

Religion und Irrationalität

Historisch-systematische Perspektiven

Herausgegeben von
Jochen Schmidt und Heiko Schulz

Mohr Siebeck

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JOCHEN SCHMIDT, geboren 1975; Studium der Ev. Theologie in Bonn, Oxford und Glasgow; 2005 Promotion; 2010 Habilitation; seit 2013 Universitätprofessor auf Zeit für Systematische Theologie und Ökumene an der Universität der Informationsgesellschaft Paderborn.

HEIKO SCHULZ, geboren 1959; Studium der Philosophie, Ev. Theologie und Pädagogik; 1993 Promotion; 1999 Habilitation; seit 2009 Universitätsprofessor für Systematische Theologie/Religionsphilosophie an der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt a. M.

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Hegel's Criticism of the Enlightenment's Charge of the Irrationality of Religion

Jon Stewart

I Voltaire: A Rational Understanding of Religion

In his work *God and Human Beings* from 1769,¹ Voltaire, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, attempts to address the question of religion by means of reason. His approach can be seen in many ways as representative of some of the basic intuitions of the period. Posing as an Englishman under the pseudonym Doctor Obern (whose work purports to be a French translation by one Jaques Aimon), he gives a detailed account of the history of the world religions. In the course of the analysis he often takes up a critical discussion with the British freethinkers of the age.² Although he is often characterized as a freethinker himself, Voltaire clearly believes that many of these figures have gone too far and have allowed their animosity towards religion to cloud their reason. At the end of the work, he ultimately gives his own account of what religion should look like, calling for its reform but not its abolition. However, the reform that he proposes ends up inadvertently eliminating key features of Christianity and indeed of religion in general. Thus while his tone and stated goal are different from those of the freethinkers, the result of his study is much the same.

Voltaire begins his account of Jesus with the claim that one should investigate the historical sources about him with critical reason. Such an approach is, to his mind, completely obvious: “Only a fanatic or stupid rogue could say that you should never examine the story of Jesus with the lights of reason. With what will you judge a book, whatever it may be? Is it with folly?”³ In matters of religion, one should not accept things on the basis of mere authority, be that of tradition, the church or a priest. Such claims of

¹ [VOLTAIRE] *Dieu et les hommes, oeuvre théologique, mais raisonnable, par le Docteur Obern, traduit par Jaques Aimon, Berlin 1769.*

² Voltaire was presumably familiar with the works of these men during the years of his exile in Britain from 1726–1729.

³ VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, trans. Michael Shreve, Amherst/New York 2010, 103/*Dieu et les hommes*, 151f.

authority invariably contain certain absurd elements which cannot be accepted. Rather, one must examine the matter for oneself with the use of one's own critical faculty. He thus turns to Jesus and the gospels in order to put them to the test of reason. One of the first things that become obvious in this examination is that reason obliges him to reject miracles and prophecies.⁴ Such things are obvious absurdities that were inserted into the sacred texts by later writers interested in validating or discrediting Christ, either by providing a proof for his divinity or by ascribing to him qualities of a magician or wizard. But these things obviously have no basis in actuality. Voltaire claims that the method of rational examination requires that such stories be rejected and thus omitted from the account of Jesus.

Voltaire further denies that Jesus ever claimed to be a God. Moreover, none of his immediate disciples ever ascribed divinity to him. Jesus was simply regarded as an especially moral and pious person who was favored by God. Critical reason must thus also reject the notion of Christ's divinity as a later idea that was imposed long after the fact by parties with strong vested interests. Once the irrational elements have been removed from the historical sources, what is left is the picture of Jesus as a human being with an upstanding moral character, nothing more or less.

Voltaire's somewhat surprising and shocking thesis is that Jesus himself never really intended to found a new religion. He and his followers were and remained Jews. Moreover, the religion of Christianity that arose later represents a vast departure from everything that Jesus actually taught and stood for. He claims,

"I dare to put forth, along with the most educated and wisest of men, that Jesus never dreamt of founding this sect. Christianity, such as it was at the time of Constantine, was farther from Jesus than from Zoroaster or Brahma. Jesus became the pretext of our fanatical doctrines, of our persecutions, of our religious crimes, but he wasn't the author of them."⁵

According to Voltaire, in the first centuries after the death of Christ numerous Christian believers cooked up different stories about him in order to legitimize the new religion. They attributed things to Jesus that neither he nor his immediate disciples ever claimed. The abovementioned ascription of divinity to Christ, for example, was something that only arose later during the period of so-called "pious frauds." Thus as time passed, the fictional figure of Jesus and his teaching moved further and further away from its actual historical source. The result of this shift was a conception of Jesus that became ever more absurd and unworthy of the divine. Indeed, in one passage, Voltaire places a neutral observer in dialogue with the vested religious interests and has the observer claim that he wants to de-

⁴ VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, 107/*Dieu et les hommes*, 159: "To judge only with reason, we must put aside every miracle, every divination."

