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Philosophical Anthropology as a Reflection of the Rationality of Religion

A Study of Hegel's Account of the Gods

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel ostensibly tries to vindicate the truth of Christianity,[1] although there are, of course, many open questions regarding this. Indeed, this issue was a key point of controversy in the immediate reception of his thought and a point which was formative for the creation of the Hegel schools. A part of his argument involves giving an overview of the religions of the world and comparing Christianity with them. According to his teleological conception, the different religions develop over time both internally and externally vis-à-vis other religions; this developmental process culminates in Christianity. But what exactly is it that Hegel sees as developing in the different religions? What is the criterion that he uses to calculate the placement of any given religion in the developmental process? Can any rationality be discerned in this system of religions? He claims that what characterizes each individual religion is its specific conception of the divine. This is what makes each religion what it is and separates it from other religions. For this reason, when we do philosophy of religion, the main focus, according to Hegel, should be on the concept of God. According to his teleology, Christianity occupies the highest and indeed the final form of religious development since it is the sole religion which has a concept of God that corresponds to what he regards as the true concept.

He notes that human beings have worshiped the divine in virtually every form imaginable. Anything at all can in principle be reverenced as a god. This

can at first glance appear very confusing. Mythology seems to be an area that defies rational explanation. Students are often utterly perplexed the first time that they hear some of the myths, for example, about the Greek or Roman gods, which seem to defy any kind of meaningful explanation. So Hegel's project also involves discerning some rationality, some logic or *logos*, in this apparently chaotic manifold of religious stories, beliefs and practices. He wants to find some basic principles that can explain why humans conceive of the gods in the way that they do. In the end he develops what we today would call a theory of mythology. By looking at the different conceptions of the divine, we can compare different religions and, according to his view, discern a development in them.

In the present article I wish to argue that there is a deep connection between Hegel's philosophy of religion and his philosophical anthropology. Today these are usually thought to be two entirely separate and distinct spheres on inquiry. But to Hegel's systematic way of thinking, these two fields are closely connected. Specifically, he believes that the conceptions that human beings have of themselves can be identified in their conceptions of their gods. Just as what it is to be human changes and develops through time, so also does the conception of the divine. There is thus a parallel movement that can be traced. One strand of this is the movement in the conception of the divine and the other the development of the human being. In Section I, I will first try to explain and outline this parallel movement following Hegel's theory of the historical evolution of the divine. This is followed in Section II with a thumbnail sketch of Hegel's account of the development of the conception of the divine from the gods of nature to those of spirit. Then in Section III, I will try to develop this theory further with my own examples drawn from a series of religions that Hegel either never knew or never treated.

I The Parallel between the Development of History and the Development of Religion

Hegel divides the material in his lectures on the philosophy of religion into three large sections: "The Concept of Religion," "The Determinate Religion," and "The Absolute Religion." In the middle section, "The Determinate Religion," he assigns all of the world religions (with the exception of Christianity) to a specific place under two large rubrics: the natural religions and the religions of spirit. As noted, the criterion that he uses for this placement concerns the image of the divine that each religion has. He places under the rubric "natural religions" those religions that conceive of the gods as some object of nature, for example, a

river, a celestial body, or an animal. These include the oriental religions of Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Egyptian polytheism. By contrast, to the "religions of spirit" belong those religions which conceive of the divine as a self-conscious agent, that is, something more anthropomorphic. These include Greek and Roman polytheism as well as Judaism. It is to be noted that this structure mirrors his account of the movement from consciousness to self-consciousness in his epistemology and philosophical psychology as found in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* respectively.[2]

Similar to his views on history, this economy of world religions is intended, as noted, to display a progressive element. The religions at the beginning of the hierarchy are the earliest and most basic. As the views of the divine change and new religions arise and develop, these become more complex. The world religions progress in step with the development of the human mind itself. Humans emerge from nature, and as they do, they develop new ways of thinking and transmittable culture, and a part of this is religion. Hegel's question is how did we as human beings get from the early conceptions of the gods to where we are today, just as cultural anthropologists would ask how we got from stone tools to computers.

