not in the name of Reason but in the name of *utility*. It is this conflict between Jewish faith and Roman pragmatism that sets the stage for their ultimate confrontation and transcendence. The secular impotence and infinite power of the Jewish God confront the secular power and spiritual impotence of the Roman empire—both entering their age of decadence in the period in question—and the consequence is a new synthesis. The Jewish religion, faced with the fateful "disharmony" of God against man that Hegel first criticized in his early manuscripts and later made the basis of the "Unhappy Consciousness" of the *Phenomenology*, makes too little of man. The Greek religion, "the religion of humanity," makes "confidence in the gods at the same time human self-confidence,"[81] but Rome takes this secularization to the ultimate conclusion and destroys both human confidence and religion. This was not true, of course, in its adolescence of restless empire-building. By the time of Herod, however, Rome was already falling into disillusionment, and at the same time that the Jewish people were finding their lot on earth inadequately served by their faith. The time was ripe for Christ—the synthesis of Jewish transcendence and Greek self-confidence—the formulation of a religious mythology which combines the infinite "Other" and the finite self-conscious self in a single representation. And so we turn, at last, to "revealed" or "absolute religion."

"Revealed Religion" (Christianity?)

> If this effort [to render Christianity plausible] were to succeed, then would this effort have the ironic fate that on the day of its triumph it would have lost everything and entirely quashed Christianity.
> —Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

It is time to account for our original claim—that Hegel is not a Christian and his philosophy is only a pretense of Christian apologetics. This account can best be completed in two stages: first, it can be shown that "revealed religion" in the *Phenomenology* is *not* orthodox Christianity, but that Christianity appears and is "sublated" in at least two preceding sections of the dialectic. Second, we must spell out our claim

81. Ibid., p. 257.

that the key doctrines of Christian theology, the Trinity and incarnation, Original Sin and the immortality of the Soul, are utterly devoid of Christian content in Hegel's analysis.

In our account of the religious dialectic we have avoided every attempt to single out the particularly Christian elements of its various forms. The essence of religion, we have seen, is its appeal to the infinite or Absolute, to a whole that is greater than ourselves. This Absolute is ultimately Spirit, and Spirit, once adequately realized, should abandon the religious "picture-thinking" which always falls short of its goal (787). But now, what is the essence of Christianity? As a religion, in Hegel's sense, it must consist of an appeal to the Absolute, and as Christianity, it must represent this Absolute in terms of an identity of God and man, *in a particular instance*. Thus, Christianity is a special attempt to reconcile the finite self with the infinite Absolute, an attempt which necessarily involves the notion of "incarnation." Thus Judaism attempted to reconcile the finite and infinite through feeling, study and prayer, the Greeks attempted to do so through art, and the Romans through their state. But only Christianity, according to Hegel, involves this very special notion of historical identity, not the Greek and Roman gods appearing as men (also as bulls, swans, and doves), but God *existing as* a man. The chapter on "Religion" explicitly returns to the beginning of the *Phenomenology* in order to give (or try to give) every form of consciousness a religious interpretation. In the section "Revealed Religion," Hegel takes us back to the beginning once again, this time with a particularly Christian outlook. How, in the dialectic of forms we have traversed so far, is the Christian identity of God and man to be traced? The answer, of course, begins with "Unhappy Consciousness," and Hegel repeats his analysis of that earlier treatment here (748–53), in contrast to the comic consciousness we have just discussed. (We remember in the early essays too, how Hegel repeatedly played off Socrates against Jesus, as well as folk religion against Christianity). Both comic consciousness and unhappy consciousness see their world reduced to absurdity, but the former as a cosmic joke, the latter as sheer misery (752). Hegel tells us that the one consciousness is in fact "the counterpart and completion of the other" (752) and revolves around opposite sides of the same antagonism between the individual consciousness and the Absolute; in comedy the Absolute is at the mercy of the individual, while in unhappy Christianity the individual is at the mercy of the Absolute (748, 749). Consequently, the comic consciousness sees itself as the Absolute (747) and "is perfectly happy within itself" (752) while the unhappy consciousness has lost all reason for living, lost all respect for itself and

the laws and ethics in general (753). Do we need a dialectical argument to tell us which is preferable?

The argument does not stop here, however; it has just begun. Hegel steps back still further and describes for us once again the break-up of society in which the comic consciousness flourished (750) and along with it the escapist philosophies of Stoicism and Skepticism (750–51) which provided the conceptual framework for the Christian world-view (754). It would be naïve not to see here too the elements of social unrest among the Jews under Rome, though they are not mentioned. Here is the crucible in which Christianity was born; alienated Rome, eternity minded-philosophers, restless Jews awaiting for "the birth of self-consciousness." "All conditions are ready for Spirit to recognize itself as Spirit" (753–54). In the midst of arrogant Roman secularism—"The Self as such is Absolute Being" (750) and "Stoic independence of thought" (ibid.)—we find the truth in "that shape which we have called the Unhappy Self-Consciousness" (751). So before we enter "Revealed Religion" as such, let us go back in the *Phenomenology* and see how Christianity has already been covered, first as "Unhappy Consciousness" in chapter 4, and then, in the person of Jesus Himself, as the "beautiful soul" in chapter 6.

CHRISTIANITY AS "UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS"

"Unhappy Consciousness (206–30) or *das unglückliches Bewusstsein* is a consciousness divided against itself, half master, half slave—the master the alien sense of "the Unchangeable," the eternal, God; the slave the "wretched" "changeable" being of flesh and blood who longs for a union with the Unchangeable. There can be no doubt that "Unhappy Consciousness" is orthodox Christianity, which takes both God and Christ to be something "other" than oneself. The question is, what is the scope of the chapter and how much of Christianity does it include? The several "triplets" in the chapter make recognition of the Trinity and the traditional Catholic church unmistakable[82], but how much more than this? How much of this chapter is theology and metaphysics? And how much is it rather—in keeping with the title "Self-Consciousness"—a description of a certain form of consciousness, in which the nature of its objects is of secondary interest? What is "Unhappy Consciousness" about?