⁵ VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, 111f./*Dieu et les hommes*, 169.

fend Jesus against the absurdities told about him by his purported religious defenders.⁶ In this context he rejects, for example, the stories of the Cleansing of the Temple,⁷ the casting out of the demons,⁸ the rendering infertile of the fig tree,⁹ the turning of water into wine,¹⁰ and the Temptation.¹¹ Jesus can best be defended, not by accepting every absurdity that is written about him or ascribed to him, but rather by rejecting these and keeping only the positive characteristics that are reasonable.

Voltaire claims that Jesus was a Jew who followed Jewish law but never preached dogma or doctrine as such. Since Christ did not talk much about actual doctrine himself, the different Christian groups were left to grapple with such things on their own: "Jesus spoke so little about dogma that every Christian society that arose after him had its own belief."¹² There were many ambiguities and unclear points in the original sources, and there was a natural need to try to bring clarification to the matter. But with the attempts to clarify the key issues there also came disputes and disagreements.¹³

According to Voltaire, it was in the course of these disputes that the greatest absurdities began to arise. The famous Church Councils, called to resolve the key issues such as the status of the divinity of Jesus or Mary, represent, in his eyes, the height of absurdity. The Councils of learned scholars debated these issues and arrived at conclusions that they then agreed among themselves must be the true ones, even though the actual issues themselves were never even broached by Jesus. In this way the religion of Christianity arose with a string of dogmas and doctrines that had precious little to do with anything that Christ ever actually taught.

⁶ VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, 107f./*Dieu et les hommes*, 160f.: "But as the Gospel tells us that Jesus had sent the devil into the bodies of these pigs, in a country that never had pigs, a man who is neither Christian nor Jewish can reasonably doubt this. He will say to the theologians, 'Pardon me if in wanting to justify Jesus I am forced to refute your books [...]. I want to make this Jesus just and wise. He wouldn't be either if everything you say were true: and these adventures cannot be true because they aren't appropriate for God or man. In order to appraise Jesus, allow me to cross out the passages of your Gospel that dishonor him. I'll defend Jesus against you.'"

⁷ Mark 11,15–19; 11,27–33, Matt 21,12–17; 21,23–27, Luke 19,45–48, 20,1–8, John 2,13–16.

⁸ Matt 8,28–34.

⁹ Mark 11,12–14.

¹⁰ John 2,1–11.

¹¹ Matt 4,1–11, Mark 1,12–13, Luke 4,1–13.

¹² VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, 135/*Dieu et les hommes*, 216.

¹³ VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, 136/*Dieu et les hommes*, 217: "More than six hundred disputes, great and small, raised and maintained trouble in the Christian Church while all the other religions on the earth were at peace [...]."

These doctrinal disputes proved to have a singularly negative effect on subsequent history since they repeatedly led to religious wars, persecutions, crusades, etc. Voltaire declares, “This argumentative theology is at the same time the most absurd and the most abominable scourge that ever afflicted the earth.”¹⁴ The woes caused by religious strife are portrayed in a brilliant satirical way in Voltaire’s classic *Candide*.

Voltaire’s great plea at the end of the work is for people to put aside all the fine points of dogma that have proved so divisive. Instead, religion should focus on the moral aspect, that is, on leading a virtuous life like that of Jesus. Only when this is done will religion be a positive force that unites people: “Religion surely consists in virtue and not in impertinent frivolities of theology. Morality comes from God; it is uniform everywhere. Theology comes from men; it is different and ridiculous everywhere.”¹⁵ Voltaire claims that we can think of an abstract God as a divinity who punishes the wicked and rewards the just, and this will have a beneficial effect on human behavior and morals, but we should not begin to introduce other elements of doctrine that will always be disputed: “but resurrection is offensive to all thinking people.”¹⁶ Voltaire believes that if we conceive of God in this abstract manner, then we can avoid all the problems of sectarianism. All the sects can come together and worship a God of this kind and, indeed, all the religions as well: “Let us worship the Supreme Being through Jesus, since it is established thus among us. [...] What does it matter if we render our homage to the Supreme Being through Confucius, Marcus Aurelius, Jesus, or some other, provided that we are just?”¹⁷ Since there is only one true, just morality, all moral individuals in history have shared this same view; therefore, it is a matter of indifference which of them one wants to take as one’s model. This simpler and more abstract conception of God can have a positive effect of bringing people together, which is just the opposite of what happens when people begin to talk about dogma: “The adoration of a God who punishes and rewards unites all men; the detestable and contemptible argumentative theology divides them.”¹⁸

At the end of the work Voltaire’s plea is to reform the present religious practice so that it is more worthy both of God and of human beings. In the end, Voltaire advocates a belief in God, albeit a rather special kind of God, and claims to have no objection to the continuation of the priesthood, church services and prayer, albeit all in modified form. For example, reli-

¹⁴ VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, 150/*Dieu et les hommes*, 243f.

¹⁵ VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, 149/*Dieu et les hommes*, 243.

¹⁶ VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, 127/*Dieu et les hommes*, 202.

¹⁷ VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, 149/*Dieu et les hommes*, 243.

¹⁸ VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, 150/*Dieu et les hommes*, 243.

gious service should be for exhortations to virtue and not the preaching of dogma.¹⁹

With attempts of this sort to undermine the causes of religious conflict, the great figures of the Enlightenment in effect waged war on dogma. This was a common approach during the period shared by Rousseau, Lessing and others. Voltaire's claim that the dogmas of Christianity were far removed from the actual life of Jesus was shocking at the time. For Hegel this kind of view was deeply problematic. Jesus lived and taught, and these are simply empirical facts (based on the extant sources), but they do not mean anything on their own. It is only when the human mind goes to work on these facts that certain ideas emerge, as they must. Thus, for Hegel, there is no absurdity in the later attempts to determine Christian doctrine. These doctrines were simply the collective human mind's attempt to conceptualize the phenomena of Christ and his teachings. This was a necessary development. For Christ's teachings to be lasting, they must be made universal and eternal by means of thought. The human mind is never content simply to leave things with the empirical. There is always an attempt to penetrate further and to reach an understanding, to find a logos in the phenomena. Thus it is absurd to claim that there is a radical split between the original Christ and the dogma of the Christian church. One can just as well say that there is a radical split between the empirical movements of the planets and Kepler's laws. In a sense it is true that there is a difference: the one is empirical and the other conceptual. But in another sense, they coincide since the one is a reflection of the other in thought.

Moreover, by calling for a reduction of dogma and by making the divine a mere abstraction, one risks opening the door to fanaticism. If the conception of God is simply of one who rewards and punishes, the question still remains open about exactly what forms of action are worthy of reward or punishment. Voltaire repeatedly returns to the idea that religion should be about morals, ethics and virtue and that this is something universal, but he never bothers to explain what this amounts to. The problem with his view can be clearly seen in his claim that the morality of all the great moral figures in history is ultimately one and the same: "Confucius, Marcus Aurelius, [and] Jesus" all purportedly had the same views of ethics and morals.²⁰ Anyone who has ever had an introductory course in ethics knows that there are very different conceptions of what is ethical and what not. There are very different principles and ideas that can be used to determine ethics. To say that all moral individuals in history had the same ethics and to leave it at that with no further explanation is to leave ethics entirely undetermined. What is a moral act? When this remains at the level of abstraction, one

¹⁹ VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, 155/*Dieu et les hommes*, 253.

²⁰ VOLTAIRE, *God and Human Beings*, 149/*Dieu et les hommes*, 243.

risks opening the door for fanatics to deem their own fanatical action moral and virtuous. Instead of Voltaire's strategy being an effective antidote to religious fanaticism, its abstraction will simply foster and cultivate it. For Hegel, the key is concrete content, and this is what dogma supplies. The movement in the modern age away from it to the realm of abstraction is a misunderstanding that leads to disastrous consequences.

II Hegel's View of Religious Knowing

Hegel's philosophy of religion can be seen as a critical response to the various theories issuing from the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Due to the numerous criticisms of different Christian doctrines, there was a general movement away from the traditional dogmas which always seemed vulnerable to attack by science and critical reason. Not only were these dogmas impossible to defend, but they were also, as Voltaire argued, the source of religious strife. As a result, Christianity in its traditional form was for the most part simply dropped for the sake of natural religion, which had far fewer dogmas to defend and which could be made, at least on the face of it, consistent with science and reason. Rousseau, Voltaire, Lessing and others thought that religious tolerance would only be possible when people give up the specifics of their religious beliefs and agree to a more general conception of the divine that could span the different religions. The desired goal was thus to round off the decimals and let religious believers of different denominations live and let live in the realization that they all ultimately worshiped the same God. But the result of this was an emptying of the religious content, which became more and more attenuated as one dogma after another was discarded.

This movement in the Enlightenment away from religious content set up the conditions for the subjectivism of Romanticism. Since there was no longer any meaningful content in religion but only a very abstract and distant deity about which one could know nothing, it was natural that religious believers simply filled in the content with their own intuitions. But with this there was a clear shift from what had once been objective, recognized doctrines, to subjective opinions and views, from which sprang the various Romantic theories about the conscience, the heart, feeling, inwardness, etc.

But far from rendering religion harmless, as Voltaire believed, the removal of doctrinal difference only served to lead to new forms of fanaticism. In the absence of a generally recognized truth, individuals with authority or power at their disposal could erect some arbitrary religious truth claim and enforce it with arms. As a part of the anti-Catholic trend of the French Revolution, a new cult of the "Goddess of Reason" was officially declared on November 10, 1793. While the celebration of this new cult took place in Notre Dame, Christian churches and images were ransacked

and desecrated. This movement was careful to avoid any detailed doctrinal system. It was defined rather in a negative way as a rejection of traditional religious belief in God and immortality. Positively, it amounted simply to a vague veneration of the ideals of the Enlightenment: science and reason. This movement was, however, short-lived, and when Maximilien Robespierre (1758–94) came to power, he quickly set about persecuting it and sending its ringleaders to the guillotine. Instead he proclaimed a new state religion, the Cult of the Supreme Being. This was a deist religion, which still wanted to preserve the notion of an abstract deity and a conception of immortality since it was believed that these notions were essential for social stability. The violence caused by the followers of the Cult of the Goddess of Reason seemed to abundantly demonstrate what people were capable of if they were not made to fear divine punishment for their immoral actions. Like the preceding movement, Robespierre publicly celebrated the Cult of the Supreme Being in grand fashion, but once again it was not to last. Robespierre fell from power and was himself sent to the guillotine, and the Cult of the Supreme Being disappeared with him. For Hegel, this course of events is typical of what happens when religion abandons its content and strays too far to the side of the subjective. The vacuum of content will always be filled by some fanatical faction claiming to be in sole possession of the truth.

One basic goal of Hegel's philosophy of religion is to find a solution for this miserable situation, which he regards as acute in his own time. He realizes that it is impossible to wind back the clock and return to traditional faith, but yet he sees the absolute importance of restoring some objective content to religion if it is not to sink into a morass of relativism.

Hegel is interested in making a case not just for religion in general but for Christianity in particular. For Christianity to be a determinate religion, he reasons, it must have a determinate content. If it lacks this content, then an ostensible belief in Christianity could in effect be a belief in anything at all. Hegel explains this while criticizing what he takes to be a mistaken "philosophizing" view of his own age that he associates with Jacobi and some of the German Romantics:

"The Christian faith implies an authority that belongs to the church, while, on the contrary, the faith of this philosophizing standpoint is just the authority of one's own subjective revelation. Moreover, the Christian faith is an objective content that is inwardly rich, a system of doctrine and cognition; whereas the content of this [philosophical] faith is inwardly so indeterminate that it may perhaps admit that content too – but equally it may embrace within it the belief that the Dalai-Lama, the bull, the ape, etc., is God, or it may, for its own part, restrict itself to God in general, to the 'highest essence.'"²¹

²¹ GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL, *The Encyclopaedia Logic. Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. T.F. Gerats, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Har-

With these examples it is clear that content is not an indifferent part of a religion. The content is precisely what defines the individual religions and separates and distinguishes them from one another. Simply by saying that one believes is not enough to define one's religion. But this content is precisely the proof that belief is a matter of knowledge. One must *know* the content of one's belief in order to distinguish it from other beliefs.

III The Relation of Philosophy to Religion: Concepts and Picture Thinking

In the Introduction to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel addresses himself to different dimensions of the Enlightenment's attack on religion:

"In dealing with religions, we must learn to perceive that what is in them is not mere nonsense, mere irrationality. What is of more importance than this, however, is to recognize the element of truth, and to know how it is in harmony with reason; and that is more difficult than to pronounce a thing to have no sense in it."²²

In the foreword to the third edition of the *Encyclopedia* in 1830 Hegel argues against what he takes to be mistaken conceptions of Christianity that insist on a split between feeling and thinking. He claims that by insisting on feeling as the criterion, the relation of faith becomes a purely formal one that is lacking all concrete content. He explains, such people with this mistaken conception

"busy themselves at great length with a mass of indifferent external matters of the faith; but then in contrast they stand by the name of the Lord Christ in a completely barren fashion as far as the basic import and intellectual content of the faith itself is concerned; and they deliberately and scornfully disdain the elaboration of doctrine that is the foundation of the faith of the Christian church. For the spiritual, fully thoughtful, and scientific expansion [of the doctrine] would upset, and even forbid or wipe out, the self-conceit of their boasting which relies on the spiritless and fruitless assurance [...] that they are in possession of Christianity, and have it exclusively for their own."²³

It is clear that if religion is to make any sense it must contain a concrete context that is accessible to everyone. It cannot be the private, exclusive domain of specific individuals to the exclusion of others. He describes this

ris, Indianapolis 1991, § 63, 112; Jub., vol. 8, 168. (Jub. = Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe in 20 Bänden, ed. Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart 1928–1941.)

²² GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vols. 1–3, trans. E.B. Speirs and J. Burdon Sanderson, London/New York 1962, vol. 2, 52; Jub., vol. 15, 404.

²³ HEGEL, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 20; Jub., vol. 8, 27.

mistaken view as “the subjectivity of knowledge” which “entrenches itself as in an inaccessible place.”²⁴

Hegel takes it to be a defining characteristic of his own day that while there is great pride taken in the advances of the empirical sciences and the knowledge attained by them, by contrast, it is equally a point of pride that it is claimed that nothing can be known about God. He takes this to be an unhappy conjunction of the result of certain philosophical theories, which lead to skepticism about God and the common sense view, prejudiced by the sciences. But, for Hegel, this is both confused and unchristian. He believes that Christianity commands one to know God, and on this point he takes his philosophy to be in complete harmony with Christian doctrine.

Hegel believes that the theologians themselves are in large part responsible for the abandonment of religious knowing. Though the course of time they have relinquished one doctrine after another, capitulating to the criticisms of the sciences. The function that philosophy can serve is to save religion from this neglect by the theologians. It can restore knowledge of God and thereby put religion back onto a firm footing.

“And yet it is philosophy which is the liberation of the spirit from that shameful degradation, and which has once more brought religion out of the stage of intense suffering which it had to experience when occupying the standpoint referred to.”²⁵

IV Religion as Historical and Speculative Knowing

One frequently hears the charge leveled against Hegel that he is Eurocentric, ethnocentric and racist in his treatments of history and religion in his famous lectures.²⁶ It is hard to avoid this conclusion when one sees his encomium for Christianity and the development of Western culture. It is said that Hegel ridicules as irrational those elements of other religions that do not fit conveniently into his system. But Hegel, in fact, tries to defend the non-European religions against the prejudices of the day. He says that they should not be dismissed as superstitious nonsense, but instead they contain the truth, as does Christianity. In this sense, he oddly looks more progressive than his Enlightenment predecessors.

²⁴ HEGEL, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 3, 174; *Jub.*, vol. 16, 379.

²⁵ HEGEL, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, 37; *Jub.*, vol. 15, 54.

²⁶ See, for example, IAN ALMOND, *History of Islam in German Thought from Leibniz to Nietzsche*, New York 2010, 108–111. ROBERT L. BERNASCONI, *With What Must the Philosophy of World History Begin? On the Racial Basis of Hegel's Eurocentrism, Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, vol. 22, 2000, 171–201. TESHALE TIBEBU, *Hegel and the Third World: The Making of Eurocentrism in World History*, Syracuse, 2011.

Hegel tries to make a case for the importance of studying other religions, even though they may seem foreign and strange to us. In his lectures he says,

“These definite religions are not indeed our religion, yet they are included in ours as essential, although as subordinate moments, which cannot miss having in them absolute truth. Therefore in them we have not to do with what is foreign to us, but with what is our own, and the knowledge that such is the case is the reconciliation of the true religion with the false.”²⁷

Even though these other religions are not the final, true culmination of the development of religious consciousness, it does not follow from this that they are worthless and meaningless. On the contrary, each of them plays a role in the development of the concept of the divine through time. Thus each of them has a role to play and a valid contribution to make.

For Hegel, the true philosophical mind does not dismiss and ridicule other religions simply because they contain ideas or forms of worship that strike one as strange. He explains, “It is undoubtedly true that the definite religions of the various peoples often enough exhibit the most distorted, confused, and abortive ideas of the divine Being, and likewise of duties and relations as expressed in worship. But we must not treat the matter so lightly [...]”²⁸ One can see in this a hidden criticism of the Enlightenment, which was so quick to criticize all forms of traditional religion as superstition and to hail deism as the only rational form of religion. This disposition reveals, for Hegel, a failure to appreciate the nature of the historical development of religion that a true philosopher can discern. He continues his plea, saying,

“On the contrary, something higher is necessary, namely, to recognize the meaning, the truth, and the connection with truth; in short, to get to know what is *rational* in them. They are human beings who hit upon such religions, therefore there must be reason in them, and amidst all that is accidental in them a higher necessity.”²⁹

The true philosophical stance is one that sees the different world religions in their historical development. When one sees each religion in its own place and time, one can begin to discern its *logos* and rationality. He explains,

“The finite religions are the appearance in history of these moments. In order to grasp these in their truth, it is necessary to consider them under two aspects; on the one hand, we have to consider how God is known, how He is characterized; and on the other, how the subject at the same time knows itself.”³⁰

²⁷ HEGEL, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, vol. 1, 76f.; Jub., vol. 15, 92.

²⁸ HEGEL, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, vol. 1, 78; Jub., vol. 15, 93f.

²⁹ HEGEL, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, vol. 1, 78; Jub., vol. 15, 94.

³⁰ HEGEL, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, vol. 1, 79; Jub., vol. 15, 95.

Even the mythologies and religious stories of other religions that, at first glance, strike one as absurd, have their own inward reason; the challenge is to find and understand it:

“We have here to look away from its vast and characteristically endless mythology and mythological forms, in order to keep to the principal fundamental determinations alone, which are on the one hand baroque and wild, and are horrible, repulsive, loathsome distortions, but at the same time prove themselves to have the Notion for their inner source; while in virtue of the development which it gets in this theoretical region, they recall the highest element of the Idea.”³¹

Hegel thus frequently interprets old myths and stories from the ancient sacred writings of the world's religions and gives them a philosophical meaning.

This historical element is key for understanding Hegel's defense of religion as something rational. Like all the other aspects of human culture, religion, as a product of the human mind, displays a deep rationality, despite all immediate appearances to the contrary. The way in which this rationality can best be discerned is by reconstructing the history of the world's religions and placing each religion in its proper place. In this way its unique role can become apparent and its rationality will become clear.

Hegel's challenge is an important one with great relevance today. Contemporary secular culture is largely stamped by three strands of thought: 1) the Enlightenment's charge that religion is in large part something irrational, 2) science's belief that nothing can be known about God or other objects of religion, and 3) Romanticism's view that religion is ultimately something subjective and personal that does not lend itself to discursive explanation or proof. Hegel's philosophy of religion offers a critical response to each of these modern intuitions. He attempts to demonstrate that there is a hidden reason or *logos* not just in Christianity but in all religion. Moreover, he treats the objects of religion like any other object of scholarly investigation and argues that since we have a concept of God, this is something that can be known and rationally evaluated just like anything else. This is also true of traditional dogmas such as the Incarnation, the Revelation, the Trinity, etc. Finally, he shows that since these things have a rational basis they can be treated as something objective on a par with other objects of scholarly investigation. Hegel's position thus represents a serious criticism to many of the most dearly held intuitions about religion today. One does not have to follow him on every point, but if one wishes to restore to religion a truth and validity that it has clearly lost in today's secular culture, then something like what he is proposing with a conceptual understanding of religion can be highly useful and instructive in showing the way to a solution.

³¹ HEGEL, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 2, 10f.; Jub., vol. 15, 263.