For Hegel, religion operates at the level of what he calls "spirit" (*Geist*), that is, human culture. The gods reflect the collective human mind, and this means that the different religions are associated with specific peoples. The Greeks have specifically Greek gods, and the Egyptians have Egyptian gods. This means that his narrative of the development of the religions of the world runs parallel to the story that he tells about the historical development of the peoples of the world. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*,[3] the development of spirit is traced in the form of individual peoples, each of which gradually rises and falls, replacing one another in history. Thus, while history is the story of the world-historical peoples, so also the history of religion is the story of religions of these peoples.

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2 Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. by Johannes Schulze, vol. 2 (1832), in *Hegel's Werke*, "Bewußtseyn," 73–130 (*Jub.*, vol. 2, 81–138), and "Selbstbewußtseyn," 131–173 (*Jub.*, vol. 2, 139–181). *Encyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, Dritter Teil, *Die Philosophie des Geistes*, ed. by Ludwig Boumann, vol. 7–2 (1845), in *Hegel's Werke*, "Bewußtseyn," §§ 418–423, 257–266 (*Jub.*, vol. 10, 263–272), and "Selbstbewußtseyn," §§ 424–437, 266–286 (*Jub.*, vol. 10, 272–291). (*Jub.* = *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe*, vols. 1–20, ed. by Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart: Frommann 1928–1941.)
3 Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, ed. by Eduard Gans, vol. 9 (1837), in *Hegel's Werke* (*Jub.*, vol. 11).

When people build temples and palaces, write poems or do philosophy, they knowingly or unknowingly invest a part of themselves in this. Like any other cultural product, a people's conception of the divine naturally reflects key elements of that people's specific culture and way of thinking. The understanding of the divine is drawn from the cultural horizon and experience of the given people. Therefore, in a people's conception of the gods one can thus see a picture of that people itself projected onto the sphere of the divine. This of course changes over time as the individual cultures develop. This means that if we wish to understand the religions of the world, it is also necessary to see how they have developed and how their conceptions of the divine have changed over time. This means that a historical element will always be present in the philosophy of religion insofar as it attempts to understand the different conceptions of the divine found in the different world religions.

This approach also makes clear the connection between the philosophy of religion and philosophical anthropology. When we study the gods in the different world religions, we are in effect studying how human beings conceived of themselves, that is, what they thought it was to be human. In their myths, the peoples of the world portray themselves in their relations to nature and to their gods. In a manifold of different ways they describe human possibility and limitation.

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* Hegel controversially argues that human history is the story of emergence of true human freedom in the world.[4] In the course of human history, people slowly begin to realize that there is something important and valuable about each individual. In contrast to seeing people always primarily as members of the specific family, tribe or group to which they belong, a new idea arises according to which individuals have value on their

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4 For such discussions, see, for example, Timo Bautz, *Hegels Lehre von der Weltgeschichte. Zur logischen und systematischen Grundlegung der Hegelschen Geschichtsphilosophie*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink 1988; Oscar Daniel Brauer, *Dialektik der Zeit. Untersuchungen zu Hegels Metaphysik der Weltgeschichte*, Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog 1982; Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2009; Jacques D'Hondt, *Hegel, philosophe de l'histoire vivante*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1966; Peter C. Hodgson, *God in History. Shapes of Freedom*, Nashville: Abingdon Press 1989; Jean Hyppolite, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of History*, trans. by Bond Harris and Jacqueline Bouchard Spurlock, Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida 1996; George Dennis O'Brien, *Hegel on Reason and History. A Contemporary Interpretation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1975; Alan Patten, *Hegel's Idea of Freedom*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999; Rudolf J. Siebert, *Hegel's Philosophy of History. Theological, Humanistic and Scientific Elements*, Washington D.C.: University Press of America 1979; John Walker, *History Spirit and Experience. Hegel's Conception of the Historical Task of Philosophy in his Age*, Frankfurt a.M. et al.: Lang 1995; Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, *Hegel's Philosophy of History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1974.

own. Without this conception of individuality, humans are subject to repressive customs and cultural traditions which prioritize the group at the expense of the individual. This is the realm of *Sittlichkeit* or the general sphere of custom or tradition. People were simply expected to conform to what was demanded of them by their family, their clan, their tribe, their people, etc. Seen from this perspective, Hegel's theory is about the liberation of the individual.