The analysis of "Unhappy Consciousness" turns on two contrasts

82. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 99.

and two progressions of three. The language is sufficiently convoluted so that many readers are relieved just to recognize the Trinity and be done with it, but it is not the Trinity as such that is being discussed here. First, however, let us introduce the two sets of contrasts:

changeable (and unessential) consciousness
versus
Unchangeable (essential) consciousness

and, from the earlier chapters of the *Phenomenology*:

universal
and
particular.

With these two sets of contrasts, Hegel discusses the story of the Judeo-Christian tradition and our various attitudes toward the Unchangeable. The resultant matrix includes the Universal Unchangeable (God), the particular Unchangeable (Christ), the universal changeable (which will eventually be Spirit, as "reconciliation of individuality with the universal") (210), and the particular changeable, which is each of us, in our animal, wretched, earthly condition.

The first progression is clearly identifiable as the Trinity, but it is more accurately described as three different views of our "link with the Unchangeable"—

1. as opposed to the Unchangeable . . . thrown back to the beginning of the struggle which is throughout the element in which the whole relationship subsists. (210)
2. consciousness learns that individuality belongs to the Unchangeable itself, so that it assumes the form of individuality into which the entire mode of existence passes. (Ibid.)
3. it finds its own self as this particular individual in the Unchangeable. (Ibid.)

The first is God the Old Testament Father, an alien Being who passes judgment upon us, threatens us, and reduces us (as Hegel had argued in his early writings) to slaves.[83] The second is the incarnation of God as Christ. Third is the holy spirit, which allows us to "experience the joy of finding ourselves therein." What concerns Hegel here is not the metaphysics of the dissected God, however, but the marked difference in attitudes that each of these views represents; the first is a projection of an almighty God that, as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard agree, can only make us feel pathetic in comparison. Furthermore, as an alien consciousness, we have no idea "how the latter will behave," no doubt a reference to the whimsical and unpredictable nature of

83. In "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 182f.

the Old Testament Jehovah (211). The second view represents a vision of God as "one of us" but, at the same time, still "other" and "alien," and "the hope of becoming one with it must remain a hope, i.e. without fulfillment and present fruition" (212). Hegel also raises the then serious worry among theologians about how a "contingent moment" in history could have eternal significance, and how Christ's appearance almost 2000 years ago, in a very distant land, could count for us now, since "in the world of time it has vanished, and in space it had a remote existence and remains utterly remote" (ibid.). The third view, on the other hand, is exactly what Hegel wants to defend, as the unity of ourselves with God, but, accordingly, he does not discuss it at all in this chapter.[84]

The second progression is a series of attempts to unify ourselves with the Unchangeable;

1. through purity of consciousness. (214)
2. through work, as a particular, living, desiring individual (Ibid.).
3. as consciousness aware of its own being-for-itself (Ibid.).

It is not difficult to see these three attempts as encompassing the whole domain of Christianity; the first is traditional Catholicism, and Hegel's sarcasm is unbridled ("the chaotic jingling of bells, a mist of warm incense, a musical thinking that does not get as far as the Concept . . . ") (217). The effort to unify one's lowly changeable existence with the Unchangeable here is a withdrawal into oneself through pure feeling or "devotion" (ibid.). But inevitably, unhappily, one falls back to the "inessential," *mere* feeling, which is fleeting and utterly changeable. In desperation, Hegel adds, this sort of consciousness seeks a tangible object for its devotion, and so seeks "the form of an object," an *icon* or, ideally, the tangible actuality of Christ. In a particularly opaque reference, Hegel says that "Consciousness can only find as its present reality the *grave* of its life," which commentators generally agree, on the basis of very little evidence, ("the struggle of an enterprise doomed to failure" (ibid.)) refers to the Holy Crusades of the 11th to 13th centuries.[85] What is clear is that Hegel considers the search for physical icons the symptom of a deep failing in Catholicism itself—its devotion to a single, contingent, historical event. This in turn leads to a self-defeating dependency on the church and other tangible symbols of God, rather than God—or the Unchangeable itself.

84. The third stage might well be viewed as the new "enlightened" religion envisioned by Lessing in his *Education of Mankind*, but one should not assume too quickly that it is identical to "revealed religion" in chapter 7.

85. E.g., Findlay, *Hegel* p. 99; and Baillie, in his translation of the *PG*, p. 258.

The second attempt is the religion of "good works," from Pelagius in the 4th century to much of secularized Protestantism, where the withdrawal from the world is replaced by a new enthusiasm for the world itself as "sanctified" (219) and by *activity* (218). For the "pure consciousness" the world itself was a "nullity," but for the active consciousness this is not the case. The modern Christian enjoys life and work; he sees his mission as *changing* the world (220). For this ability to enjoy and work this energetic consciousness "gives thanks" to the Unchangeable and "denies itself the satisfaction of being conscious of its independence," even "renounces itself" (222). It is a familiar picture for us—the secular Christian missionary, working for fame and fortune (often on television) in the name of Christ. But here Hegel's early criticisms emerge once again against this duplicity of both acting and renouncing, doing deeds but not ultimately taking responsibility for them and, in true Nietzschean form, he claims that the whole business of renunciation, which does indeed give one a sense of "unity with the Unchangeable" (ibid.), is exactly the opposite of what it pretends to be—a renunciation. The very act of renunciation, in all of its self-righteousness, is at the same time an arrogant act of self-assertion. Here is the dilemma of the self-consciously Christian businessman, who claims dependence on God and "gives thanks" for his success but at the same time takes pride in his being a "self-made man." At some point, he may well feel either that his claims to success are fraudulent, or, that the pretense of dependency is a sham and renunciation the furthest thing from his self-made mind.[86]

The third form of consciousness, accordingly, is the renewed realization that worldly success cannot be made compatible with this uncompromising self-denying view, that every success is a "vanity" that draws us further away from the unity with the Unchangeable, and that the only way to unify oneself with the Unchangeable is to deny oneself completely. This is the ascetic religious consciousness, which also plays such an important role in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* many years later.[87] The Catholic consciousness tried to ignore itself in devotion to the Unchangeable consciousness; the second, more secular form of consciousness devoted itself mainly to its life and its work, with peripheral "thanks" to God. But now, the ascetic self sees itself

86. The obvious affinity here is Kierkegaard's harsh attacks on "Christendom" throughout his philosophy but particularly in his *Journals*, and his later (1854) *Attack on Christendom* (Princeton Univ. Press, trans. W. Lowrie, 1944):

"The fault with the monastery was not asceticism, celibacy, etc.; no, the fault was that Christianity had been moderated by making the admission that all this was to be considered extraordinarily Christian—and the purely secular nonsense to be considered ordinary Christianity."

87. Translated by Kaufmann, part iii. Also in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* as "the despisers of the body" (Part I, sec. 4).

as the enemy, the "*Fiend*," as "flesh," as "vile," as "petty" and "wretched." This is the truly unhappy consciousness, the morbid life of religion described by Kierkegaard or Augustine on their worst days. This final form of the unhappy consciousness attempts to deny itself altogether. It gives away its property (since property, in the thinking of the time, was definitive of selfhood too). It fasts and mortifies the flesh. It is particularly repulsed by "its awareness of itself in its animal functions" (225) which are "no longer performed naturally and without embarrassment" (ibid.). In them, "the enemy reveals himself in his characteristic shape" (ibid.) and so he sees himself "defiled" and impoverished and becomes a "brooding, wretched" self, as unhappy as is imaginable (ibid.).

The compensation for this misery, however, is "consciousness of its unity with the Unchangeable" (226). The attempted destruction of the self is "mediated by the thought of the Unchangeable" and this, in a familiar pathological sense, has some success. The argument would seem to be that, in the frenzy of total self-denial, which is wholly negative, there is a positive consciousness of gain on the side of the Unchangeable; as there is less and less of one's worldly self, there is more and more room for one's divine soul—assuming, that is, that selfhood is a kind of vacuum and that the Unchangeable soul is capable of filling it.

Hegel takes an odd twist here, which suggests, at least, that all of "Unhappy Consciousness" remains within the realm of the early church; Christ, by way of the church, again appears (227–30) and heartens this most unhappy ascetic consciousness by giving advice and, in effect, taking all responsibility for our actions and our fate on Himself. In the realm of the church, we renounce our actions and our enjoyments; we are encouraged to give up our property; we are told to say "what is meaningless" (228) and "practice what we don't understand" (229). Here, in other words, is everything Hegel hated about Christianity as a youth, its "positivity" (authoritarianism), its senseless jargon and catechism, its denial of our responsibility for our actions and our autonomy of thinking; and most of all, the church turns us into something less than human, into a "thing" (229) ascribing all of this degradation as "a gift from above" (ibid.).[88] It may be, as Christians have often said, that theirs is a religion—perhaps the only religion—in which God actually reaches down to his people instead of

88. And from the other side,
Men thus corrupt, men who have despised themselves from the moral point of view, even though in other respects they prided themselves on being God's favorites, were bound to create the doctrine of the corruption of human nature and adopt it gladly.
(The Positivity-essay, pp. 159–60).

requiring them to one-sidedly reach up to him. But Hegel's view of this virtue is unmistakable—that the very idea of a God "above" and alien to us is a miserable misunderstanding of the Absolute, and we shall see this criticism invoked again and again, as an error in "picture-thinking," in the chapter on "Revealed Religion" as such.

Although the time sequence is backward, one could not do better than to see "the unhappy consciousness" as best exemplified by Kierkegaard.[89] The Danish existentialist's conception of "becoming a Christian" is precisely this third and ultimate phase of "unhappy consciousness," the resignation and willingness to abandon oneself, "to fill one's consciousness with meaningless ideas and phrases," to voluntarily "disclaim all power to independent self-existence," but nevertheless retain the awareness of "its own resolve" and "its own self-constituted content." Kierkegaard would agree with Hegel that the church is "positive" or authoritarian, and he would insist that the "resolve" must be formulated directly before God without this corrupted "ministering agency." But Kierkegaard would ultimately reject the entire "cult" and "communal" dimension of Hegel's religion, and he would insist that the "representations" of Christianity, whether they be icons or theological treatises, are ultimately irrelevant to the faith. What is left, therefore, is feeling and devotion, but not the simple innocent feeling of Hegel's first phase. It is rather the anguish and "unhappiness" that comes in the ultimate phase. Hegel now takes his dialectic onto happier ground, first to the idealistic and self-confident world of science, then to the increasingly spiritual world of the community. Kierkegaard insists upon remaining in "Self-Consciousness," indignantly "individual," stubbornly "unhappy," and belligerently opposed to just that sense of community ultimately deified by Hegel. Kierkegaard refers to Hegel's Spirit as "the Crowd," "the Public," the "collective Idea," "the Christian hordes" and variously compares them to geese, sheep, and factory products.[90]

It is at this point that the dialectic finds religious consciousness intolerable and flees to the happy refuge of science. It would be strange, to say the least, if we were to return back to this same "unhappy" phase once we have had our taste of it. In fact, we do not. This is the last we will see of traditional Christianity. Kierkegaard complained

89. "Christianity is certainly not melancholy; it is, on the contrary, glad tidings—for the melancholy." Kierkegaard, *Journals* (1843).

90. "Thus it was established by the state as a kind of eternal principle that every child is naturally born a Christian . . . so, it took it upon itself to produce Christians. . . . So the state delivered, generation after generation, an assortment of Christians; each bearing the manufacturer's trademark of the state, with perfect accuracy one Christian exactly like all the others. . . .the point of Christianity became: the greatest possible uniformity of a factory product" Kierkegaard, (*Papirer*, XI, A12).

that Hegel had given up Christianity, and he was correct. What is commonly interpreted as Christianity in "revealed religion" is Christian in terminology and triads only. One might as well suggest that the Bohr atomic theory is Christian because of its reliance on groups of three (though there are current theories of religion that would probably not find this suggestion implausible).

JESUS AS "THE BEAUTIFUL SOUL"

"Unhappy Consciousness" was concerned with the more theological and metaphysical aspects of Christianity. But there is another aspect of Christianity which many Protestants—Kant and Hegel among them—would argue is even more essential: Christian *ethics*. In Hegel's early manuscripts and in Kant's *Religion*, moral concerns *define* religious doctrines, and religion is justified *solely* on the basis of the support it provides for morality. Accordingly, Jesus can be considered, not as God incarnate, but as a human moral example. In a grotesque fashion, Hegel's "Life of Jesus" attempted to consider Jesus only as a normally born and normally buried human being, who distinguished himself as the first Kantian in his "Sermon on the Mount." The attempt was abortive, but the motivation evident; the Jesus that interested Hegel was not the Christ of the Trinity but rather the Jewish moral teacher as a late colleague and an illustrious competitor of Socrates.

Because Hegel thought far more of Jesus than he did of Christianity as such, Jesus appears in the *Phenomenology* long after we have left the unhappiness of Christianity. This is a historical Jesus, not a divinity, a "beautiful soul" who teaches ethics by example. This Jesus appropriately follows Kantian morality in the dialectic, giving the bare forms of the categorical imperative substantial content. This section is the last section of chapter 6, "Spirit", and immediately precedes the long chapter on "Religion." It is worth noting that the section ends

> it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge. (671)

"The Beautiful Soul: Evil and Forgiveness" (*die Schöne Seele: das Böse und seine Verzeihung* (658–71, esp. 668f.)) has often appeared as a mystery to commentators, an arbitrary addition to the fairly solid discussion of Kant and conscience preceding it. The "beautiful soul" was a well-known Romantic phenomenon, discussed extensively by Jacobi, dramatized by Goethe, and enacted by Novalis. Accordingly, this

section of Hegel is typically interpreted as an awkwardly placed discussion of this phenomenon.[91] But however obnoxious this bourgeois melodrama may have been in war-torn Germany in 1806, it is not just the Romantic "beautiful soul" that Hegel portrays at this prestigious stage of the dialectic. The references to "self-destruction" may fit certain Romantic heroes, but they are surely tailor-made to the Passion of Jesus, just as the somewhat strained conceptual nativity scene of the following chapter (referring back to "Unhappy Consciousness") is tailor-made for the beginning of the Jesus-story. One might well agree that references to Novalis (including the pointed reference to "pining away in consumption") are out of place here, but a discussion of Jesus as moral teacher is surely very much *in* place here; in fact, it is absolutely necessary if we are to make any sense of this discussion at this all-important juncture of "Spirit" and "Religion."

In the *Phenomenology*, the "beautiful soul" appears immediately following "Conscience," Fichte's attempt to reconcile Kant's formal morality with individual feeling. Hegel sees "conscience" as a quasi-religious position, "God immediately present to mind and heart" (656). With the retreat of conscience into itself, with the recognition that it is incapable of distinguishing between moral and immoral dictates of conscience, with its rejection of "all externality," conscience evolves into the beautiful soul. Hegel explicitly links this "soul" to "Unhappy Consciousness" (658) in its withdrawal from the world—

> It lives in dread of besmirching the splendour of its inner being by action and an existence; and in order to preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact with the actual world, and persists in its self-willed impotence to renounce its self which is reduced to the extreme of ultimate abstraction. . . . it vanishes like a shapeless vapour dissolving into thin air. (658)

The beautiful soul abstains from moral judgment, places itself *above* such judgment, and ultimately amounts to a condemnation of moral concerns. Thus we recall that many of Jesus' teachings were not moral exhortations but meta-moral preachings, attitudes to be taken toward moral laws and transgressions of laws rather than laws themselves. But judgment *about* moral laws is still judgment, even moral judgment, and the "morality" of the beautiful soul is to place itself *above* all such judgment ("Judge not that ye be not judged"). To do so, the beautiful soul turns to the spirit of forgiveness, the ability to look beyond the "moments" of moral and immoral action to the whole of Spirit. ("The wounds of the Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind"

91. E.g., Baillie, pp. 642, 667, 676; Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 129.

(669).) Here is Jesus' contribution to Spirit, not Christian morality as such but the teaching that we should rise above morality. This does not mean, of course, that we should be *im*moral. It means that we should acknowledge our participation in flawed humanity, with its many varying moralities and provincial prejudices, and view our own efforts at morality with a kind of humility, as part of a universal brotherhood of mutual weakness and forgiveness.[92]

Why should we believe that this beautiful and forgiving soul is Jesus? If we confine ourselves to the *Phenomenology*, the identity is debatable, and our argument can only be that the Jesus-interpretation renders the discussion unquestionably essential to the dialectic as a whole and provides an easily understandable bridge to the chapter on "Religion." But there is better evidence, if we once again return to Hegel's early "theological" manuscripts, in particular, the fourth of these, "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate."[93] Hegel explicitly introduces a picture of the "beautiful soul" as Jesus.[94] The beautiful soul is the unity of courage and passivity which "renounces its own mastery of reality, renounces might, and lets something alien, a law of the judge's lips, pass sentence on him." The beautiful soul voluntarily gives up his rights and his possessions, including the right to sit in judgment over others and the right to defend himself ("If any side of him is touched . . .;" i.e. "turn the other cheek").[95] By placing himself above all such rights, Hegel adds, Jesus ultimately destroys himself. The beautiful soul withdraws from life and the world, "like a sensitive plant, he withdraws into himself when he is touched." "Hence Jesus required his friends to forsake father, mother, and everything in order to avoid entry into a league with the profane world."[96] Jesus renounces everything to maintain himself, refrains from action and moral judgment but ultimately must find that such a course becomes more judgmental than the judgments it condemns ("It sets up a fate for them and does not pardon them") until he realizes that forgiveness, not judgment, is the only way to spiritual unity; "Thy sins are forgiven thee, not a cancellation of punishment, as an elevation above law and fate."[97]

This is precisely the same progression that we find in the *Phenome-*

92. The conflict between secular ethics and religious faith is not unfamiliar in religious literature. Kierkegaard, most famously, takes the Abraham and Isaac story of the Old Testament and uses it to illustrate that potential conflict and declares it to be unresolvable except by faith. ("The teleological suspension of the ethical," in *Fear and Trembling*, trans. W. Lowrie (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954)).

93. *Early Theo. Mss.*, pp. 234–44.

94. Ibid. 236, 239.

95. Ibid. 235.

96. Ibid. (cf. Luke 14: 26).

97. Ibid. 239 (cf. Luke 7: 48).

nology, and so we may have some confidence that our interpretation was Hegel's intention as well. But, though Hegel's opinion of Jesus has mellowed since his essay in 1795, he still accuses Jesus of positivity, still has limited regard for him as a person, and still conceives the "other-worldliness" of his renunciation a *de facto* compliance with evil. Ultimately, the beautiful and forgiving soul may provide the "word of reconciliation" that is necessary for our "reciprocal recognition which is Absolute Spirit" (670), and he may represent "God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge" (671). But the historical Jesus is still at best an example, at most a "moment" of Spirit, and consequently, he disappears from the dialectic at this point, before we have entered the dialectic of "Religion" proper.

Christianity makes other appearances in the *Phenomenology* too, as "Deism" in the section on "Enlightenment" and as Kant's "Postulates of Practical Reason" in the "Morality" section preceding "Conscience and the Beautiful Soul." But religion is not a function of either theoretical reason (as in Deism) or practical reason (as in Kant); it is a search for unity which is neither one nor the other, but that ambitious sense of ultimate identity that Kant had struggled with in his third *Critique* and Schelling had made the centerpiece of his Identity-philosophy. As religion, this ultimate identity is to be found not in Buddhist pantheism—where one might reasonably look for it—nor in Spinoza, where it had already been handed to us on a philosophical platter. It is to be found in "revealed religion," ostensibly Christianity, despite all of Hegel's criticisms in the past.

RELIGION REVEALED

Finally, we can broach the penultimate section of the *Phenomenology*, "Revealed Religion" and the self-recognition of Spirit as Spirit (755–87).[98] The question is, Is "revealed religion" Christianity? And our answer is, "In name only" (though, significantly, Hegel never bothers to call it by name). The language is indisputably the language of Lutheran theology. But at every turn, Hegel makes the critical point that the terms have been misunderstood by "picture-thinking," and that what is or ought to be a conception of ourselves as Spirit in the present is misunderstood as a story in the distant past, along with a promise of a distant future to come (787).

The simple essence of revealed religion is the identity of God and

98. Cf. *Encyclopaedia*, VII, sec. iii. B.b. 564–71; *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 3, Pt. iii, pp. 1–151.

man as Spirit. But the vehicle of Hegel's presentation, as well as the single most important historical-mythological symbol of this identity, is the Trinity. Thus, as in "Unhappy Consciousness," the section "Revealed Religion" is set as a concern for a three-part relationship, God, Jesus as Son of God, and Holy Spirit (758–63).

The doctrine of the Trinity has its origin in Jewish theology. In the traditional Christian church, the third term, Spirit, has always been obscure, vaguely referred to by Paul and the early writers as God entering into the Holy community through Jesus and the Incarnation. Lutheranism shifted the emphasis to the Holy Spirit and, obviously, it is this shift that weighs heavily in Hegel's speculations. The debate over the true nature of the Trinity had been going on for centuries, of course, and many Christians tended to reject it altogether on the grounds that it violates the central canon of Judeo-Christian monotheism—the singularity and unity of God. This is Hegel's argument too, and, toward the end of his discussion, he even pokes fun at the very idea of a "Trinity" (Why not a Quaternity, or even a five-in-One? he asks (776)). In Hegel's search for Spirit, however, it is the Father and the Son who are sacrificed to the third term; God is reduced to pure thought and the Son becomes no one in particular. (Hegel also lampoons the very idea of interpreting God and Jesus in the language of a "natural relationship," i.e. father and son (771).) God is One. God is nothing but the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is only in us;

> Finite consciousness knows God only to the extent to which God knows himself, spirit is nothing other than those who worship him.[99]
>
> Man knows God only insofar as God knows himself as man. The Spirit of man, whereby he knows God, is simply the spirit of God himself.[100]
>
> This incarnation of the divine Being, or the fact that it essentially and directly has the shape of self-consciousness, is the simple content of the absolute religion. In this religion the divine Being is known as Spirit, or this religion is the consciousness of the divine Being that is Spirit. For Spirit is the knowledge of oneself in the externalization of oneself . . . (*Phenomenology* 759)

Given the long debates and the age-old charges of "heresy" on the proper interpretation of the Trinity, and given Hegel's rather complete education on the subject and my own lack thereof, there is no point going into the elaborate historical and theological background of Hegel's discussion except by way of laying out the key alternatives.

99. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, p. 327.
100. Ibid. 496.

On the one hand, there is (more or less) the traditional view, that the Trinity is indeed a unity, which raises awesome metaphysical and logical questions about how that is possible. There is the weaker Protestant view that Christ *is* God incarnate and the Holy Spirit permeates the community on that basis, and the more heretical view that only God is God, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit, even if divine, are not. Then there is the blasphemous view—defended by Hegel in his early writings—that Jesus is just a man, a special man, perhaps, but nothing more. It is blasphemous because—however honored or moral this Jesus may be—he is not the Christ of Christianity. The literal incarnation, on either the traditional view or perhaps the weaker construal, is the very essence of that religion. But this is the view that emerges from the section on "Revealed Religion" in the *Phenomenology*, that Jesus is no one in particular, that it is the Holy Spirit, and not some Fatherly God, who not only enters into but who *is* all of us, not only Jesus.

What makes this topic so difficult to talk about is both its elaborate and perplexing metaphysical history and Hegel's own intentional obscurity on central points. On the one hand, one can find the most pious spokesmen for Christianity asserting theses that sound very much like Hegel (Aquinas on God as Thought, for example, or Luther—whom Hegel quotes and utilizes liberally). On the other hand, there is little doubt, reading through the traditional language, that Hegel himself is anything but pious. He claims that what he is doing is to convert the *form* of Christian dogma from "picture-thinking" to conceptual truth, but it is not hard to show that what he saves (as essential content) is not Christianity, and that the form into which he converts it is wholly compatible with atheistic humanism.

For example, Hegel's analysis of the Creation is somewhat less than faith-inspiring. This too, is an example of "picture-thinking" and not to be taken seriously. Using a familiar Schellingian ploy, Hegel analyzes Spirit in two ways, as substance becoming self-consciousness, and as self-consciousness making itself substance.[101] The first, in standard philosophical jargon, is Aristotle's metaphysics, hardly Christian and barely theistic; the second, in religious picture-thinking, is the Judeo-Christian conception of the Creation. But for Hegel, (as for Spinoza) Creation is not to be understood as a temporal coming-into-being, and Spirit in any case is not to be understood apart from its Creation (755, 774).

Hegel's view of the Fall, similarly, is an atemporal conceptual recon-

101. Cf. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, pp. 347–48.

struction (775). He interprets "innocence" as simply not yet knowing oneself, "the Fall" as nothing more than the recognition of evil, and evil as ultimately indistinguishable from (that is, part of the same moral world as) good (776). Hegel also points to the story of the fall of the devil as more picture-thinking, and it is at this point that he blasphemously suggests that Lucifer be added to the Trinity to yield a Quaternity (776), and perhaps the fallen angels too (for "a five-in-one").

It is the "middle term" of the Trinity that exercises Hegel the most; God or "Spirit" is easily reinterpreted as immanent, and the "Holy Ghost" already has precisely the status Hegel wants it to have, as Spirit effused throughout the community. But it is the role of Jesus that distinguishes Christianity from other religions, and the notion of "incarnation" which "contradicts all understanding."[102] Christianity is the theory of the incarnation, and it is Hegel's interpretation of this momentous non-event that shows his humanist colors.

Lessing had asked, "How is it possible that Christianity can base the whole of its faith on an historical accident?"[103] It is not a pressing question still, but the problem of contingency, when applied to the existence of a necessary being, seemed to be incomprehensible indeed. Hegel's answer, in fact, is found in Goethe, who described this as an allegory, "a particular considered only as an illustration, as an example of the universal."[104] *All* men and women are incarnations of God. It is not the *life* of Jesus that is significant, but his *death*. It is "the vanishing of the immediate existence known to be Absolute Being" in which "the universal self-consciousness of the community" is born, "not the individual by himself, but together with the consciousness of the community and what he is for this community, is the complete whole of the individual spirit" (763). (Findlay: "If Christ does not go, the Holy Ghost cannot come to the worshipping community . . . God as a picture must die in order that God as thought may live."[105])

Lessing's question, reiterated later by Kierkegaard, might be restated as the question how the Eternal (Unchangeable) could enter into the time-bound events of history. Hegel's answer here is that the historic event of the incarnation and the death of Christ does not matter at all; it is "dead and cannot be known," "an heirloom handed down by tradition," a "degraded content" (771).

Jesus was not a special case but only an example—

102. *Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 3, p. 76. Cf. Kierkegaard in *CUP*: "Christianity is the paradox; paradox and passion are the mutual fit . . . Faith is the objective uncertainty along with the repulsion of the absurd held fast in the passion of inwardness." And, "what is the absurd? The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into being in time" (ibid.).

103. Cf. Kierkegaard, *CUP*, II, 2.

104. In *Maxims and Reflections*, trans. Ronnfelt (London: Scott, 1897).

105. Findlay, "Analysis," pp. 586, 589.

> The dead divine Man or human God is *in himself* the universal self-consciousness; this he has to become explicitly *for this self-consciousness*. (781)

This passage is of particular interest, first because it is one of the few places that Hegel actually uses the terms "Man" and "God", and philosophically because the reference to "this self-consciousness" only makes sense here as a secular reference, not to God but to us ("Man" in general). The phrase "in himself" here might better be translated as "implicitly" (as in Baillie) and so we see the continuing theme of Hegel's analysis—that Christ is significant as an *example*, a symbol (in picture-thinking) of the conceptual truth that there is no God but in and through humanity. Furthermore, the traditional Christian teaching that, in Christianity (unlike Judaism and other religions) God "comes down" to man (760) is turned around by Hegel to declare that the identity of Man and God is "the highest essence" of God (ibid.) and, in a familiar Hegelian twist, "the lowest is the highest" (ibid.). The point again and again becomes clear—there is no "alien" God who reaches down to us; God is Spirit and Spirit is us, nothing more. (See esp. 759, 761, 763, 779, 781–84.) It is the *death* of God, not His historical life, that is of greater significance. But this is not because (as picture-thinking would have it) the death of Christ is an all-important event which signifies the salvation of all true believers; the death of God signifies the *un*importance of Christ, and the fact that our lives too are Holy and Immortal, through the universal Spirit of the community (781–84). Indeed, the most tragic mistake of picture thinking (i.e. Christianity) is the idea that our salvation and unification with the Holy Spirit will come some time in the distant future, when the truth is that the unification of ourselves with Spirit is *now* if only we will realize it (787). But in realizing this, it is doubtful on what grounds we might also say that we have become or are still Christians. What we have done, in effect, is to throw out the whole of the Bible and the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, to reassert an ancient truth that both the Bible and that tradition have always rejected as the ultimate heresy–the view that the human Spirit, in and for itself, is God.

I do not know how to pursue this argument much further. The thicket of theological interpretations of these matters is such that no doubt a good Christian Hegelian could reinterpret these themes once again in a respectable if not exactly orthodox way.[106] In my secular impatience, I sometimes find it necessary to use a Humean razor, and

106. "You may advance the most contradictory speculations about the Christian religion, but no matter what they may be, numerous voices are always raised against you, alleging that what you maintain may touch on this or that system of the Christian religion but not on the Christian religion itself" (Positivity-essay, p. 67).

ask, rather bluntly, does Hegel believe anything that a thorough-going atheistic humanist cannot believe—even in the guise of "the Absolute" and "infinity"? Does he believe in any sense in a God other than ourselves, in the Divinity of Christ in the only sense that can be called "Christian," in the literal or at least symbolic truth or much (if not all) of the Scriptures? The answer seems to be in every case "no." What religion reveals for Hegel is our striving for absolute Unity, for "the infinite," for something beyond the hurly-burly of everyday life and ordinary happiness. But to think that this is Christianity seems to me to be absurd. Hegel is no Christian. The Absolute is in no interesting sense, God.

HEGEL'S HUMANISM AS A SPECIES OF PANTHEISM

> . . . what in religion was *content* or a form for presenting an *other*, is here *Self's* own *act* . . . This last form of Spirit—the Spirit which at the same time gives its complete and true content the form of the Self and thereby realizes its Concept . . . in this realization—this is absolute knowing; it is Spirit that knows itself in the form of Spirit, or a *comprehensive knowing*. (*Phenomenology*, 797–98)

I ask that my impatience with theological niceties will be excused as an antidote for the excessive apologetics that have long been forthcoming from the Hegelian "right," for example, when Findlay suggests that Hegel might be called Christian for his appreciation that something is "god-like in the facts of human thought,"[107] or when McTaggart argues at considerable length that

> No religion in history resembles the Hegelian philosophy so closely as Christianity. . . .The orthodox Christian doctrines are not compatible with Hegel's teaching, but they are far closer to that teaching than the doctrines of any other religion known to history.[108]

These euphemisms do not hide the fact that "closeness" does not compensate for "incompatibility," and the claim that Hegel's ultimate conception of religion is closer to Christianity "than any other religion known to history" is clearly false. Once the incarnation has been purged of its orthodox mythology, it is clear that Hegel's conception of religion is far closer to a great many Eastern religions than to Christianity, probably closer in spirit to Greek folk-religion than to medieval Catholicism, as close to Hasidic Judaism as to traditional

107. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 349.
108. McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology*, pp. 249–50.

Lutheranism, and far closer to Spinoza's pantheism than to the Christianity of the Church and the New Testament. Ultimately, even McTaggart is forced to conclude that Hegel's philosophy "reveals itself as an antagonist [to Christianity]—an antagonist all the more deadly because it works not by denial but by completion."[109] But what is this "completion" but "*aufheben*", in the same sense that the philosophy of the *Phenomenology* "outgrows" Romantic individualism and the fad of phrenology. Similarly, Findlay ultimately admits that Hegel "may be held to have given merely a 'persuasive definition' of 'religion,' . . . and is simply 'cashing in' on the widespread approval (of such terms)."[110] The same may be said for his use of Christian terminology, for it must be admitted, and it is time to do so without apology, that Hegel is no Christian.

Toward the end of his examination of "Hegelianism and Christianity," McTaggart makes a final attempt to "save" Hegel, if not Hegel's Christianity—

> It is impossible to believe that it was a deliberate deception, prompted by a decision for his own interest. There is nothing whatsoever in Hegel's life which could give us any reason to accuse him of such conduct.[111]

Less sympathetically, H.S. Macran does accuse Hegel of "self-deceiving sophistry or sordid dishonesty," and insists that he is "mistermed" as a Lutheran.[112] We may insist that Hegel's conduct was neither "deliberate deception" nor "sordid dishonesty," keeping in mind his own precocious awareness of the "unconscious" forces of reason and his teaching that philosophers typically signify more than they intend. Not a "deliberate deception," perhaps, but it is very likely intentional obscurity. There is no lie in Hegel's claims, and his atheism is right there in the text if we are willing to look for it. But of course, most of his readers were not expecting any such conclusions, preferred not to find them, and so, naturally, they did not.

It might be maintained that Hegel, though not a Christian, is yet a theist, namely, a member of that elite and controversial group of philosophers championed by Spinoza called "pantheists." Stirling, for example, admits that Hegel is a pantheist, "but with a purer reverence for God than pantheism of ordinary views."[113] The fidelity to the master may again make us smile; but Hegel often argues in such a fashion;

109. Ibid., pp. 250–51.
110. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 131.
111. McTaggart, *Studies*, p. 245.
112. H.S. Macran, *Hegel's Doctrine of Formal Logic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912).
113. Stirling, *The Secret of Hegel*, vol. 1, p. 87.

> The realm of Spirit is all-comprehensive; it includes everything that ever has interested or ever will interest man.[114]

The view that Hegel's atheism is a form of pantheism raises two insuperable problems, however; first, Hegel vociferously denies that he is a pantheist.[115] Second, it may seriously be doubted that pantheism, the name aside, is a form of theism at all. Applying our Humean razor, we ask, "What would a pantheist admit to exist that an atheist would not?" But to say God is the world ("Without the world, there is no God") is clearly not to make any such admission. A pantheist may approach his world with a more religious attitude than his straightforwardly atheistic colleagues, but not with a richer ontology.[116]

Hegel's relationship to pantheism was a point of controversy even in his own time. Accordingly, to avoid the charge (which had recently forced Fichte from his position), Hegel openly attacked the position and attempted to distinguish it from his own (in the *Encyclopaedia*, "Philosophy of Spirit," para. 573). It is worth noting the defensive and at times abrasive tone of the argument, in contrast with Hegel's usually casual and often ironic style, a sure sign of the polemicism that often accompanies inadequate convictions.

