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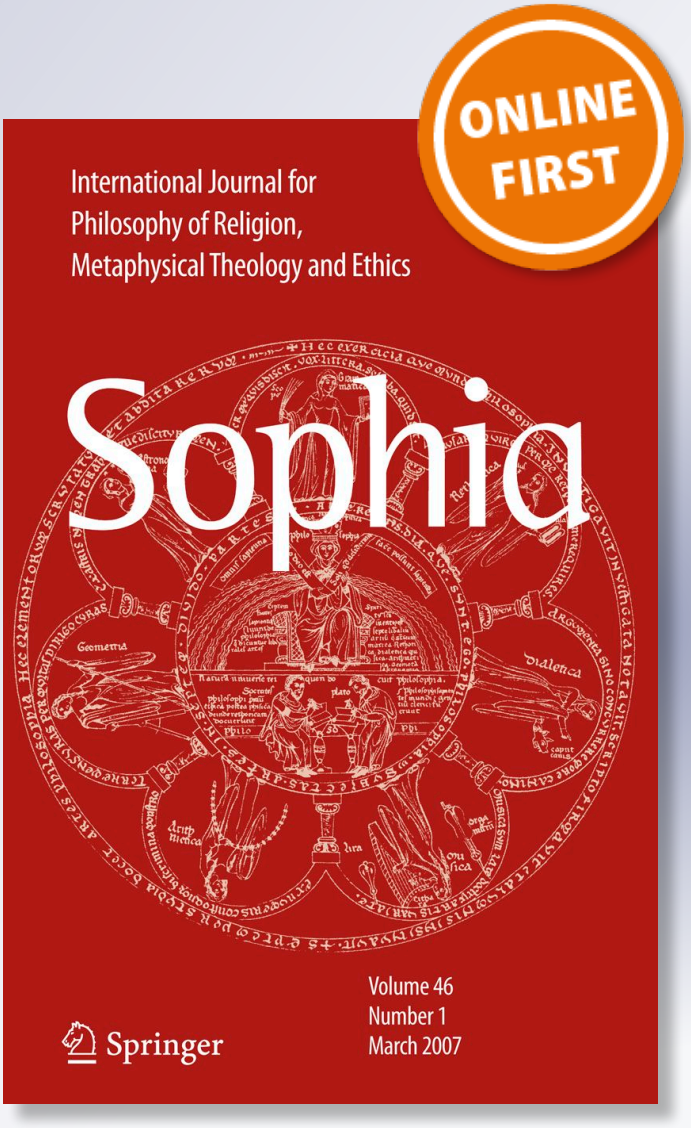

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Abstract This essay deals with the impact of Hegel's philosophy of religion by examining his positions on religious identity and on the relationship between theology and history. I argue that his criterion for religious identity was socio-historical, and that his philosophical theology was historical rather than normative. These positions help explain some historical peculiarities regarding the effect of his philosophy of religion. Of particular concern is that although Hegel's own aims were apologetic, his major influence on religious thought was in the development of various historical and critical approaches to religion.

Keywords Hegel · Religious identity · Hegelian school · DF Strauss · Bruno Bauer

Hegel's legacy in the philosophy of religion divides on questions of religious allegiance. On the one hand he spent the last decade of his life outlining an apology for modern Protestantism that rivals in ambition the most comprehensive of medieval theologies. The twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth even referred to Hegel as the Thomas Aquinas of Protestantism.[1] On the other hand, he gave birth to diverse critical and even secular approaches to the study of religion that seem to rest uneasily with his conservative intentions, much of this work being executed by his disciples in the decade following his sudden death in 1831. His philosophy of religion includes a history of religions, a comparative study of world religions, an anthropological study, and even a theory of biblical interpretation. In terms of historical influence these aspects of his approach far outstrip the justificatory arguments that they first supported. The purpose of this essay is to explore the historical and conceptual relationships between these two tendencies, viz., Hegel's apologetic theology and the more critical or secular studies of religion that it inspired.

[1]See the essay on Hegel in Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Eerdmanns 2002), 370 ff. The work dates originally from 1947.

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I consider two reasons why Hegel retained the justificatory structure to his philosophy of religion, and these issues also serve to shed some light on the postmortem divorce of his philosophy from Christianity. The first reason pertains to the criterion for religious identification that he developed. Although Hegel was a theologian by training, he was especially interested in religious history. At an early point in his so-called theological phase, he became troubled by a difficulty in identifying theological positions with religious traditions.[2] He noticed how this problem gets glossed over by proper nouns such as 'Christian', and he addressed it by developing a socio-historical criterion for religious affiliation. This fact coupled with his tendency to identify with his own historical and social circumstances conditioned his adoption of Christian religious ideas and symbols. The second point concerns Hegel's specific historicist methodology. He wished to provide an account of the history of religions that could explain the appropriateness of each religion to its adherents and to its age. The only method at his disposal for treating ancient religions without dismissing them as unreasonable superstitions was to describe them as early stages of modern humanity's self-understanding, and this latter he could only formulate in terms of those same ideas and symbols with which he identified. This led him to interpret the history of religions in such a manner that it served also as a kind of theology.

The outcome of these two decisions by Hegel was a normatively neutral, historically inclusive theology that provided his followers with a method rather than a doctrine. In short, Hegel's theology was not a means of establishing correct beliefs that would be binding on all agents. Instead his embrace of his specific religious tradition was only an interpretation of his place in history, although that interpretation took the form of a synthesis of religious symbols with historical studies. The impact on his disciples of the historical specificity of his theology was that they could continue his work and develop his insights without also sharing his professed identity as a Christian. In the following I consider also the implications of these problems for Hegel scholarship, and I conclude by mediating some divergent approaches to his philosophy of religion.

The Methodological Problem: Theology and History

In this first section I wish to introduce Hegel's early struggle with problems of religious identification. The texts relevant to this topic are from his essays of the middle and late 1790s.[3] In these works the young Hegel framed his methodological concerns in terms of the opposition between moral theology and what he called 'positive' religion, which in this case means the transmission of doctrines by authority and accepted on

[2] Walter Kaufmann (in 'The Hegel Myth and its Method' in *Philosophical Review* 60, 1951, 460 n.3) once suggested that Hegel's 'theological writings' should be labeled instead 'anti-theological.' I take this claim quite seriously, and in the following I intend to show the extent to which Hegel's writings in this period (1795–1802) represent a rejection of theology. His mature philosophy of religion, however, clearly maintains very much theology, even if Hegel has considerably altered the form of this.

[3] The texts are collected in Hermann Nohl's *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* (Tubingen 1907). An English edition by T.M. Knox (*Early Theological Writings*, Chicago 1948) offers translations of much of the same material. In the following I give page numbers to both editions. I use Knox's translation except where otherwise noted.

that basis.[4] This dichotomy reflects the influence of Kantian moral theory, which tended to view all forms of positivity as a threat to moral autonomy, the latter being the sole issue of importance in religious and theological discussion.[5] Already in the early years of the decade, however, Hegel became sensitive to the difficulties posed to theological discourse by institutional aspects of religion. More inclined than Kant and his followers to the study of history, Hegel concerned himself with the inadequacy of theology for explaining and evaluating the historical realities of religion.[6] The crucial development occurred when he began to notice how theological positions are systematically elusive in relation to religious history. Competing theologies, for instance, can lay claim to the title 'Christianity' precisely because each must allow that the actual practices and beliefs of the world diverge from the supposedly authentic doctrine. The facts of Christianity as a religion, in other words, underdetermine what should count as Christianity in theological discussion. Philosophical and theological disagreements in turn pose a very frustrating limit to the efficacy of any critique of religion: one only ever criticizes corrupt practices and doctrines, never the real thing. The 25-year-old Hegel made this admission in the opening lines of his 1795 essay *The Positivity of the Christian Religion*:

> 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. Everyone sets up his own system as the Christian religion and requires everyone else to envisage this and this only.[7]

In that essay Hegel's solution to the problem was much less interesting than his diagnosis of it. He assumed a rather predictable stance for a philosopher, stipulating what ought to be considered the truth of Christianity. Given a precise definition of 'the aim and essence of all true religion, including our own' it is possible to appraise 'all the more detailed doctrines' of a given religion as well as 'the means of propagating them.'[8] If we know what Christianity is supposed to be, or what true

[4] I will refer mainly to *The Positivity of the Christian Religion*, but occasionally also to *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*. Hegel's understanding of 'positivity' undergoes some variations in these essays, and he employs the concept in a more developed form still in his lectures of 1827 (Religion 3 180). Here I am concerned only with how Hegel uses this idea at, for instance, Knox 71, Nohl 155, in the early sections of *Positivity*.

[5] Kant's views on this topic can be found, among many other places, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which was the most important Kantian text for the young Hegel. Any account of Hegel's early development will provide details of his study of Kantian moral theory. For a brief overview see chapters 2 and 3 of Terry Pinkard's *Hegel* (Cambridge University Press, 2000). For a full study see H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight 1770–1801* (Oxford University Press, 1972).

[6] Walter Jaeschke (*Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, tr. Stewart and Hodgson, California University Press, 1990) provides a helpful account of Hegel's methodological crisis at this period. See especially pages 101–3.

[7] Knox 67, Nohl 152.

[8] The passage I am alluding to is also from the Preface of *Positivity*, and reads '. . . I remark here that the general principle to be laid down as a foundation for all judgments on the varying modification, forms, and spirit of the Christian religion is this—that *the aim and essence of all true religion*, our religion included, *is human morality*, and that all the more detailed doctrines of Christianity, all means of propagating them, and all its obligations . . . have their worth and their sanctity appraised according to their close or distant connection with that aim' Knox 68, Nohl 153, my italics.

Christianity is, then of course we can cast judgments on the particular forms of it we find in history, in the schools, and in the churches. Such is the procedure of the essay in question. Having appropriated his definition of religion from the Kantian/Fichtean moral philosophy, Hegel formulated on that basis criticisms of a few stages of early Christian (as well as Jewish) history.[9]

The opening quip, however, had acknowledged a limit to the effectiveness of any criticism developed along these theologically normative lines: 'what you maintain may touch on this or that system of the Christian religion but not on the Christian religion itself.' Although the direct focus of the essay is on a few historical episodes, a dissenting philosophical theologian is nonetheless welcome to provide a different norm of Christianity by which to assess the history. In that case Hegel's specific criticisms of the early church would lose some relevance. For this reason many scholars have concluded that the procedure in the essay contradicted its author's better judgment.[10] Subsequent years found him not only abandoning the moral concept of religion, but also more accepting of the elusiveness that had at first worried him. Whereas the young Hegel had followed the tradition of condemning positive religion on the basis of a normative principle, the mature Hegel arrived at a theology that included and embraced his extensive study of history and society.[11] A significant advance in this direction appears in a revision to *Positivity* dating from 1800, when he began to reject any attempt to treat conceptions of religion in abstraction from particular historical or social conditions.[12] His reasoning is that theological concepts construed along normative lines lead their adherents to be dismissive in regard to positive aspects of religion, when the goal should be to understand the various historical contexts of religion:

> But this method of explaining the matter presupposes a deep contempt for man and the presence of glaring superstition in his intellect; and it leaves the main problem untouched, namely, the problem of showing religion's appropriateness to nature through all nature's modifications from one century to another. In other words, the sole question raised on these lines is the question about the truth of religion in *abstraction* from the manners and characteristics of the nations and epochs which believed it, and the answer to *this* question is that religion is empty superstition, deception, and stupidity.[13]

Nonetheless, Hegel conducted his particular studies of history and culture by employing theological concepts, and the organization of even his mature philosophy of religion contains the remnants of a normative theology. To put this in slightly different terms, Hegel indeed, as he once insisted everyone will, 'sets up his own system as the Christian

[9] See especially Section 29, (Knox 135–145), in which Hegel discusses the limits of morality as conceived within a public institution such as a church.

[10] Georg Lukacs' analysis (in *The Young Hegel*, translated by R. Livingstone, MIT 1975 74–89) reaches this conclusion.

[11] The second and longest part of Hegel's philosophy of religion, entitled 'Determinate religion,' is devoted to his historical sketch of religions. See *Vorlesungen ueber die Philosophie der Religion* II (Felix Meiner 1993). In the following I give all references to Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* to the Meiner paperback edition, cited as 'Religion' with the volume number. All translations from these texts are my own.

[12] Compare Lukacs 225.

[13] Knox 173, Nohl 144.

religion.'[14] His system, however, attempted to address the difficulties of religious identification in numerous ways. In the first place, Hegel's theology is an historical one that finds God within human history, and this allowed him to apply his theological concepts to the historical realities of religious practices and institutions. More importantly, this enabled him to treat episodes in the history of religion in a manner that was not as dismissive of them as were the histories of religion cum superstition that appeared in the eighteenth century.[15] The few philosophers of that time who were also historians of religion, such as Hume and the French *philosophes*, had considered religions only as so many varieties of aberrant belief.[16] This exclusively critical intent prevented them from addressing the 'main problem,' namely, why particular people at certain times and places held such and such beliefs and engaged in the accompanying practices.

Finally, Hegel's theology is an inclusive study of historical movements and schools of thought. His theory embraces rather than discards any apparently divergent understandings of religion by placing the relevant theories in the appropriate historical contexts. The key result of this for theological debate is that in claiming title to Christianity, he did not deny it to anyone else. [17] 'Christianity' did not for him name a normative principle that determines what should count as right belief. It named rather on one hand a set of world-historical events and circumstances that resulted in the transmission of a specific set of doctrines, ideas, narratives, etc. On the other hand, 'Christianity' names the manner in which those events and circumstances are understood and interpreted by the individuals to whom they pertain. Since Christian themes have proved to be consistent 'with the most varied manners, characters, and institutions,' there is little use, in Hegel's opinion, in establishing a certain version of it to the exclusion of its various historical manifestations.[18]

The Solution: Theology as History

In acknowledgement of the fact that his own historical circumstances qualified him as a Christian, Hegel also embraced the central religious doctrines of his tradition. The young Hegel came close to defining religion as a kind of embrace of tradition, and in his late philosophy of religion he made this idea both more precise and more comprehensive.[19] He needed first, however, to develop historical interpretations of specific religious ideas, and he was aided in this by the fact that the central tenets of

[14] Knox 67, Nohl 152; see above for full quotation.

[15] The text in this category that is most widely read today would be Hume's *Natural History of Religion* (1757). This is available in many current editions, including one edited by J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford 2008).

[16] The following passage from Hume is by no means exceptional: 'Examine the religious principles which have, in fact, prevailed in the world. You will scarcely be persuaded, that they are anything but sick men's dreams' (*Natural History of Religion*, 'General Corollary,' Oxford edition pg. 184).

[17] I refer to Hegel as an inclusivist, by which I mean that Hegel insists that apparently divergent views on religion are dialectically consistent with his own. Peter Hodgson argues (*Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion,* Oxford 2006, pg. 230 ff) that Hegel is a pluralist rather than an inclusivist in religion.

[18] Knox 168, Nohl 140. I cite the entirety of this passage below.

[19] I have in mind passages like this one from an early *System Fragment*: 'Religion is any elevation of the finite to the infinite, when the infinite is conceived as a definite form of life' (Knox 315, Nohl 350). This passage of course does not specify 'infinite' as something historical. For a discussion of how Hegel develops this idea of religion as transcendence of individuality, see my Section III below.

Christianity were otherwise resistant to philosophical interpretation. He considered it among the principal legacies of the so-called Enlightenment to have established a rift between the articles of faith and the dictates of reason, and he considered it among his principal philosophical tasks to reconcile these two.[20] In this section I discuss how in his mature philosophy of religion Hegel negotiated this conflict between faith and reason, which took the form of an appropriation of revealed doctrine by theoretical philosophy. By 'revealed doctrine' I mean here only the tenets of a given religious tradition as they appear prior to interpretation from a philosophical standpoint, whereas a theology consists in some reasoned account of such tenets. The relevant revealed doctrines in the case of Christianity include the incarnation, trinity, resurrection, etc. My intention is to explain how Hegel indeed developed a philosophical theology in that he tried to illustrate the reasonableness of these historically prominent Christian ideas, but that he accomplished this in two apparently unorthodox moves. In the first place, he allowed revealed doctrines to inform his account of rationality; second, he historicized both reason and the revealed doctrines.

Although Hegel presented only one of several philosophical alternatives to the problem of faith and reason, the entire scope of possible responses to this problem found representation in the positions of the leading German thinkers at the turn of the century. His position developed, and is still most easily understood, by contrast with his contemporaries. Those contemporaries who accepted the dilemma between faith and reason, or revealed doctrine and philosophy, could defend either one against the other. There were many who thus embraced the split between religion and philosophy. Most famously, Jacobi claimed that all philosophy leads to atheism, and he at least seemed to defend faith against reason.[21] Numerous philosophers opted instead for the opposing, atheistic horn of the dilemma. Some of Fichte's followers, such as Friedrich Forberg, took this path despite the fact that atheism was otherwise strongly discouraged by the religious and political control of academic discourse in the German-speaking provinces.[22]

A philosopher who rejects the dilemma can either adapt the doctrines of faith to the principles of reason or reinterpret the latter in terms of the former. Fichte himself, perhaps following Kant, chose the first option to the extent that he accepted exclusively those aspects of religion that were in conformity with independently established philosophical doctrines.[23] In Hegel's eyes his compatriots were following the basic tendency of the Enlightenment in this regard, and they thereby suffered the

[20] See, for example, the lecture on Jacobi in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. An abridged, one-volume version of E.S. Haldane's and Frances H. Simson's English translation of these lectures is available from Prometheus Books, 1996. In the following I will refer however to the German paperback edition published by Suhrkamp, *Werke* volumes 18–20 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

[21] Jacobi had been read this way after the Spinoza controversy of 1785, but he rebutted such charges in 1787 *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus. Ein Gespräch*. Breslau: Gottlieb Löwe. Hegel, however, seems always to have considered Jacobi to reject philosophy in favor of a kind of faith. See, for instance, Religion 1 284–5 and *Werke* 20 315–29.

[22] In the so-called 'atheism controversy' of 1798–9, Forberg outlined an atheistic position. See his *Entwicklung des Begriffs der Religion*, which is reprinted in *Appellation an das Publikum… Dokumente zum Atheismusstreit um Fichte, Forberg, Niethammer. Jena 1798/99*, (Leipzig 1987). English translations of all the texts of the controversy appear in in *J.G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute (1798–1800)*, ed. Yolanda Estes and Cirtis Bowman (Ashgate 2010).

[23] See Fichte's *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (trans. Garrett Green, Cambridge 1978) of 1792, or Kant's *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* (trans. Allen Wood and George Di Giovanni, Cambridge 1999) of the following year.

same fate as their predecessors.[24] Hegel had already shown that those who follow such an approach will conclude that the actual beliefs and practices of history fall short of the truth. What is worse in this context, however, is that the mysterious doctrines of faith remain beyond the reach of such philosophical theologians. Thus, Kant preserves personal immortality and a kind of belief in God, but has little room for the trinity or the incarnation, not to mention for sacraments, services, etc.[25] Fichte equated 'God' with his own moral postulate, and he rejected even basic tenets like the personhood of the deity.[26]

In contrast to the Kant/ Fichte approach, the chief premise of Hegel's philosophy of religion was that all aspects of religion (doctrinal and ecumenical) are perfectly rational and should thus serve as the object of a philosophical study.[27] Instead of redefining religious doctrine in rational terms, he redefined rationality in religious terms. Hegel's principal predecessor in regard to this kind of reconciliation of reason with faith was Lessing.[28] In his once influential *The Education of the Human Race* (1778), Lessing proclaimed that history would transform the mysteries of faith into new kinds of rational propositions.[29] Any apparent conflict between reason and revelation, he claimed, was only ever provisional; revealed truths are those for which people are yet to formulate appropriate reasons. Lessing's position was merely prophetic, however, and he made no effort to accelerate the historical movement from revelation to philosophy.

Hegel followed Lessing by attempting to convert revealed doctrines into rational propositions, albeit in a context in which their defense appeared unlikely. The best minds of the eighteenth century had met with considerable success in establishing the irrationality of revealed dogmas (e.g., the incarnation, the trinity, the resurrection, etc.).[30] In the wake of Kant's influence especially, philosophy required a significant

[24] Although Kant's method and doctrine differ greatly from, say Locke, consider the close analogy between the title of Kant's chief work on religion (*Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*) and Locke's (*Christianity not Unreasonable*).

[25] Hodgson (190 ff.) provides an interesting discussion of the role of sacraments in Hegel's philosophy of religion.

[26] See the texts reprinted in Estes and Bowman.

[27] Aspects of Kant's allegorical readings of biblical myths faintly anticipate Hegel's later philosophy of religion. Of his two texts on the topic it seems that *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason* stands slightly closer to Hegel than does *The Conflict of the Faculties,* although even the title of the former text reveals that for Kant religion must always conform to reason rather than, as for Hegel, vice versa. In *Religion* Kant goes as far as to provide an allegorical interpretation of the Incarnation, but the following passage from the latter illustrates how squarely within the Enlightenment tradition Kant remained: 'the doctrine of the trinity . . . transcends all our concepts. Whether we are to worship three or ten persons in the Divinity makes no difference' (the translation here is by Mary J. Gregor in her bilingual edition, Abaris 1979, pp. 65–7).

[28] Jaeschke (289–90) is one of few recent Hegel scholars who has discussed the influence of Lessing. In the nineteenth century, however, Hegel's affiliation with Lessing (and his opposition to Kant) was more widely recognized. See, for instance, Part II of Andrew Seth's *The Development from Kant to Hegel* (Edinburgh 1882).

[29] See especially #76 of *Education of the Human Race*, where Lessing writes that 'the conversion of revealed truths into rational truths is absolutely necessary if mankind is to be helped (by religion).' My translation here is of the Franz Bornmueller edition, *Werke*, *Kritisch durchgesehene und erläuterte Ausgabe*. 5 Bände.Leipzig u. Wien 1905, (vol. 5, 628).

[30] Fichte was generalizing a common trend in philosophical theology when he criticized the concept of revelation. Perhaps the most widely read, and one of the most successful, philosophical analysis of revelation is Hume's 'On Miracles' (in *Enquiry concerning human understanding*, Chapter X, Hackett 1977, originally 1748).

overhaul if the apparently inexplicable and indefensible notions of trinity, incarnation, resurrection, etc., were to serve as objects of philosophical study. If Hegel was to defend religion, then he was required to rework philosophy from its foundations, and his entire system of philosophy thus serves as his purported defense of Christianity. This does not mean that Hegel's system is in all respects consistent with his late philosophy of religion, nor do I insist that one must read his other writings through a religious lens. My point here is only that if we take the claims of his late philosophy of religion seriously, then we need to find revealed truths expressed through and translated into areas of philosophy such as logic and history. The legitimacy of this approach is supported by the fact that in his late lectures on religion Hegel himself reads his system in this kind of manner. Hegel recognized, and I only wish to highlight, that his interpretation of religion required his other writings to accommodate revealed Christian ideas.

The case of logic suffices, I hope, for an initial illustration of my point. Enlightenment philosophers like Bayle and Hume had argued that a revealed doctrine such as the trinity is incompatible with basic logical and metaphysical maxims.[31] One of Bayle's influential arguments asserts that if the doctrine of the trinity is true, then the law of transitivity ('if a=b and a=c then b=c') is not true. But if this last is not true, then none of the forms of traditional syllogistic logic will work.[32] Successful arguments for revealed truths thus could not rest on traditional logic, and Bayle concluded that if Christian doctrines are true then traditional logic is mistaken throughout. Hegel did not object to arguments such as this, but he rather developed a dialectical logic that could better accommodate ideas like the trinity. He considered the law of transitivity and similar maxims to rest on what he called the logic of identity, and he criticized the related laws of thought in the second book of his *Science of Logic*.[33] Several years after the initial publication of his logic, in the 1824 course on the philosophy of religion, Hegel is recorded as having acknowledged the importance for religion of rejecting the logic of identity. He applied this in particular to the notion of the trinity:

> …it is abstract thinking and its principle of identity that occasions attacks on the inner contents of the church. The content in question is…divine trinity. And this concrete content stands in contradiction to the law of identity. Just the same the relationship between God and humanity, the endowment of grace, the unity of divine and human nature, the mystical union, etc., these are all absolute conjunctions of opposed determinations.[34]

The Hegel of 1824 and after thus saw his logic at least as having theological import, although it is probably more accurate to say that he acknowledged his logic to

[31] Bayle's dictionary (1697) note on 'Pyrrho,' Note B (See *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, trans. Richard H. Popkin, Indianapolis 1965, pp. 194 ff.) provides perhaps the most lucid analysis of the incompatibility of classical logic with Christian revelation. His view, however, is widely accepted in the eighteenth century.

[32] This I take from Bayle: 'It is evident that things which do not differ from a third do not differ from each other. This is the basis of all our reasonings and all our syllogisms are grounded upon it; nevertheless, we are assured by the revelation of the mystery of the trinity that it is a false axiom' (the translation here is taken from Ariew and Watkins in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*).

[33] See especially the two Remarks on Identity in *Science of Logic* (translation AV Miller, Humanities 1969), pp 412–16; Suhrkamp 6 39–45.

[34] Religion 3 170.

be theologically motivated. The privileging of contradiction over identity and the notion of identity-in-difference reflect loosely trinitarian moves, and other central concepts of Hegelian logic relate closely to traditional Christian myths or narratives. The *Science of Logic*, on this view, is a logical foundation for the central themes of Christianity. Hegel summarized this reading of his logic in 1829 when he said that logic 'is metaphysical theology, to the extent that it considers the evolution of the idea of God in the ether of pure thought.'[35] Such passages as this abound in the Berlin lectures,[36] and a vast secondary literature exists, mainly in German, in which are highlighted the presence of revealed doctrine among various portions not only of the *Logic*, but also the *Phenomenology* and *Realphilosophie*.[37]

Hegel's attempted reconciliation of revelation with logic forms only one premise to his philosophy of religion. In the Berlin lectures he also historicized each side of this equation. He explained his logical principles as the outcome of an historical development within which the logic of identity played a legitimate and necessary role, and also presented his religious principles as the outcome of the history of religions. Near the end of the 1827 course, he intimated, for instance, that Plato and the Pythagoreans expressed versions of trinitarian logic, and he claimed that 'in addition countless other instances could be described, in which the content of the trinity took different forms in different religions.'[38] In religious history, however, the concept of the trinity remained at the level of extramundane myth, and its translation from myth to logic had been one of the tasks of modern philosophy.[39] It was particularly the German mystic Jakob Boehme by whom the trinity was first 'raised to a pure form of thinking' prior to its further conversion into a logical scheme by Kant.[40] These developments in philosophy were retrospectively interpreted by Hegel as a kind of slow conversion of revealed doctrine – of the kind Lessing had predicted - into a logical maxim. He accordingly viewed Kant's dialectical procedure as an appropriation of the trinity, though he of course did not think that Kant understood himself in this way.[41] The distinctively Hegelian point is that these earlier developments were not seen as mistaken, but rather that the historical movement from the logic of identity to dialectical logic is accounted for by his own position.

A second historicizing move is crucial to the philosophy of religion: the historical conversion of revealed truth into logical maxim is explained partly by revealed doctrine. History, on Hegel's account, not only validates the trinity but also has a trinitarian structure.[42] Another way of putting this point is that at least part of the utility of the theological terms is that they become historical descriptors. The trinity is, on this

[35] In the course on the proofs for God's existence, which can be found in Werke 17 419. 'Every stage of the logical idea can serve (as proof of God's existence),' Religion 1 318.
[36] The 1829 lectures on the existence of God (*Werke* 17 347–501) make manifold references to the earlier subdivisions of Hegel's philosophy. See especially the opening pages, in which Hegel deals specifically with the relation between logic and religion.
[37] For a review of the literature in this area, see the first chapter of Martin Wendte's *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel* (de Gruyter 2007).
[38] Religion 3 213.
[39] Religion 3 214.
[40] Ibid.
[41] In fact he attributes this already to both Boehme and Kant. Kant's use of dialectical logic was, in the eyes of the late Hegel, a philosophical appropriation of the concept of the trinity. See, for instance, Rel 3 214.
[42] This move is best explained in Religion 3 219–237.

view, a specific historical development of a specific myth into a philosophical theory. This is the kind of move by which Hegel indeed, as he once worried everyone does, 'set up his system as the Christian religion.'[43] He understood his historical expositions of how myths became philosophy to illustrate the grandiose claim that the content of his philosophy is the same as the content of the Christian religion, and he presented this identity claim as an apology for Christianity.[44] My concern here is only to characterize the historical role of Hegel's claims so as to indicate some things that Hegel did not mean when he wrote that his philosophy and Christianity are the same. In light of the justificatory claim made in the Berlin lectures, the remainder of the system appeared as a kind of sweeping appropriation of Christian narratives.[45] The very detailed and influential studies of history and society were subsumed under the umbrella concept of *Geist*, allowing him ultimately to unify the many positive aspects of religion that he found so troubling in his youth.[46] From the perspective of Hegel's religious claims, then, world history appeared to be the achievement of freedom on the part of spirit, for which modern politics, law, and culture provided the necessary circumstances.[47] Art and religion were the means and ways of self-understanding for *Geist*, with modern religion eventually bringing to history and culture the thesis that all of this had been one long process of gradual self-recognition and recollection. History and human culture had always been the Incarnation of spirit, with the recognition/recollection of this fact on our (Hegel's) part symbolized by the return of the Son to the Father.[48]

The 'Christian religion' to which Hegel lent a kind of justification thus received in this context a very specific historical interpretation. In a very important sense he considered all humans to have been Christians, since he took that religion for the sum of world history.[49] This is true even for those individuals who lived before Christ and who had different ideas and practices that we call 'religious.' The Christian myth of creation-fall-incarnation-resurrection-redemption-salvation was unconsciously a

[43] Hodgson and Jaeschke have provided an enormous service to Hegel scholarship by re-editing the lectures and separating the material into four lecture courses. The previous editions had attempted to combine the courses into a single text.