But Hegel's theory is not just about individuals. A part of the story of the development of human freedom is the creation of just institutions that are conducive to the flourishing of the individual. This is, of course, one of the main themes in his political philosophy in the *Philosophy of Right*, which tries to sketch just and rational institutions in the context of society and the state. But these rational institutions are not just given; instead, they must be created through the course of history. In traditional societies the danger was the oppression of the individual since the will of a person might well be in conflict with the demands of custom and tradition. The individual thus felt alienated from these time-honored practices since he could not always recognize his own will in them. In the course of the historical development, these older customs and traditions come to be replaced by rational institutions which reflect the rationality and the will of the individual, thus overcoming the previous alienation. In this sense human freedom concerns both the individual but also the social sphere. Indeed, true freedom can only take place in a community, which allows its citizens to pursue their rational will.

The dramatic historical story that Hegel tells is one of the liberation of the individual, which is only fully achieved in the modern world. For this liberation to take place, a specific philosophical anthropology must become dominant, namely, one that recognizes and celebrates the aspect of inwardness and subjectivity of each individual. As long as these elements are repressed, the human spirit cannot develop fully. For Hegel, the development of the religions of the world plays a key role in this (as do other parts of evolving human culture). His apologetic story tells that Christianity was a key element in the realization of human inwardness. With the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity, Christianity came to the realization that the human was an essential part of the divine. Thus, the human element was radically elevated above the realm of nature, where it had dwelled in the previous religions.[5] Before discussing this further,

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5 For an account of Hegel as a Christian thinker, see Ulrich Asendorf, *Luther und Hegel. Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung einer neuen systematischen Theologie*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner 1982; Emilio Brito, *La Christologie de Hegel. Verbum Crucis*, Paris: Beauchesne 1983; John W. Burbidge, *Hegel on Logic and Religion. The Reasonableness of Christianity*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1992; Patricia Marie Calton, *Hegel's Metaphysics of God. The Ontological Proof*

our focus will be on how the world religions have developed in their conceptions of the divine and how this can be understood as a reflection of the self-conception of human beings.

II The Movement from Gods of Nature to Gods of Spirit

Philosophers have long conceived of human beings as having something in common with nature. For example, in Plato's city-soul analogy, the soul consists of different human faculties as corresponding to parts of a state.[6] While the soul has a rational element, it also has an appetitive part that must be kept in check. This appetitive part is what we share with the animals. Similarly, Aristotle's famous definition of man as a rational animal (ζῷον or ἄνθρωπον λόγος ἔχων) emphasizes that for whatever else human beings are, their nature overlaps in some substantive way with that of the animals. In Augustine the natural drives and desires become the object of obsessive concern; the goal is to separate ourselves from this natural element. Likewise, the medieval hierarchies conceived of humans as occupying a space somewhere between the animals and the angels. What all of these quite different views share is the idea of the human species as a mixed being with elements of both the animal and something else. Hegel's idea is that there is a development in these views. Initially humans were conceived to be more on the side of nature and then only later more on the other side. His claim is that this self-conception of human beings can be found reflected in their views of the gods.

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as the Development of a Trinitarian Divine Ontology, Aldershot: Ashgate 2001; Martin J. De Nys, Hegel and Theology, London and New York: T. & T. Clark 2009; Peter C. Hodgson, Hegel and Christian Theology. A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005; Hans Küng, Menschwerdung Gottes. Eine Einführung in Hegels theologischen Denken als Prolegomena zu einer künftigen Christologie, Freiburg i.Br. et al.: Herder 1970; Henri Rondet, Hégélianisme et Christianisme. Introduction théologique à l'étude du système hégélien, Paris: Lethielleux 1965; Jörg Splett, Die Trinitätslehre G. W. F. Hegels, Munich: Alber 1965; James Yerkes, The Christology of Hegel, Missoula: Scholars Press 1978; 2nd ed., Albany: State University of New York Press 1983.
6 Plato, Republic, trans. by Christopher Rowe, London: Penguin 2012, Book IV, 142ff., 434e and following.

In his account of the so-called natural religions Hegel discusses, among others, Zoroastrianism, the religion of ancient Persia.[7] This religion originally conceives of the divine as light.[8] The religious spaces of the Zoroastrians include fire altars, and fire plays a key role in their religious ceremonies. Light is juxtaposed to a negative principle of darkness. At the beginning, these were just deified natural forces. But then in the course of time the ancient Persians began to ascribe human elements to these deities, conceiving of light as a benevolent deity and darkness as a malevolent one. Over time these natural forces came to take on personalities and were conceived as the opposing divinities Ormuzd,[9] the god of light, and Ahriman, the god of darkness. These two deities were thought to be locked in an epic struggle that is evident in human affairs.

For Hegel, the shift in the conception of the gods occurs as people begin to recognize the element of inwardness or subjectivity that is unique to humans, that is, that quality which separates them from the natural sphere. A part of the explanation of this shift can also be found in the notion of prayer or communication with the gods. Early humans were in awe of nature, and it was natural for them to attribute divine powers to forces that were greater than the human. It was understandable that in times of distress, for example, when a loved one was suffering or dying, early peoples recognized their own helplessness and prayed

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7 See Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, 352–358 / *VPR*, Part 2, 254–259; *LPR*, vol. 2, 609–625 / *VPR*, Part 2, 504–518; *LPR*, vol. 2, 737–738 / *VPR*, Part 2, 624–625. (*LPR* = *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vols. 1–3, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson, trans. by Robert F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson and J.M. Stewart with the assistance of H.S. Harris, Berkeley et al.: University of California Press 1984–1987 / *VPR* = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Parts 1–3, ed. by Walter Jaeschke, Hamburg: Meiner 1983–1985, 1993–1995.) See Ernst Schulin, "Vom Zendvolk bis zur Bildung Persiens" in his *Die weltgeschichtliche Erfassung des Orients bei Hegel und Ranke*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1958, 90–95; Reinhard Leuze, *Die außerchristlichen Religionen bei Hegel*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1975, 115–125; Michel Hulin, "La religion de Zoroastre et l'Empire perse," in his *Hegel et l'Orient, suivi de la traduction annotée d'un essai de Hegel sur la Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, Paris: J. Vrin 1979, 125–129; Otto Pöggeler, "Altpersische Lichtreligion und neupersische Poesie," in *Hegel in Berlin*, ed. by Otto Pöggeler et al., Berlin: Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz 1981, 196–204; Herman van Erp, "The Religions of Persia, Syria and Egypt. The Transition from the Natural to the Spiritual," in *Hegel's Philosophy of the Historical Religions*, ed. by Bart Labuschagne and Timo Slootweg, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2012, 79–97.
8 For Zoroastrianism, see Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians. Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London et al.: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1979; Maneckji Nusservanji Dhalla, *History of Zoroastrianism*, New York: Oxford University Press 1938.
9 Following his contemporary sources, Hegel uses the name "Ormuzd," which is a transliteration from Middle Persian; other orthographical variants include "Hormazd" or "Hurmuz." The original name in Avestan for the personification of light and the good is Ahura Mazda. Similarly, "Ahriman" is the Middle Persian equivalent of "Angra Mainyu" in Avestan.

to a more powerful force for help. This is a recognition of the finitude of human strength and intelligence. Thus, humans attempted to influence the natural forces by means of prayer, ceremony, sacrifice, etc., which in time developed into regular rituals. But these practices implied that the natural forces were in some ways self-conscious agents who could be reasoned with, appealed to and appeased. So in the course of time the natural force came to be personified as individual gods who were responsible for a specific natural sphere. These divinities gradually became emancipated from the natural forces that were their origin and in time became more anthropomorphic.

This movement from a deity conceived as a natural force to one with more human characteristics appears to be a feature of the development of a number of different world religions. Hegel also discusses Hinduism, which, according to his analysis, is characterized by the worship of plants and animals.[10] At

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10 Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, 316–352 / *VPR*, Part 2, 219–254; *LPR*, vol. 2, 579–609 / *VPR*, Part 2, 475–504; *LPR*, vol. 2, 731–735 / *VPR*, Part 2, 619–622. See also *Phil. of Hist.*, 139–167; *Jub.*, vol. 11, 191–226. *LPWH*, vol. 1, 251–303, especially 273–281; *VPWG*, vol. 1, 164–233, especially 192–204. *PhS*, 420–421; *Jub.*, vol. 2, 530–531. (*Phil. of Hist.* = *The Philosophy of History*, trans. by John Sibree, New York: Willey Book Co. 1944; *LPWH* = *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, vols. 1–3, ed. and trans. by Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson, with the assistance of William G. Geuss, Oxford: Clarendon Press 2011 ff.; *VPWG* = *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. Berlin 1822–1823*, ed. by Karl-Heinz Ilting et al., Hamburg: Meiner 1996.) For Hegel's treatment of Hinduism, see Ignatius Viyagappa, *G.W.F. Hegel's Concept of Indian Philosophy*, Rome: Gregorian University Press 1980; Clemens Menze, "Das indische Altertum in der Sicht Wilhelm von Humboldts und Hegels," in *Werk und Wirkung von Hegels Ästhetik*, ed. by Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert and Otto Pöggeler, Bonn: Bouvier 1986 (*Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 27), 245–294; Merold Westphal, "Hegel, Hinduism, and Freedom," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 20, 1989, 193–204; Susanne Sommerfeld, *Indienschau und Indiendeutung romantischer Philosophen*, Zürich: Rascher Verlag 1943, 69–87; Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe. An Essay in Understanding*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1988, 84–99; Bradley L. Herling, *The German Gita. Hermeneutics and Discipline in the German Reception of Indian Thought, 1778–1831*, New York: Routledge 2006, 203–253; Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters. History of European Reactions of Indian Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1977, 208–220; Nicholas A. Germana, *The Orient of Europe. The Mythical Image of India and Competing Images of German National Identity*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2009, 206–242; Michel Hulin, "Le monde indien," in his *Hegel et l'Orient*, op. cit., 99–124; Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Das Indienbild deutscher Denker*, Stuttgart: K.F. Koehler 1960, 39–60; Paul Cruysberghs, "Hinduism: A Religion of Fantasy," in *Hegel's Philosophy of the Historical Religions*, ed. by Bart Labuschagne and Timo Slootweg, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2012, 31–50; Urs App, "The Tibet of the Philosophers: Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer," in *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, vols. 1–2, ed. by Monica Esposito, Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient 2008, 7–60, see 22–42; Arvind Mandair, "Hegel's Excess: Indology, Historical Difference and the Post-Secular Turn of Theory," *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2006, 15–34.

first, it was the natural entities themselves that were revered: sacred cows, monkeys, elephants, etc. These animals are thought to be manifestations or avatars of the god Brāhma. This is an abstract divinity with no real personality, and to which only a very few temples are dedicated. This deity is conceived merely as the power of creation.[11] Thus any natural or created thing can be seen as a reflection of it, and these things become the object of veneration. But then over the course of time, these natural entities came to take on human characteristics. The monkey god Hanuman, who is featured in the epic *Ramayana*, is almost an entirely anthropomorphic character. He leads an army of monkeys to assist the hero Rama in his ventures. Similarly, the well-known elephant god, Ganesha, was originally portrayed simply as an elephant but in later depictions as a deity with human hands, clothes and jewelry. As in Zoroastrianism, a shift has taken place in the conception of the natural deities. The fact that these deities are portrayed as mixed figures evidences that the change is still taking place: they are not wholly animal, nor are they wholly human. But rather a human element has arisen in them and is growing, but it has still not wholly emancipated itself from the natural form.

This same movement can be seen quite clearly in the ancient Egyptian religion.[12] Almost all of its deities are known for being mixed figures, which combine human heads with animal bodies or vice versa. In the former category is the well-known sphinx, a figure which unites a human face with a body of a lion. There are a vast number of examples of deities which fit into the latter category: Ra (the sun god) has the head of a hawk, Sobek, the head of a crocodile, Khnum, the head of a ram, Sekhmet the head of a lion, Bastet, the head of a cat, and Taweret the head of a hippopotamus. Hegel's claim is that these mixed figures are the result of a long period in the evolution in the conception of the divine. Originally, these deities were worshiped in their purely animal forms, and then only later were the human elements added. This explains why the animals themselves are regarded as sacred, as in Hinduism. There are some statues and

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11 Note that this deity is not to be confused with the personified god Brahmā, who is portrayed as having four heads.

12 For Hegel's account of the Egyptian religion, see *LPR*, vol. 2, 358–381 / *VPR*, Part 2, 259–281; *LPR*, vol. 2, 625–639 / *VPR*, Part 2, 518–532; *LPR*, vol. 2, 744–747 / *VPR*, Part 2, 629–631. For Hegel's treatment of the Egyptian religion, see Jay Lampert, "Hegel and Ancient Egypt: History and Becoming," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1995, 43–58; Herman van Erp, "The Religions of Persia, Syria and Egypt. The Transition from the Natural to the Spiritual," in *Hegel's Philosophy of the Historical Religions*, ed. by Bart Labuschagne and Timo Slootweg, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2012, 79–97; Jeremy W. Pope, "*Ägypten und Aufhebung:* G.W.F. Hegel, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the African Orient," *The New Centennial Review*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2006, 142–192.

paintings of the god Anubis, which portray him as a dog, and then, presumably from a later period, there are other depictions of him in his well-known form as having a human body with the head of a dog.[13] As the human quality of the divinity was developed, certain spheres of human affairs such as science and learning were ascribed to him. Once this happens, it makes sense that the deity cannot continue to be conceived as wholly canine since dogs, of course, do not have science. There must also be a human element in the animal deity. A similar example can be found in the god Thoth, who was originally conceived as an ibis. As this deity became anthropomorphized, he was portrayed as having a human body with the head of an ibis. To him was ascribed the origin of writing, and thus he is often portrayed as writing something on a tablet. As this human characteristic becomes dominant, the animal element is diminished.

It should also be noted that the Egyptians have a small number of gods which appear to be wholly anthropomorphic, for example, Osiris. He was said to be one of the early kings of Egypt who, after death, became immortal and was thought to rule in the realm of the dead. Depictions of him show him in fully human form. Likewise, his sister and wife Isis and his other sister Nephthys also appear as human. By contrast, his evil brother Seth is a mixed figured with characteristics of some indeterminate animal. Likewise, Horus, the son of Osiris and Isis, is also a mixed figure, with the head of a falcon and the body of a human. It is difficult to draw any decisive conclusion from all of this, but it does seem clear that the Egyptian conception of their deities was one that was changing, with the human element emerging and in at least a few cases becoming wholly dominant.

In these religions what began as an animal or a natural force in time became increasingly invested with human characteristics, as people gradually became aware of the strength of the human vis-à-vis nature. In the Greek religion this same development took place, but according to Greek mythology, as recounted by Hesiod, it took a slightly different form.[14] Instead of the individual gods transforming slowly into new forms, in Greek mythology the old gods were simply replaced by new ones who possessed the desired human qualities. According to Hegel's interpretation of Hesiod, this can be seen in the different generations of the Greek gods.[15] The early gods such as Gaia, the goddess of the earth,

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13 Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, vol. 9, in *Hegel's Werke*, 257 (*Jub.*, vol. 11, 279).

14 See *Theogony* in *Hesiod*, trans. by Richmond Lattimore, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 1959, 130 ff.

15 For Hegel's interpretation of Greek polytheism, see *LPR*, vol. 2, 160–189 / *VPR*, Part 2, 66–95; *LPR*, vol. 2, 455–497 / *VPR*, Part 2, 353–396; *LPR*, vol. 2, 642–669 / *VPR*, Part 2, 534–

and Uranus the god of heaven, were natural deities. After them came the generation of the Titans, who were also closely associated with nature, although some human aspects were beginning to emerge in their characters. It was only with the generation of the well-known Olympians that wholly anthropomorphic deities appeared. According to Hesiod's account, the Olympians overthrew the Titans in a revolt and thus displaced them. On Hegel's interpretation, this is a recognition of the awareness that the human is higher than nature. Thus the Olympians represent the higher development of human culture beyond nature.

Instead of one deity developing new characteristics over time as in the previous religions we discussed, this account of the different generations of gods, which replaced one another, means that there are parallel deities in the different generations, which are responsible for the same spheres. Thus in the older generation Cronos was the head of the pantheon, whereas in the next generation he is replaced by his son Zeus. While Cronos represents the more abstract principle of time, Zeus is a much more anthropomorphic deity. Similarly, among the older generation Oceanus is the god of the sea. He appears as a heterogeneous figure with a human upper body but with the fin of a whale or a dolphin instead of legs, and with the claws of a crab or a lobster protruding from his head. By contrast, his pendant in the generation of the Olympians is Poseidon, who is portrayed in idealized human form and to whom are also attributed elements of human culture such as building and the training of horses. While Oceanus is simply a natural force, Poseidon is this but much more.

It is impossible to document with complete accuracy the actual historical development of the Greek religion, although attempts have been made to identify specific broad stages.[16] But it seems likely that, with the proliferation of divinities that one finds in many polytheistic religions, as the older gods seemed increasingly irrelevant, new ones were introduced. When this happened some story was required to explain the relation of the new gods to the old ones, especially in the

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560; *LPR*, vol. 2, 747–758 / *VPR*, Part 2, 631–640. There is surprisingly little secondary literature on this topic: J. Glenn Gray, *Hegel and Greek Thought*, New York: Harper 1968, 35–52; Kathleen Dow Magnus, *Hegel and the Symbolic Mediation of Spirit*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2001, 190–194; Paul Cobben, "Religion in the Form of Art," in *Hegel's Philosophy of the Historical Religions*, ed. by Bart Labuschagne and Timo Slootweg, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2012, 99–124; Emil Wolff, "Hegel und die griechische Welt," *Antike und Abendland*, vol. 1, 1944, 163–181.

16 See Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, Mineola, New York: Dover 2002. For the Greek religion, see also Carl Kerény, *The Gods of the Greeks*, London: Thames and Hudson 1951; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. by John Raffan, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1985; Louise Bruit Zaidman and Pauline Schmitt Pantel, *Religion and the Ancient Greek City*, trans. by Paul Cartledge, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992.

cases where there were two deities who seemed to have the responsibility for the same sphere of activity. Thus, the myth of a revolt of one generation against another was introduced by way of explanation. But the key point here is that instead of a single divinity changing form over time, in the case of the Greeks new gods were presented which made up for the deficiencies of the old ones. While the mechanism was different, the result was the same: the divinities became more anthropomorphic over the course of time.

The same kind duality in the conception of the Greek gods can also be seen among the deities in the Roman pantheon.[17] Originally, Jupiter was conceived as a natural deity who was responsible for producing weather phenomena.[18] Thus he was given epithets such as *Jupiter Fulgur*, *Jupiter Tonans*, and *Jupiter Pluvius*, that is, he was the source of lightening, thunder and rain. Then in time, he was ascribed more responsibilities that were more clearly concerned with the human sphere, specifically in the realm of martial prowess, which played such a crucial role in Rome's success. In this context he had entirely different epithets such as *Jupiter Stator*, who stood fast and held the line with the Roman soldiers facing the enemy, or more straightforwardly *Jupiter Invictus*, or "the unconquered" and *Jupiter Victor*, "the victorious." Thus military victory was associated with the assistance of Jupiter. It was not uncommon for new temples to be made to him after successful battles or campaigns. Here the shift from a divinity of nature to a more anthropomorphic god concerned with human affairs is evident.

Hegel also spent much time studying Judaism, which he places under the rubric of the religions of spirit.[19] He discusses the Hebrew conception of God as

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17 For Hegel's account of the Roman religion, see *LPR*, vol. 2, 190–231 / *VPR*, Part 2, 96–137; *LPR*, vol. 2, 498–512 / *VPR*, Part 2, 397–410; *LPR*, vol. 2, 687–699 / *VPR*, Part 2, 579–591; *LPR*, vol. 2, 758–760 / *VPR*, Part 2, 639–642. See also Bart Labuschagne, "Hegel and the Roman Religion: The Religion of Expediency and Purposiveness," in *Hegel's Philosophy of the Historical Religions*, ed. by Bart Labuschagne and Timo Slootweg, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2012, 157–176.
18 For the Roman divinities, see John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion*, trans. by Janet Lloyd, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2003; Robert Turcan, *The Gods of Ancient Rome. Religion in Everyday Life from Archaic to Imperial Times*, trans. by Antonia Nevill, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2000; Edward Bisham and Christopher Smith (eds.), *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome and Italy. Evidence and Experience*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2000; Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions in Rome*, vols. 1–2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998; Robert Maxwell Ogilvie, *The Romans and their Gods in the Age of Augustus*, London, