HEGEL'S APPROACH TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN THE *LECTURES ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION*

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Resumen: Con las *Lecciones sobre la filosofía de la religión* Hegel muy probablemente se convierte no sólo en un predecesor, sino en el fundador de la filosofía de la religión contemporánea. Esto es así porque en esta obra esboza un acercamiento original al conocimiento de Dios. Cuando Hegel dilucida el concepto de religión como la "consciencia" (*Bewusstsein*), y en especial la "ocupación" (*Beschäftigung*) del ser humano con Dios, diferencia la perspectiva objetiva de la teología natural del punto de vista doblemente subjetivo de la filosofía de la religión. Mientras que en la primera disciplina Dios es aprehendido como un objeto "abstracto" del pensamiento —Dios como meramente es *en sí mismo*—, en la segunda conocer a Dios es primariamente percatarse de él como un sujeto "concreto" que aparece a los sujetos que nosotros somos, ya que "El Espíritu de Dios *es* esencialmente en su comunidad". El énfasis de Hegel en "esta esfera íntima" (*dies Innerste*) ejemplariza un enfoque análogo al de pensadores medulares del siglo veinte quienes, a partir de tradiciones filosóficas diferentes, aseveran que el conocimiento de Dios hay que sacarlo de adentro.

Palabras clave: Hegel, filosofía de la religión, Dios, religión, Espíritu, *Innerste*, Unamuno

Abstract: With the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* Hegel arguably becomes not just a forerunner, but the founder of contemporary philosophy of religion. This is because in this work he delineates an original approach to the knowledge of God. When Hegel explicates the concept of religion as the "consciousness" (*Bewusstsein*) of, and especially the "occupation"

(*Beschäftigung*) of humankind with God, he differentiates the objective view of natural theology from the doubly subjective standpoint of philosophy of religion. Whereas in the former discipline God is apprehended as an "abstract" object of thought—God as he merely is *in* himself—, in the latter to know God is primarily to be aware of him as a "concrete" subject that appears to the subjects that we are, for "God's Spirit *is* essentially in his community." Hegel's emphasis on "this intimate sphere" (*dies Innerste*) instantiates an outlook analogous to that of key twentieth-century thinkers who, from different philosophical traditions, assert that knowledge of God must be gathered from within.

Keywords: Hegel, philosophy of religion, God, religion, Spirit, *Innerste*, Unamuno

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To Eliseo Cruz Vergara, with admiration and gratitude

There is no need to endorse the entire metaphysical system of G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), the apex of nineteenth-century German Idealism, to rightly assert that he was the thinker who expressed in the clearest manner—even better than philosophers[1] who immediately preceded him and that also reflected on religion as such—how the outlook on religion instantiated by these modern reflections agrees with, and differs from the traditional philosophical treatment of religious issues. In what follows I will argue that this is so because his *Lectures on the Philosophy of religion* represent a synthesis of the old and the new philosophy of religion that encompasses an original approach to the knowledge of God. In this sense one could say

[1] I am thinking especially of works whose titles somehow suggested that they would deal with religion as a whole, such as David Hume's *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), Immanuel Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Discourses on Religion* (1799).

that even if Hegel had not been the first thinker to stamp the title "philosophy of religion" on a strictly philosophical work, he is arguably the founder of this contemporary discipline.

In Volume 1 of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*,[2] Hegel asserts, on the one hand, that philosophy of religion is different from other branches of philosophy, such as natural theology that investigates the reasonableness of basic beliefs which have their seat in religious life—in this instance, the peculiar nature and existence of a divine Being. Yet on the other hand he also claims that this discipline is identical to natural theology for they have the same object of primary speculative interest that for him is God himself, and that is also the object of primary veneration in religion. It is noteworthy that by the very manner in which Hegel begins his inquiry of religion he seems to underscore this identity: "The object of these lectures is the philosophy of religion, which in general has the same purpose as the earlier type of metaphysical science, which was called *theologia naturalis*. This term included everything that could be known of God by reason alone" (*LPR* 1 Introduction 1821, E 83, G 3-4, S 3).

[2] Hegel did not publish a book that would have been a definitive and systematic version of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* which he read in 1821, 1824, 1827, and the year of his death, 1831. References to volume 1 of Hegel's *Lectures* (abbreviated as *LPR* 1) are to these editions, abbreviated as follows: E: Lectures *on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 1. *Introduction and the Concept of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, translated by R. F. Brown, Peter C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart with the assistance of J. P. Fitzer and H. S. Harris (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984); G: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion,* Teil 1, *Einleitung über die Philosophie der Religion - Der Begriff der Religion*, neu herg. von Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993); S: *Lecciones sobre la filosofía de la religión*, Vol. 1. *Introducción y Concepto de la Religión*, edición y traducción de Ricardo Ferrara (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1984). Hereafter references to this work are cited in the text between parenthesis in the following order: *Lectures* Vol. 1 (LPR 1), part of the work (Introduction or Concept of Religion), year in which the lectures series was read (1821, 1824, 1827, or 1831), page number in the English translation (E 3), German original (G 3-4) and Spanish translation (F 3); for instance, (*LPR* 1 Introduction 1821, E 83, G 3-4, S 3) refers to the Introduction of Vol. 1 of the *Lectures* given in 1821, page 83 of the English translation, pages 3-4 of the German original, and page 3 of the Spanish translation.

But then, what makes philosophy of religion different from rational or natural theology? In the Introduction to the *Lectures* read in 1824 Hegel succinctly and unequivocally formulates this radical difference: namely, whereas natural theology assumes an exclusively objective perspective, investigating everything that can rationally be said to be produced by means of God, his philosophy of religion has an outlook on God which is doubly subjective.[3] This is the case, firstly, because philosophy of religion studies God not only insofar as he is the absolute substance—as the only being which in strict sense is by itself, or is self-sufficient—, but likewise inasmuch as he is a subject—as a being which is for itself, or is self-aware—; and secondly, because it elucidates what God is not only as an object—what he is in himself—, but also determines what God is for the subjects that we are, and in this sense it investigates how God is present in his community, that is to say, how he appears to the faithful or worshippers. In all the *Lectures* series for which we have either Hegel's own manuscript (1821) or transcripts produced by his disciples (1824, 1827) that are essentially complete, the Introduction appears without substantive modifications, expressing in terms of incomparable poetic beauty what religion has been, and always is for the heart of its devotees, no matter where and when it may have emerged, and over and above the multiple doctrines, ceremonies, social forms and innumerable conventional circumstances that may have accompanied its historical emergence. Hegel simply characterizes this essence not merely as the consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) of, but the concern or "occupation" (*Beschäftigung*) of humankind with God.

In this sense, philosophy of religion is not identical with, and contains something more than mere natural theology. While the latter examines God only as he is in himself, the former includes also religion itself, which is God as he enters into a relation with the human spirit—in other words, God as he exists for human beings as an object of feeling, faith, veneration, and

[3] The term 'subjective' is not employed here to refer to something that is represented in the subject, but which might not be in reality. By this word what is emphasized is precisely the opposite: it primarily refers to a being that is encountered by the subject, and which is substantively real as an actually existent subject.

supreme aspiration. The passage from the 1824 Introduction is the one that most vibrantly enunciates the universal concept of religion that this "new" discipline has to elucidate by a full development of the logical articulations implicit in it within an investigation that exceeds the limits of natural theology:

> Occupation with this object is fulfilling and satisfying by itself, and desires nothing else but this. Hence it is the absolutely free occupation, the absolutely free consciousness. This occupation is the consciousness of absolute truth; as a mode of sensibility it is the absolute enjoyment we call blessedness, while as activity it does nothing but manifest the glory of God and reveal the divine majesty. For the peoples have generally regarded this their religious consciousness, as their true merit, as the sabbath of life in which finite aims, limited interests, toil, sorrow, unpleasantness, earthly and finite cares— in which all the unpleasantness and misery of the everyday world—waft away in devotion's present feeling or in devotion's hope. All of it wafts away into a kind of past. Psyche drinks from this river of forgetfulness, and in its doing so earthly cares and worries waft away, and the whole realm of temporality passes away into eternal harmony (*LPR* 1 Introduction 1824, E 114, G 32, S 30).