Paragraph 573 is among the longest of the *Encyclopaedia*, another sign that we are finding Hegel at his most defensive. The section is filled with insults, "shallow pantheism and shallow identity," "an attenuated and emptied God," "an indeterminate and abstract God," "the stale gossip of oneness or identity," and, regarding the pantheist interpretation of his own thought, "it is only his own stupidity and the falsification due to such misconceptions which generate the imagination and the allegation of such pantheism." Hegel betrays a personal concern (for example, employing considerable use of the first person singular, which is *very* unusual for him) for the fact that the allegation of pantheism has replaced the charge of atheism against philosophers (the latter "having *too little* of God," the former having

114. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Introduction ("Reason in History"), p. 20.

115. *Encyclopaedia*, 573.

116. One might object that this too-Humean criterion eliminates a large class of theists, namely, those (as in "plant and animal worship") who identify some particular object as having divine status (whether this be cats, lizards, fire, clouds, or the king). The theist and the atheist would agree in ontology but disagree in theology. What is the difference? Not one of philosophy but, one might say, of "attitude," though this need be no small matter. One might convert a mediocre dinner into a feast by saying "grace" over it, and so too there may be all the difference in life between someone who sees the world as divine and someone who sees it as mere material "substance." But this only points to what Hegel broadly conceived as a "religious" outlook, not to theism or Christianity.

"*too much* of him"). "To impute Pantheism instead of Atheism to Philosophy is part of the modern habit of mind," he accuses, "of the new piety and the new theology." But his argument against pantheism turns on a small technical point, one which may indeed have significance for certain metaphysical disputes but is surely not sufficient to establish Hegel as an orthodox theist. The point rests upon the distinction between "everything" considered as a collection or totality of things ("empirical things, without distinction, whether higher or lower in the scale . . . each and every secular thing is God") and "everything" considered as a unity, a "universe" (what Heidegger, struggling with the same problem, would call "the worldhood of the world"). What Hegel denies is that he has ever claimed that "everything is God" in the first sense. But he clearly holds this view in the second sense, so long as we insist that this "everything" is a "subject as well as substance." In this holistic sense, Hegel is neither more nor less of a pantheist than Spinoza or Fichte. In this same section, Hegel curiously defends Spinoza's philosophy as a monotheism, not a pantheism, which errs in its "apprehension of God as substance, stopping short of defining substance as subject and as spirit." But surely this is a misreading of Spinoza, who insisted that thought was one of the essential attributes of the One Substance, and it is even more unfair to Fichte, who shared with Hegel the notion of the Absolute as absolute *Ego*. But Hegel's argument moves quickly from these controversial issues into one of the more notorious red herrings of philosophy, a several-page celebration of "the most poetical, sublime pantheism" of the *Bhagavat-Gita*, complete with several lengthy verses. In short, Hegel's argument is a pedant's delight, advancing his defense with loaded questions (Is God an ass or an ox?), impressive by learned distractions and conscientiously speaking away from the point at issue. But Hegel's own position, that of God as Spirit and nothing but Spirit, places him in the pantheist camp without qualification. And pantheism, as we have argued (despite Hegel's objection) is no more than pious atheism.

This is not, finally, to deny that Hegel might be considered a man of spiritual reverence. In his *Logic*, for example, he tells us that "Speculative truth means very much the same as what in special connection with religious experience and doctrines, used to be called Mysticism."[117] But Hegel's mysticism is emphatically without mystery, and his reverence is without God. Hegel has a certain reverence for thought, for life, above all for humanity. But he is not, in the usual

117. *Logic*, VI, 82.

sense, a religious man, much less the "greatest abstract thinker of Christianity." He is, perhaps, one of the first great humanists of German philosophy. That was Hegel's secret, and the source of Kierkegaard's righteous complaint:

> Modern philosophy is neither more nor less than paganism. But it wants to make itself and us believe that it is Christianity.[118]

118. Kierkegaard, *Sickness unto Death*, trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1954). Thus MacIntyre (in seminar, Feb. 1980): "if Kierkegaard hadn't existed, it would be necessary to invent him." Alternatively, "God invented Kierkegaard to throw light on Hegel."

(Tentative) Conclusion: "Absolute Knowing"

> The skies were mine, and so were the Sun and Moon and Stars, and all the World was mine, and I the only Spectator and Enjoyer of it.
> —Thomas Traherne

The Absolute, Hegel tells us in the Preface (20) is essentially a *result*, the final product of a process, the process being the conceptual development described in the *Phenomenology*. Accordingly, the final chapter on "Absolute Knowing" is mercifully short, half of it once again reviewing the whole of the *Phenomenology*, in case we missed it the first time, the other half consisting of an outpouring of exuberance concerning the self-recognition of Spirit and, no doubt, the end of an extremely painful several months of pressured work.

Since Hegel is mercifully short, we will be too. There is no need to once again explain how it is that consciousness gropes towards self-consciousness and self-consciousness stumbles toward recognition of itself as Spirit until, finally, in the images of Christianity and the Incarnation, it discovers its true identity (788–98). Nor is this the place to follow through Hegel's final instructions, that we can really understand all of this only by turning our attention to history ("Spirit emptied out into time" (808)) as well as to the philosophy of logic and nature. (Hegel's advertisement for his works to come.) Indeed, what is most remarkable about the concluding chapter of the *Phenomenology* is how little it says, how empty it is, and how many questions it leaves unanswered.

> . . . from the chalice of this realm of spirits,
> foams forth for Him his own infinitude.

With these words from Schiller, Hegel ends his book. But whatever Hegel's intentions regarding "absolute knowing," his finale is philosophically unsatisfying. It chimes with enthusiasm but, unlike Bee-