[44] For extended discussion of this point see Stephen Rocker's *Hegel's Rational Religion: The Validity of Hegel's Argument for the Identity in Content of Absolute Religion and Absolute Philosophy* (Farleigh Dickinson 1995). Quentin Lauer's 'Hegel on the Identity of Content in Religion and Philosophy,' (in. Darrel E. Christensen, ed., Hegel and the *Philosophy of Religion: The Wofford. Symposium* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970) outlined a similar reading.

[45] The early chapters of Rocker explain this issue in great detail.

[46] The third part of Hegel's system, the philosophy of Geist, includes psychology, law, politics, ethics, world history, and aesthetics in addition to religion. The dialectical treatment of these fields of inquiries is supposed to demonstrate their relations to one another.

[47] See the *Lectures on World History* (*Werke* 12), translated by Duncan Forbes and H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[48] An exposition from the 1824 course (Religion 3 151) gives part of this point, when Hegel explains the ascension of Christ as revealing the divine nature of history. The complete point that I am making, however, requires that we take into account what Hegel says about the congregation in the subsequent section. I deal with this in Section III.

[49] The third part of the *Lectures* (Religion 3) treats Christianity as 'completed' (*vollendete*) religion. Christianity is not, for Hegel, a distinct movement or phenomenon, but rather the completion or perfection of religion. Other 'religions' are only incomplete developments of religion. In Christianity religion is also 'reconciled' with the further developments of world history in which the 'principle of freedom' has been realized (Religion 3 264ff).

symbolic interpretation of an inclusive world history. The previously prevalent representation of this scheme as taking place above and beyond the realities of that history was just one part of the scheme itself (the fallen part), one that was destined to be removed at later stages. Part of the completion of the process, in other words, was the removal of the illusion that this all happens in a sort of different realm or place. The Christian narrative was converted by Hegel into a description of Christian history.

As an interpretation of religion, Hegel's theory invites a few further comments. First, the religion that Hegel defended was not simply a single religion among others, but instead the entire human phenomenon of religion. He conceived it in specifically Christian terms, to be sure, but Christianity was for him only a further development of previous or different forms of religion. He provided a fairly detailed history of religions that treated them as stages of a single religion, and in doing so he at least attempted to account sympathetically for each set of beliefs and practices of which he had any knowledge.[50] This inclusiveness is of course qualified by the fact that revealed Christian myths provided the interpretive themes with which he approached apparently diverse religious traditions. The various religions of world history, then, appeared to Hegel as both intelligible and reasonable, but only to the extent that they led to Protestant Christianity (not to mention to Hegelian philosophy).

Second, the relationship between Hegel's philosophy and Christianity was supposed to be akin to the relationship between Christianity and other religions. In each case the proclaimed identity was a matter of *Aufhebung*. 'Christianity,' as this word suggests, was both overcome and preserved in his philosophy. When he frequently spoke of the identity of philosophy and religion, he meant it always in this sense. Third, if Hegel's philosophy is not exactly the same as all versions of Christianity, this is partly because 'Christianity' names a principle of self-understanding common to diverse peoples at diverse stages of world history.[51] His allowance for diversity within Christianity qualified his claim of identity between his philosophy and that religion. Finally, this last notion of Christianity as an interpretive principle allowed Hegel to develop a novel definition of religion, one that related it to the broader tendencies of humans to understand ourselves in our history.

The History of this Theology

As the above sections explain, Hegel distinguished his theory of religion by the manner in which he applied the theological concept of God to the positive realities in which that concept arose in history. Christianity for him was an interpretive principle

[50] Hodgson provides extensive analyses of Hegel's views of various religions.

[51] An outstanding passage from 1800, mentioned above, reads 'The Christian religion has sometimes been reproved, sometimes praised, for its consistency with the most varied manners, characters, and institutions. It was cradled in the corruption of the Roman state; it became dominant when that empire was in the throes of its decline, and we cannot see how Christianity could have stayed its downfall . . . it was the religion of the Italian states in the finest period of their licentious freedom in the middle ages; of the grave and free Swiss republics . . . In all climates the tree of the cross has grown, taken root, and fructified. Every joy in life has been linked with this faith, while the most miserable gloom has found in it nourishment and its justification.' Knox 168, Nohl 140.

for world history and culture. The expression 'philosophy of religion' suggested this entire context, and he meant by it to call attention to the methodological differences between his theory and the old *theologia naturalis*.[52] The latter discipline had offered a merely formal analysis of the concept of God and the consequent abstract puzzles such as how and why a good god might allow evil in the world.[53] Philosophy of religion, by contrast, studies the relationship between humanity and God, especially as this appears in the diverse historical and social phenomena known as 'religion.'[54] Philosophy can thereby come to terms with religion by discovering it, as the young Hegel had hoped, in the context of 'the manners and characteristics' of the various stages of history.[55] It is worth noting that much of what today qualifies as philosophy of religion resembles more closely the *theologia naturalis* of the eighteenth century, since it deals mainly with such topics as the existence and attributes of God, the problem of evil, etc.[56]

Scholarship on Hegel's philosophy of religion has been troubled by the fact that his theory is, the above distinction taken in due context, nonetheless a philosophical theology.[57] Hegel gave religion a social and historical meaning, but his position was nonetheless in many respects drawn from traditional theologies. One point that has troubled scholars is the fact that Hegel even revived the old philosophical arguments about God, and several aspects of his philosophy of religion thus appear to have a kind of retro character. He repeatedly claimed to support, for example, the traditional proofs of God's existence, and he wedded these to his analyses of positive religion.[58] In each case his strategy was to resurrect traditional argumentative frameworks by inserting into them a series of social and historical analyses. His acceptance of traditional forms of argument that other philosophers after Kant had discarded was no accident, since Hegel's philosophy of religion aimed to approve and incorporate not only previous religions, but also previous thought about religions.[59] He intended for the philosophy of religion to be in some ways consistent with previous philosophical reflection on the same topics. In this section I wish to look at some of the

[52] Jaeschke (230 ff.) and Hodgson (53 ff.) discuss this point in some detail. Hegel discusses it, among other places, in the introduction to 1824 lectures series. See especially the discussion of Wolff's theology (Religion 1 33–4).

[53] Wolff's *Theologia naturalis* (Georg Olms 1978, originally Leipzig 1736) presented the standard arrangement that Hegel had in mind. For a summary of Wolff's procedure, see 'The Existence of God, Natural Theology, and Christian Wolff' in *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 4(2) 1973 105–18.

[54] See especially Religion 1 45–8, 'On the relationship of the philosophy of religion to positive religion.'

[55] See above, n41, Knox 168, Nohl 140.

[56] For a lengthy discussion of the status of 'philosophy of religion' as a subdiscipline, and one that does not defend Hegel's vision of his own historical importance, see James Collins, *The Emergence of the Philosophy of Religion* (New Haven, Yale University Press 1967).

[57] The reasons why anglophone scholars are resistant to this fact differ from the corresponding reasons why the German scholars resist the same point. The latter tend to study Hegel solely in relation to Kant and his German followers, whereas Hegel's attachments to 'pre-Kantian' philosophical theology illustrate his relationship to philosophers outside the German tradition. In the English-language literature the 'non-metaphysical' interpretation of Hegel has been predominant for a few decades, and this reading does not typically stress Hegel's philosophical theology. A summary of the latter very widespread trend appears in Simon Lumsden's 'The Rise of the Non-Metaphysical Hegel' (*Philosophy Compass*, 3(1) 61–75 2007).

[58] I give an extensive account of one example in my *The Ontological Argument from Descartes to Hegel* (JHP/Humanity 2009, pp 197–230).

[59] See the conclusion to his *History of Philosophy* (*Werke* 20 454–62).

sources that informed his philosophical moves with respect to the interpretation of religion. The aim here is to place Hegel's socio-historical theology in the context of the myriad kinds of Christian philosophical theology and by doing so to qualify further his claims to allegiance with Christianity.

The principal theological move underlying Hegel's historical concept of the divine is his inclusion of human history within God's nature. He approached this problem by relating human knowledge to divine knowledge, and only separately did he demonstrate the historicity of such knowledge.[60] Treated in isolation, the unity of human knowledge with the divinity was an issue familiar to anyone acquainted with the history of theological ideas. The issue appears in dozens of passages from the Berlin lectures and other works in which he claims that 'finite consciousness is a moment in the divine mind.'[61] Although sentences like this contain Hegel's own characteristic phrasing (the relevant concept of 'moment' is specific to his philosophy), the central point was familiar to Hegel already from the studies of his youth. Most of his explicit remarks on this topic are complicit with the tradition of Christian Platonism from Augustine onwards, including especially the medieval tradition of Bonaventure and others. In some medieval contexts, for instance in Bonaventure's still widely read text *Itinerarium mentis in deum* (*Journey of the Mind to God*), the human mind is said to make its ascension or journey to God by means of philosophical contemplation[62]; in Church history even the most orthodox traditions use phrases similar to *ascencio mentis in Deum* as a definition for prayer.[63] Hegel adopted this notion of ascension, which he translated by the German phrase *Erhebung des Geistes zu Gott* ('elevation of the mind to God'), and he treated this in numerous philosophical contexts as the principle of divine-human unity.[64]

Hegel's most direct and formative influences in this regard were not mainstream theologians like Augustine or Bonaventure, but rather German mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Jakob Boehme.[65] It was chiefly the study of these figures that suggested to Hegel the importance for theology of the unity of humanity with God, and it was only after a period of mysticism that he began to elaborate the notion of *Erhebung* in various contexts. Hegel studied Eckhart extensively in the late 1790 s and again in the early 1820 s, and in each case his writings supply abundant evidence of preoccupation with mystical ideas.[66] For the mystics the idea of the unity with the

[60] The former occurs in the philosophy of religion, while the latter is implied by the preceding parts of the philosophy of *Geist*: history, politics, law, art, etc.

[61] Religion 1 222; see also Strauss's sketch of the 1831 lectures in Religion 1 279–89.

[62] Hackett has published a recent edition (1993) translated by Stephen Brown.

[63] For a discussion of this see Lauer's *Hegel's Concept of God* p. 212.

[64] Of the many texts in which Hegel discusses this concept, see especially Religion 1 308–330, and the Sixth Lecture of the 1829 Series on the proofs for the existence of God (Werker 17 385–91). For an interesting discussion of Hegel's notion of *Erhebung* in terms of moral philosophy, see Robert M. Wallace's Hegel's *Philosophy of Reality, Freedom, and God* (Cambridge 2005) pg. 102 ff. For an analysis of the role this concept plays in philosophical theology, see my *Ontological Argument from Descartes to Hegel*, 219–20.

[65] Hegel devotes to Boehme an unusual amount of attention in his history of modern philosophy. In the Suhrkamp edition, for instance, the now almost unknown Boehme receives 30 pages of discussion, or just less than Descartes and considerably more than Locke or Hume.

[66] See Cyril O'Regan's 'Hegelian Philosophy of Religion and Eckhartian Mysticism' in *New Perspectives in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (ed. David Kolb SUNY 1992) and Glenn Allen Magee's *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Cornell 2001).

divine pertains chiefly to contemplative experience and thought specifically about God. Eckhart's famous dictum, which Hegel was especially fond of quoting, expresses this point: 'The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me: my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing and one love.'[67] We find the Hegel of the late 1790 s frequently echoing this and similar remarks, most evidently in the 1798 essay *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*. In that essay he wrote:

> The hill and the eye that sees it are object and subject, but between man and God, between spirit and spirit, there is no such cleft of objectivity and subjectivity; one is to the other in that one recognizes the other; both are one.[68]

The sentiment here is unmistakably mystical, and Hegel's account of religious knowledge never lost its Eckhartian gloss. But the significance of his interest in mysticism lies in the fact that he was able to apply this idea of a divine-human unity to the social and political history of religions, something he could not accomplish with competing theological concepts such as the Kantian one. In other words, while he borrowed much of his rhetoric from the central theme of the mystical tradition, his concern always lay not with any private belief or experience but with the practices of human communities. The concept of an elevation or ascension to a *unio mystica* thus acquired a social meaning, and even in the mystical phase of 1798 he began to formulate his mystical theology in social terms: '[God and man] are unified not in a universal, a concept (e.g., as believers), but through life and through love.'[69]

The concept of love is a central theme of *The Spirit of Christianity* and of numerous sketches from the years that follow it, representing as that concept does a kind of union among distinct persons.[70] In these works Hegel took the Johannine expression 'God is love' quite literally to mean that God is a unity among persons in a religious community, and the relevant scriptural passages remained favorites of Hegel's all the way to his last lectures.[71] In the *Spirit* essay love applies to several matters of both ethical and historical concern. In the first place, the concept of love permits him to develop an understanding of virtue that distinguishes him from Aristotle, but more especially from Kant.[72] More important for my concerns is that this mystical, Johannine theology serves as the basis of Hegel's historical analysis. God as love unites persons, not merely here or there, arbitrarily throughout history, but rather in and through a definite sequence of historical events recorded in the Gospels. So Hegel reads the last supper as a 'love-feast,' the meaning of which is that the participants overcome their own particularity by sharing in the meal.[73]

[67] German sermon no. 12; at Religion 1 248 Hegel quotes the passage at greater length than I reproduce here.
[68] Knox 265, Nohl 312.
[69] Ibid.
[70] See especially Knox 247–64 (Nohl 295–312) for a discussion of this, as well as discussions of many passages from John. Both Knox and Nohl include a short fragment on love from just prior to the composition of *Spirit*, though in that text the application of the unity of persons theme does not extend to religion.
[71] 1 John 4; for a later text by Hegel, see Religion 3 201.
[72] Knox 244, Nohl 293.
[73] Knox 248–9, Nohl 297–8.

In the later philosophy of religion, the theme of unity of persons extends beyond Biblical events and into the modern churches. The central concept here is that of the congregation or community (*Gemeinde*). The congregation is not merely a collection of distinct persons who happen to believe some of the same things and partake of the same practices. Rather, the congregation is the spirit in its historical appearance: 'the congregation is . . . the spirit in its existence, God existing as a community.'[74] The importance of this point here is its implication for the religious individual: for Hegel participation in the congregation signifies a transcending of particularity into a community, and a community that is the historical appearance of God. Religiosity is a social matter, and a 'belief in God' independent of participation in a community is not something that the theory can even explain let alone encourage. 'God' is something like the love the members of a specific community have for each other. Religiosity is participation in such a community, and 'Christian' thus refers simultaneously to the symbols used in a particular tradition and to Hegel's overarching narrative of religious participation.

Three points should be taken from this move by way of conclusion: in the first place, at a very early stage in his career Hegel detached the criterion for religious identification from notions of doctrine or belief. Second, he makes this move by appealing to classical theological concepts and elaborating them in terms of a position drawn from Christian scripture. There is no reason to suspect him of intending any radical breaks with the traditions he discusses. The fact that he inspired such breaks among his followers, however, is a different matter. Third, Hegel extends his traditional themes by lending them a specifically social interpretation. If the philosophy of religion was to be the study of the relationship between humans and God, this came to mean the study of religious communities. The impact of this point for the philosophy of religion would be significant. More important to my purposes, however, is its implication for religious identity. Someone qualifies as 'religious' in Hegel's sense solely by means of membership in a particular kind of loving community, and these communities represent the truth of the formerly mysterious ideas such a trinity, incarnation, etc.

Interpretation and Influence

It should come as no surprise that even in the midst of his apologetic throes Hegel faced persistent accusations of unorthodoxy. Just as one always criticizes 'this or that' system of Christianity, one never defends a religion to everyone's liking. The young Hegel was already aware of this problem and so expressed hesitance about offering a confession of faith.[75] When the old Hegel finally did make a sort of public confession, from the philosophical pulpit at the University of Berlin, he exposed himself to the current forms of religious calumny. In Prussia in the 1820 s the relevant affronts included not only 'atheism' but also 'pantheism' and its more specific variant, 'Spinozism.'[76] That Hegel was required to defend himself against such accusations would be of minimal interest were it not also the case that members of his school

[74] Rel 3 254.

[75] See the preface to *Positivity*, Knox 68 (Nohl 153).

[76] Hodgson ('Hegel's Christology: Shifting Nuances in the Berlin Lectures' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53:1 1895, 23–40) and Jaeschke (357–65) discuss these disputes at some length.

disagreed about whether his position could lay claim to the moniker 'Christian.' Even today debates in the interpretation of his philosophy sometimes take the form of disagreements about the authenticity of his Christianity, and the history of labeling him an 'atheist' has continued from his contemporary opponents in the 1820 s down to some of his most recent commentators.[77] The chief difference brought about by the almost two centuries of this discussion is a mere change in tone from condemnatory to laudatory.[78] In this final section I discuss some of the factors that led to this interpretive crisis for Hegel's religious identification and how these problems directed the influence of his philosophy of religion away from apologetic issues. I conclude with a brief discussion of how the socio-historical aspects of Hegel's religious identity qualify disputes over his religiosity.

It is perhaps worth qualifying this discussion with the remark that problems of orthodoxy are endemic to philosophical theology; the oscillations of theological dispute have swung against a wide range of interpretations of religion. It was perhaps observations like this that urged Hegel toward his study of the relationship between history and theology. Even Thomas Aquinas, of whom Hegel was supposed to be the Protestant version, met with some opposition in thirteenth-century Paris.[79] Eckhart, who of any major religious thinker had the strongest influence on Hegel, suffered official condemnation in 1329.[80] Hegel's case, however, differs dramatically from such examples, since neither Aquinas nor Eckhart inspired secular interpretation of their own work.[81] Karl Marx did not arise from the school of early Thomists, and the fact that he does not appear exceptional in the Hegelian school begs for explanation.

A combination of theological, philosophical, and historical factors contributed to the eventual divorce of Hegelian philosophy from Christianity, although many of these confirm as much as disconfirm his definitions of religion and Christianity. In the first place, Hegel's emphasis on the historicity of the divinity seemed to flout the notion of divine transcendence. This was the response of some of his opponents in the early 1820 s; still today the corpse of Hegel meets with this response from philosophical theologians.[82] Such theologically normative objections, however, fail to confront the specifically cultural definition that Hegel gave to religion. More importantly, they do nothing to explain how the complicity with Christianity dissolved even within his own sphere of influence. What requires explanation is how it was possible to be a Hegelian without being a Christian, despite the fact that Hegel had identified his philosophy with Christianity.

The emphasis on an historical God did cause problems within the school, and some disciples likewise objected that the 'God' of speculative philosophy lacked the transcendent quality required by the non-philosophical religious. This problem did not appear among the first generation of Hegelians, who often experienced their

[77] See, for example, William Desmond's *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double* (Ashgate 2003).
[78] There is a long tradition among Hegel scholars of reading him as a subtly disguised atheist. Walter Kaufmann provided the classic example in his *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* (Doubleday 1966), and Robert Solomon has followed this line in *From Hegel to Existentialism* (Oxford 1987).
[79] Andrew Shanks discusses this point in detail in *Hegel's Political Theology* (Cambride 1991, pg. 72 ff).
[80] See Bernard McGinn, 'Evil-Sounding, Rash, and Suspect of Heresy': Tensions between Mysticism and Magisterium in the History of the Church,' *Catholic Historical Review*, 20 (2004), 193–212.
[81] Shanks (72 ff.) discusses this same problem, but attributes to Hegel a 'reformist' attitude.
[82] This is the line Desmond pursues.

adoption of his philosophy as a religious conversion and accordingly assimilated religion to philosophy.[83] The second generation of followers, however, tended to discover a discontinuity between the speculative/historical concept of God and their religious traditions. The complaint is made most humorously by the poet Heinrich Heine, who attended the Berlin lectures of 1827: '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.'[84] D.F. Strauss, who studied with Hegel only in the last months of the latter's life, likewise had difficulties negotiating between his teacher's almost pantheistic abstraction and the Christian message that his congregation could swallow.[85]

Although Hegel's philosophy predicts and absorbs problems of this sort, they also reveal a limit to his position. Defenders of Hegel will be quick to remind that philosophical speculation always leaves room for unphilosophical representations, and that philosophy remains undisturbed by apparent inconsistencies with common concepts. But there is a deeper issue here in regard to the acceptance of Hegel's religious position. If Hegel offered a social criterion of religious identification, he also formulated this in terms of a tradition (mystical, Johannine, and idealist) that was fairly specific to him. Heine's Jewish grandmother, and to a much lesser degree Strauss's congregates, belonged to at least slightly different traditions, and so Hegel's exact position should not have satisfied them.[86] In this sense his criterion in part explains why not everyone could adopt his version of that criterion. The question of the relationship between Hegel and his unorthodox disciples begs here for an explanation of how specific religious identity is, and this is something to which Hegel perhaps did not supply us with an answer.

Another threat to the religious identification of his followers lay in the peculiar relationship that Hegel established between theology and history. The symbolic interpretation of religious history left unresolved questions about the factual nature of certain significant events, and many were unwilling to detach the term 'Christianity' from a more literal interpretation of revealed history. Christ was indeed a central symbolic figure in the philosophy of religion, but the importance of the historical Jesus lay merely in his having communicated to his followers the idea that humanity is divine.[87] The school lacked any definitive statements from the master on such questions as whether Jesus in fact resurrected, whether he was uniquely divine, etc.[88] What they could explicitly appeal to were vagaries like the following:

[83] John Edward Toews' outstanding intellectual history of the Hegelian school (*Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–41*) recounts these episodes. See especially pp. 71–140.

[84] *The Life, Work, and Opinions of Heinrich Heine*, ed. William Stigand, (London, 1875) p. 85.

[85] Toews 268.

[86] This is surely true of the former, as Heine's grandparents were Jewish. Strauss preached in Wurttemberg in the 1830 s, so his congregation was in fact of a similar tradition to Hegel.

[87] William Shepherd ('Hegel as a Theologian' in *Harvard Theological Review* 61:4 pg. 595) writes that for Hegel Christ 'furnishes man with the information that [the] reconciliation occurs in the being of every individual.'

[88] Jaeschke and Hodgson have been fond of attributing all disagreements in Hegel interpretation to the lack of a reliable edition of the Berlin lectures. Although these two scholars provided the first reliable edition only in the 1980s, this fact does not explain all disagreements about the rectitude of Hegel's alleged Christianity. These disagreements began with students who knew Hegel, conversed with him, and attended his lectures. Such deeply rooted ambiguities must lie in the nature of Hegel's philosophical position and cannot be attributed to the merits or demerits of a particular edition of his lectures.

> What concerns the other confirmation, namely that to these people at this time and place [God] appeared, that is only to be known from the perspective of world history. It was said that 'when the time came, God sent his only son,' and whether the time indeed came is an historical question.[89]

In the face of this the disciples imputed on their teacher the diverse views on these issues that they developed independently in the 1830 s. In his monumental *Life of Jesus* (1835), to give the most prominent example, Strauss attempted to vindicate Hegel by demonstrating the insufficiency of biblical accounts.[90] The falsity of historical claims, he reasoned, supported Hegel's mythical interpretation.[91] Bruno Bauer responded, also on the alleged behalf of Hegel, that the truth of biblical history was rather demonstrated philosophically.[92] Whereas Strauss argued that the falsity of the facts proved the theory, Bauer argued that the theory proved the facts. This very convoluted debate indicates an important fact about the influence of Hegel's philosophy of religion. Neither Strauss nor Bauer successfully resolved the conceptual relationship between theology and history, and the specifics of their musings on this topic belong to an obscure episode in the history of ideas.[93] Nonetheless, it is significant that the legacy of this period (1831–9) does not fall within the received history of philosophy and that the major players instead had their influence on the sciences of biblical exegesis and historical criticism.[94] After a decade of intense debate on the legitimacy of biblical sources, it was the specifically theological aspects of Hegel's philosophy that his students began to discard. Bauer, for instance, surrendered his repeated attempts at modifying his teacher's philosophy to the historical evidence. His eventual move would be to assume the identity of 'atheist,' in one case insincerely imputing this title on Hegel as well.[95]

A similar problem arose in the social criticism of religion, the details of which have passed through the Marxist tradition. Philosophers in that tradition, most notably Lukacs, have argued that Hegel's theology was limited by his idealist methodology of history. His followers could abandon the theological framework, then, if only they

[89] This is a bit of a free translation of a passage from 1842 (Religion 3 147). Compare Hodgson's rendering, which is perhaps even freer: 'As for the other mode of verification, namely, that God appeared in this human being, at this time and in this place – this is quite a different matter, and can be recognized only from the point of view of world history. It is written: 'When the time had come, God sent forth his son' [Gal. 4:4]; and that the time had come can only be discerned from history.'

[90] See especially the 'Concluding Dissertation,' pp. 757–81 of Eliot's translation (New York 1860) and Toews, 265–71.

[91] Toews 265–71.

[92] Bauer responded in his journal *Jahrbucher fur wissentschaftliche Kritik* (1836:1 704). Discussion of this can be found in Toews (303), Jaeschke (373–80), and in part II of Lothar Koch's *Humanistischer Atheismus und gesellschaftliches Engagement* (Kohlhammer 1971).

[93] This is an episode that has not been appreciated by historians of philosophy. Toews provides a helpful outline within the limits of his study. Marilyn Chapin Massey writes a brief historical defense of Strauss in David Freidrich Strauss and His Hegelian Critics' in the *Journal of Religion* 57(4) 341–62.

[94] Strauss and Bauer, for instance, receive mention by scholars treating the history of biblical interpretations, but rarely by historians of philosophy. For a recent discussion of their importance for biblical criticism, see Bo Reicke's 'From Strauss to Holzmann and Meijboom: Synoptic Theories Advanced During the Consolidation of Germany, 1830-70' in Novum Testamentum 29(1) 1977, 1–21.

[95] Such is the argument of the notorious *The Trumpet of the Last Judgment against Hegel the Atheist*, in which Bauer amusingly portrays Hegel as an atheist. Part of this text is available in Lawrence Stepelevich's *The Young Hegelians* (Prometheus, 1997, 177–87).

could develop another historical method.[96] Hegel's philosophy provided at least some of the resources for the method they developed. The master's shortcoming was that he could see only two kinds of answer to questions of the type 'why did those people have such beliefs and practices?' Either the strange beliefs are attributable to incivility, stupidity, and superstition (the Enlightenment answer) or they contained a degree of truth (Hegel's answer). It was inconceivable to him that people had formed their beliefs reasonably unless those beliefs were identical to, even if dialectically identical and so *aufgehoben* in, his own. As a result he needed his historical and inclusive interpretation of the Christian narrative in order to make any sense of the religions of other times and places. His own historical and social analyses, however, gave birth to a third possible position on religious history: one could treat social and economic principles alone as the unifying principle of an historical narrative.

Such points explain some of the differences between Hegel and his followers, and they suggest that the likes of Feuerbach or Marx did not so much abandon Hegelian philosophy of religion as they recognized and acknowledged its own historical specificity. Matters stand somewhat differently with contemporary Hegel scholarship, since the burden in this case is sometimes to explain in a different language the extent to which Hegel's philosophy is or is not Christian. Here Hegel's social and historical criterion of religious identity provides a complication: in Hegel's terms it would be illegitimate to introduce a divergent definition of what is religious, or what counts as 'Christian,' and then to assess whether or not his philosophy meets the criterion. Arguments concerning whether Hegel's philosophy is religious can begin only by selecting a normative criterion of religion from the very start, which is the move Hegel criticized most heavily from his earliest writings on the topic. Of course, a commentator need not abide by Hegel's historical definitions of religion, but the fact that Hegel has such a definition nonetheless complicates the issue.

As a matter of fact, many prominent interpretations of Hegel's philosophy underplay his religiosity, whereas some readings that emphasize his philosophy of religion have undertaken an apologetic tone.[97] My conclusions here hopefully help to bridge this rather silent divide. There is unfortunately little dialogue between the religious readings of Hegel by, for instance, Rocker or Lauer, and the more mainstream scholarship that neglects the fact altogether that Hegel himself interpreted even his logic as a theology. My thesis that Hegel's philosophy of religion concerned his own historical identity should provide some perspective on this difference. If his identification as a Christian, and the related claim that his philosophy was Christianity, signified only his recognition of his place in history, then there is nothing in this with which subsequent readers can exactly identify themselves. The truth of Christianity for Hegel would be largely a truth about Hegel, one that is not relevant to a contemporary reader's willingness or not to identify also as a Christian. Just the same, we should understand revisionary appropriations of Hegel's philosophy as having a significant shortcoming. These overlook the socio-historical aspects of his philosophy, viz., that his philosophy (and with it his identity as Christian apologist)

[96] Lukacs 233.

[97] For a classic attempt to understate Hegel's philosophy of religion within the non-metaphysical tradition of interpretation, see Terry Pinkard's 'The successor to metaphysics: absolute idea and absolute spirit' in *Monis*t 74(3), 295–328. For an apologetic reading see, for instance, Rocker.

are specific to his time and place. We can appreciate the significance of Hegel's philosophy without attempting to detach it from its setting and relate it too directly to our own concerns. An approach that involves strongly identifying with a philosopher perhaps works in the case of some historical figures, but it is at the very least rather awkward in the case of Hegel. We might say, in respect of Hegel's early acknowledgement of the tension between philosophy and history, that it is illegitimate either to identify with Hegel's own understanding of religion or to introduce a different sense of 'religious' and say whether we can identify Hegel with our criterion.