Now then, what is God precisely so that it may be possible for such a being to become the object of supreme adoration, explicit or implicit, in religion in general and not only in monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? In order to give a thoroughly adequate answer to this question, one would have to enter into the whole and details of the metaphysical system of Hegel, which is an enterprise that exceeds the thematic boundaries of this paper and the competence of its author as well. So, without losing sight of this metaphysical scheme, I will give only some brief indications about the salient notes of the Hegelian concept of God that would show how it may become the key element of a universal definition of religion and at the same time be able to include what for Hegel is the truth that the Christian religion proclaims.

In the Introduction to his manuscript of 1821 Hegel points out that a speculative philosophy that attempted to rationally explain reality in its wholeness, would certainly have to treat

God as "the Absolute," as immanent principle and end of all things, so that everything comes to be and ceases to be because of him and in him: "God is the beginning of all things and the end of all things; [everything] starts from God and returns to God ... is sustained through its relationship with him, lives by his | radiance and [there] has its soul [*von seinem Strahl lebt und seine Seele hat*][4] (*LPR* 1 Introduction 1821, E 84, G 3-4, S 4). That is why Hegel would have approved the assertion the apostle Paul directed to the philosophers on the Areopagus: that God "is actually not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'" (ESV Acts 17: 27-28). In addition, that universal speculation would have also to examine religion in order to arrive at an adequate and complete comprehension of the essence of God himself. Why? That is because "the concept of God is God's idea, [namely,] to become and make himself objective to himself" (*LPR* 1 Concept of Religion 1821, E 186, G 96, S 90).

But then again, what is God so that in his own universal essence or idea, it is implicit that in order to be God in concrete he has to enter in a relationship with himself by becoming an object for himself? In order to clarify this Hegelian conception, it may perhaps be useful to say first what God *is not* for Hegel. Divinity is not an artisan or cosmic demiurge who may have formed the visible world out of a prime matter, be it created by him or preexistent. Nor is he a primordial corporeal and alive matrix, be it continuous or divisible, whose imperishable movement would generate all the multiplicity of finite beings. And finally, he is not, like the God of Spinoza, the infinite and eternal substance in virtue of which all perceivable beings would be but finite and transitory modifications of two of its eternal attributes—thought and extension.

Hegel, however, partially coincides with Spinoza in asserting that God is substance and subscribing to his maxim that "whatsoever is, is in God, and without God nothing can be, or be conceived."[5] That is why Hegel had to confront the

[4] Hodgson *et al* translate "*von seinem Strahl lebt und seine Seele hat*" as follows: "lives by his | radiance and has [within itself] the mind of God."

[5] Benedict [Baruch] de Spinoza, *The Ethics* [*Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*], trans. and intro. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover Books, 1955), Part I, Concerning God, Proposition XV, p. 55.

objection that his position was pantheistic. He distanced himself from pantheism by emphasizing that finite things in this world have real existence, are truly actual since that they are not mere accidents, but effects of God.[6] At the same time he concedes that they do not exist as distinct and separate entities from the divine Being; that is to say, all finite things, such as human beings, are not only because of God for he is the "absolute cause" that maintains them in existence, but also because they receive from him that which makes them what they really are—"their truth"; in short, that God is "the absolute substance, as the truth of everything and so also of themselves, of everything that they are and do" (*LPR* 1 Introduction 1821, E 85, G 4, S 4). Independently whether this position avoids pantheism or not, Hegel modifies the metaphysical view of Spinoza in a fundamental aspect: God is not only substance, the only self-sufficient and free substance, as Spinoza asserts, but also and primordially subject, or "self-knowing substance" (*sich wissende Substanz*); that is, God is a self-conscious subject, a being that is aware of itself, or as the Gospel of John simply says: "God is Spirit."[7] In order that God may be a "concrete" subject that is conscious of his own identity, he has to put or "posit" himself as another, to become other to himself as an object of thought. In other words, in his "Idea" or "philosophical concept" it is implicit that God has to make himself an object for himself, and this is something that only thought can do. For that reason Hegel will say that "thinking" or "thought" is the "locus," (*der Ort*) or "soil" [*der Boden*] of religion (LPR 1, Excerpts Lectures 1831, E 465, G 354, S 334).[8] The one that comes to learn that the subject that

[6] See *LPR* 1 Concept of Religion 1827, E 432, G 322, S 304-305. Here is where Hegel more accurately clears up his disagreement with Spinoza, whose position, instead of pantheism, he thinks it should be denominated "acosmism," for in Spinoza's system "So strictly is there only God, that there is no world at all," and so "the finite has no genuine actuality (*wahrhafte Wirklichkeit*, i.e. true reality)."

[7] "God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (ESV John 4:24-25).

[8] This quote is from an appendix with *Extracts from a Transcript of the Lectures of 1831*, which was prepared by David Friedrich Strauss, the famous author of *Life of Jesus*. It is akin to the following passage from the 1824 *Lectures*: "For *thinking* is the source (*die Quelle*), the very ground (*der Boden*) upon which God, or the universal in general, *is*: the universal is in

thinks is the same as the object that is thought, is no other than spirit as it "self-manifests," "self-reveals" —that is, as insofar as it executes its fundamental act, which is to be "a being for spirit" and in virtue of which God exists as self-conscious Spirit. This in turn implies that the divine Spirit, the "*Absolute* self-consciousness is found only (*ist nur*, that is "is only") to the extent that it is also [finite] consciousness" (*LPR* 1, Excerpts Lectures 1831, E 465, G 354, S 334).

The preceding declaration signifies for Hegel that God is real or exists concretely only inasmuch as he is in an "inseparable" relationship (*untrennbare Beziehung*), indeed an indissoluble unity (*unzertrennliche Einheit*) with human consciousness, so that the explanation of this "basic concept of spirit" will constitute "the development of the entire doctrine of religion" (*LPR* 1 Introduction 1827, E 164, G 73, S 68). This unbreakable bond entails the need to comprehend within a process, both complex and diversified in multiple phases, how does it come about that God "is for spirit": i.e. how in the historical development of humankind the Absolute Spirit that God is becomes manifest for itself when it reveals itself to the finite spirit of humans, and reciprocally how our finite spirit knows itself in what it truly is when it becomes conscious of God. "Thus God knows himself in humanity, and human beings, to the extent that they know themselves as spirit and in their truth, know themselves in God" (*LPR* 1 Excerpts Lectures 1831, E 465, G 354, S 334). In order to characterize in a more concrete and poetically effective manner this indissoluble union and reciprocity of divine and human consciousness in the *intimate* knowledge of God that religion provides, Hegel paraphrases a few notable passages from the fourteenth-century mystic and Dominican friar, Meister Eckhart, who when examining the intimate dimension of our being where we encounter God, "this inner life" (*dies Innerste*), says: "The eye with which God sees me is the eye with which I see him; my eye and his eye are one and the same ... If God did not exist nor would I; if I did not exist

thought, only in thought, and for thought (*LPR* 1 Concept of Religion 1824, E 312, G 216, S 204).

nor would he"[9] (*LPR* 1 Concept of Religion 1824, E 347-348, G 248, S 233).

Even though its point of departure is the finite spirit of human beings to the extent that they enter into a relationship with God, philosophy of religion has as fundamental presupposition God himself, but insofar as he is the "result"[10] of all the previous philosophy, that is of the metaphysical system elaborated by Hegel, about which I can only make a few brief and somewhat superficial remarks. According to this scheme, all finite things, which are continuously becoming and perishing, are the outcome of the self-manifestation of an infinite Reason, an Absolute Subject—the logical or philosophical Idea of God—that self-reflects in them by sustaining their being as objects of his thinking. Finite things are the innumerable forms in which God self-reveals in the world and human history, and at the same

[9] These fragments cited by Hegel come from sermons of Eckhart which, according to the note provided by Hodgson, are published in Meister Eckhart, *Die deutschen Werke* (DW), ed. J. Quint (Stuttgart, 1958 ff.), 1:201, 478 (Sermon **12**); 2:252, 684, 503–504, 730 (Sermons 39, **52**). The sermons from which these two passages are extracted have been translated into English by Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), "Selected German Sermons," Sermon 16 (DW 12), p. 237, and Sermon 22 (DW 52), p. 272. Hegel seems to have offered not a direct quotation, but rather a paraphrase of the second passage.

[10] "But [pure] philosophy in its customary divisions [first] considers the logical idea, the idea as it [is] in thought, not just for our thoughts, but in the way the contents is thought itself or the categories of thought themselves. Beyond that, philosophy points to the absolute in its process of production, in its activity—and this activity is the absolute's path in coming to be for itself, in becoming spirit. God is thus the result of philosophy, a result that is recognized not merely to be the result but to be eternally producing itself, the act of production and equally the beginning of the first [step]. ... In the philosophy of religion we consider the idea not merely in the way it is determined as idea of pure thought, nor yet in its finite modes of appearance, but as the absolute, or as the logical idea—except that at the same time we also consider it in the way this idea appears and manifests itself, though in its *infinite appearance* as spirit. Spirit is what manifests itself, what appears but is infinite in its appearance; spirit that does not appear is *not*; it reflects itself back within itself. This then, in general, is the position of the philosophy of religion vis-à-vis the other branches of philosophy. God is the result of the other branches: in the philosophy of religion this end is made the beginning." (*LPR* 1 Introduction 1824, E 119-120, G 36-37, S 34-35).

time the objective conditions for God to become conscious of himself, of his own thinking activity.

In terms of the well-known Hegelian triadic scheme (Idea–Nature–Spirit), we could say that the philosophical Idea—God in himself—becomes another by stepping out of itself, externalizing itself, and appearing or embodying itself[11] as the opposite of the Idea, that is, as Nature, or the totality of finite things. God, however, is present in them as "the absolute vitality" of mundane beings, a vitality that becomes manifested or revealed as what it really is, i.e. as Spirit,[12] when it enters into a relationship with human consciousness. All of the diverse configurations of Nature are defined as externality or finitude against the interiority or infinitude that characterizes spirituality.[13] An exterior being is such that it has no center, which is dispersed in the sense that it relates with another being and does not know itself. By contrast, what is spiritual has a center from which it confronts what is other and different, and knows itself. This "complete externality" or "otherness" is characteristic even of things that owe their being to the activity of the human spirit, or self-conscious thought, such as a work of art to the extent that it is only a mere object of sense intuition.

> Thus the work of art is, so far as intuition is concerned, initially an external object of a quite ordinary sort, which has no sense of self and does not know itself. The form, the subjectivity, which the artist has given his work, is only

[11] "These determinate configurations of the idea or of the absolute—nature | finite spirit, the world of consciousness—are embodiments of the idea; but they are determinate configurations or particular modes of appearance of the idea. They are configurations in which the idea has not yet penetrated to itself in order to be as absolute spirit" (LPR 1 Introduction 1824, E 119-120, G 37, S 35).

[12] In *LPR* 1 Concept of Religion 1827, E 432, G 323, S 305, Hegel curtly asserts that the absolute vitality is no other than Spirit: "*die absolute Lebendigkeit, der Geist ist*".

[13] "Nature is the idea implicitly and *only* implicitly, and the mode of its existence is *to be outside itself* in complete externality" (LPR 1 Concept of Religion 1821, E 227 note 115 W_2, G 135 note 886-871 W_2, S 127 note 39-44 W^2). "God creates the world out of nothing; i.e., outside the world there is nothing sensible, nothing external, for the world is externality itself" (LPR 1 Concept of Religion 1824, E 308 note 95 *Ho*, G 212 note 392-406, S 200 note 570-586). The external [thing] is not just external to me, but to itself; it is the finite" (LPR 1 Concept of Religion 1824, E 313, G 217, S 204).

> external, not the absolute form of self-knowing, of self-consciousness (LPR 1 Concept of Religion 1821, E 236 note 137 W_2, G 145 note 46-61 W_2, S 136 note 247-264 W^2).

When consciousness arises, i.e. thought, we enter into the realm of Spirit, which has as its supreme end the knowledge of itself as infinite. Consciousness is but the vehicle for achieving this goal, for "one knows of God only in connection with consciousness" (LPR 1 Introduction 1827, E 164, G 74, S 69). When after a long process consciousness may come to know itself in its truth, then it will apprehend itself as the infinite. But beforehand consciousness apprehends God as the infinite itself.[14]

It is thus with the dawn of consciousness that the "transition" from Nature to Spirit occurs. After a number of stages in the development of the human spirit that I cannot examine here, this finite spirit, when it denies the "finite vitality" or "reality" of mundane beings and so of its own being, comes to be conscious of its "truth": of God as the Infinite or Absolute Spirit that dwells in us and in everything else, bestowing life to all things and living in them all.[15] Hence God is no longer a mere idea of pure thought (*des reinen Gedankens*), or "abstract" universal, but comes to be "concrete," in himself and for himself. It is then that God self-manifests in his "infinite appearance" as Spirit, or as Hegel points out, that "spirit is *for* spirit":

> If we ask | our consciousness for a provisional account of what spirit is, the answer is that spirit is a self-manifesting, a being for spirit. *Spirit is for spirit* and of course not merely in an external, contingent manner. Instead it *is*

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[14] I have to acknowledge my great debt with Professor Eliseo Cruz Vergara, one of the most notable Hegel scholars in Latin America, in particular for his observations on the connection between religious knowledge of God and Hegel's metaphysical system, a few of which has been incorporated in writing this paragraph. Within this system, the philosophy of religion is followed by the philosophical history of philosophy. In the latter, the process of the self-knowledge of consciousness as Absolute Spirit culminates, although now in a conceptual form which is strictly universal. It is little that I can say here about this philosophical comprehension of Spirit.

[15] "We have the finite as our starting point; and it turns out to be something negative, the truth of which is the infinite, | i.e., absolute necessity or, by a more profound definition, absolute vitality, or spirit" (*LPR* 1 Concept of Religion 1827, E 432, G 322-323, S 305).

> spirit only insofar as it is *for* spirit. This is what constitutes the concept of spirit itself. Or, to put the point more theologically, God's spirit is [present] essentially in his community; God *is* spirit only insofar as God is in his *community* (LPR 1 Introduction 1827, E 164, G 73-74, S 68).

The preceding passage outlines the exemplary manner in which, on the basis of an metaphysical vision of breathtaking encompassing scope, Hegel brings together the old ambition of natural theology to frame a rational solution to millenary questions such as "What is God?", "Does something like God exist?", with the new task of the discipline that Hegel denominates philosophy of religion: the search for a unitary concept that may allow us to cogently apprehend the unity within the innumerable and diverse configurations that the religious life of the human spirit displays in its historical career. In systematically tackling such a task Hegel also anticipates the future because this conceptual inquiry will turn out to be a sort of capital "occupation" for twentieth-century philosophical thought concerning religion.[16] All in all, the best way to express this Hegelian synthesis of the old and the new philosophizing is the following: "This is the concept of religion, that God knows himself in spirit and spirit knows itself in God" (*LPR* 1 Excerpts Lectures 1831, E 465, G 354, S 334).

There is a lot that has been left out of this general and schematic survey of Hegel's philosophy of religion, in particular the way in which he examines the historical appearance and

[16] C. J. Ducasse and William P. Alston represent contrasting views about the possibility of formulating this sort of Hegelian, all-inclusive concept of religion. Ducasse, influenced by the pragmatism of William James, provides us with a functionalistic definition of religion in *A Philosophical Scrutiny of Religion* (New York: The Ronald Press, 1953), particularly in chapter 8, "What religion is," pp. 130-147. For his part, Alston, following the doctrine of "family resemblances," which Ludwig Wittgenstein expounded in his *Philosophical Investigations*, suggests that it is not logically viable to frame a universal definition of religion. Alston expounded this theory in *Religious Belief and Philosophical Thought* (New York/Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963), "Introduction: Religion and the Philosophy of Religion", pp. 1-15; and also in the article "Religion," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York/London: The Macmillan Co., 1967), vol. 7, pp. 140-145.

development of an immense variety of religious forms that go back to the prehistory of humankind, ancient religious traditions, such as the Egyptian, Babylonian, Hebrew, Hellenic and Roman among others, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. Within the confines of his own philosophy of history, Hegel contemplates this extraordinary and complex multitude of diverse deeds of devotion, faith communities and doctrines, in order to frame a speculative explanation, i.e. rational and all-encompassing, about what these religious forms contribute to, and how they are coordinated as distinct and necessary phases in the process of the self-acknowledgment of God within the human spirit, and reciprocally of the human spirit in God. In volume 2 of the *Lectures*, *The Determinate* (bestimmte) *Religion*, he analyses the varieties of religious life in which God reveals himself with a determinate and still finite character to the extent that the divine subject is opposed to the finite subject or particular self of human beings. And in volume 3, *The Consummate* (vollendete) *Religion*, Hegel examines Christianity, which he conceives as the culmination of the process in which God reveals himself as Spirit, so that the "indissoluble unity" of the divine Spirit and human spirit is achieved.

In view of contemporary knowledge provided by innumerable historical and comparative studies of religions, many of Hegel's assertions in those two volumes, either have been rejected, or have become very difficult to maintain, even though there is no doubt that he absorbed most of the studies about these subjects published and at his disposal in his epoch. More difficult to accept particularly to many persons who view historical religions with philosophical spectacles, is the progressive-hierarchical ordering that enthrones Christianity as the consummation of the human consciousness of the divine Being. Finally, nowadays there are progressively less philosophers of religion who may dare to take the idea of the divine—theism—as a leading thread for the formulation of an unequivocal and comprehensive concept of religion as such.

In favor of Hegel one may point, however, that his conception of the divine does not coincide with traditional Judeo-Christian-Islamic monotheism. We have instead a universal concept (*Begriff*) that according to him contains in

itself the truth that historical religions proclaim, either in an expressly or tacit manner, either clearly or confusedly—that God is Spirit—, and not only Christianity. As the essence of infinite Spirit is to self-manifest, to develop itself in successive stages, then God is not what occurs at the end of that process, but what takes place in the totality of the phases of that self-unfolding; for God "is a result that is recognized not merely to be the result but to be eternally producing itself, the act of production and equally the beginning of the first [step]" (*LPR* 1 Introduction 1824, E 120, G 36, S 34). In other words, the historical is a constitutive feature of God's essence,[17] and this imposes on anyone that wishes to know what God is, the need to consider the history of religions not in the fashion of an ordinary historian that records and causally orders events and doctrines, but as a philosopher that attempts to grasp in such an apparently contingent becoming its "superior necessity" —its significance for the development of the human spirit and the self-development of Absolute Spirit. Then again, religions do not proclaim their truth as rationally adequate descriptions that are formulated in universal concepts (*Begriffe*), but in the form of representations (*Vorstellungen*), i.e. singular poetic images commonly associated with material things. Hence, these representative images cannot be taken in a literal sense; they are rather symbols or metaphors of the spiritual reality to which they point at.[18] The figurative-

[17] I must thank Professor Cruz Vergara for helping me to see in a clearer manner this inseparable connection of the historicity of God's being with the religious knowledge of God. For a profound contribution to a thorough understanding of Hegel´s theory of historical knowledge, its influence and contemporary relevance, see Eliseo Cruz Vergara, *La concepción del conocimiento histórico en Hegel: Ensayo sobre su influencia y actualidad* (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1997).

[18] The following passages clarify the symbolical character of the truth that Hegel attributes to traditional religious doctrines, and in this fashion he seems to prefigure the German philosopher and theologian Paul Tillich, who in mid-twentieth century—especially in *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 1957)—emphasized this aspect in order to distinguish religious truth from that of science and philosophy: "It must be borne in mind that representation has a more or less external, sentient mode of configuration or form of externality. Representation stands between an immediately sentient sensibility and thought properly speaking. Representation has already brought the sensible into the inner dimension; the content is of a sensible kind, but thought has already ventured into it, although it has not yet fully

representative form with which the truth of historical religions is clad covers its rational contents; yet it also announces it, although in a fashion which is inadequate to its contents:

> No matter how much this history is compiled and elaborated, it mainly lets just the external and apparent side be seen. The higher need is to apprehend what it *means,* its positive and true [significance], its connection with what is true—in short, its *rationality.* After all, it is *human beings* who have lighted upon such religions, so there must be *reason* in them (*LPR* 1 Concept of Religion 1821, E 198, G 107, S 121).

On the whole, Hegel harmonizes in a striking manner what philosophy of religion has been in the ancient, medieval and modern worlds with the new turn that it takes at the end of the eighteenth and beginnings of the nineteenth century. In a sense it may be claimed that he is not just a forerunner, but the founder of contemporary philosophy of religion. Although by the manner in which he introduces this subject matter he seems to identify philosophy of religion with natural theology, in elucidating his concept of religion as the "consciousness" (*Bewusstsein*) of, or "occupation" (*Beschäftigung*) with God, he distinguishes the objective view of the latter from the doubly subjective standpoint of the former. To know God is not only to apprehend him as an "abstract" object of thought —God as he merely is *in* himself—, but primarily to be aware of him as a "concrete" subject that appears to the subjects that we are, for

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penetrated or dominated the content. Thus representation readily seizes on figurative expressions, analogies, and indeterminate forms. "Begetting," "the Son," etc., are [figurative] representations of this kind, which are derived from the web of connections belonging to the natural living state, [while] "creation" is an *indeterminate* representation, expressing in a general fashion the speculative connectedness of God and the world." (*LPR* 1 Concept of Religion 1824, E 333-334, G 235, S 221-222). "So there are many representations that derive from immediate sensible intuition as well as from inner intuition. Thus we soon know that talk of God's wrath is not to be taken in the literal sense, that it is merely an analogy, a simile, an image. The same holds true for emotions of repentance, vengeance, and the like on God's part." (*LPR* 1 Concept of Religion 1827, E 398, G 293, S 277).

"God's Spirit *is* essentially in his community." By underscoring this intimate domain (*dies Innerste)* Hegel inaugurates an approach akin to that of key twentieth-century thinkers who, from different philosophical traditions,[19] claim that knowledge of God must be gathered from within —for instance, either from a phenomenological description of religious experience and devotion, or a conceptual analysis of the religious form of life.

For this reason, I think it is fitting to conclude this work with words by the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1863-1936). In his essay "¡Adentro!" ("Inside!" or "Within!") he evokes, in a plain but eloquent manner analogous to a Hegelian *Vorstellung*, this interior sphere—*dies Innerste*—in which, according to Hegel, occurs the fusion of our acknowledgment of God's self-manifestation by virtue of which the finite subject and

[19] Alfred North Whitehead, the great British mathematician, logician, and metaphysician, is an early example of a contemporary philosopher who defined religion, almost in a Hegelian fashion, as "the art and the theory of the internal life of man, so far as it depends on the man himself and on what is permanent in the nature of things." See *Religion in the Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), pp. 13-18. Later on, many diverse scholars interested in religion, and not only philosophers, have been influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory about language games that is expounded in *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd. ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1958), par. 23, p. 11e: "Here the term '*language-game'* is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is a part of an activity, a form of life". Ninian Smart, a renowned analytic philosopher of religion, prompted by Wittgenstein's theory, tackled the task of formulating a coherent, univocal concept of religion from a viewpoint strikingly akin to Hegel's by emphasizing that in order to do so one must have an inside knowledge, and not merely an observer's external view of the feelings, attitudes, and actions of the faithful and worshippers. For him, the practical aspects and immediate experience are the background against which the key religious concepts have to be comprehended; in short, "to understand religion is surely to understand what religions mean to those who participate in them." See *The Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), cap. 1 "On Understanding the Concept of Religion," pp. 3-27. Lastly, the most notable and polemical attempt in the twentieth century to formulate a universal concept of religion through a phenomenological description of religious experience is that by Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy* (*Das Heilige*, 1917), trans. John Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), especially in chapters 1–7.

the world exist within him, with the consciousness that God and the world do not dwell outside, but inside the human spirit:

> Leave that talk of forward and backward, up and down to progressives and reactionaries, ascendants and descendants who move in the exterior space only, and rather search for the other one —your interior sphere, the ideal, the domain of your soul. Struggle to fit inside it the entire universe, which is the best way for you to plunge into it. Consider that there is within God nothing else but you and the world, and that if you are a part of the latter because it sustains you, the world is also a part of you because it is within you that it is known to you. So instead of saying forward! or up!, do say: within![20]

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[20] "¡Adentro!", in *Ensayos por Miguel de Unamuno*, vol. 2 (Madrid, 1916), p. 196. I am responsible for the English translation of this passage. The Spanish original is as follows:

Deja eso de adelante y atrás, arriba y abajo, a progresistas y retrógrados, ascendentes y descendentes, que se mueven en el espacio exterior tan sólo, y busca el otro, tu ámbito interior, el ideal, el de tu alma. Forcejea por meter en ella al universo entero, que es la mejor manera de derramarte en él. Considera que no hay dentro de Dios más que tú y el mundo y que si formas parte de éste porque te mantiene, forma también él parte de ti, porque en ti lo conoces. En vez de decir, pues, ¡adelante!, o ¡arriba!, di: ¡adentro!

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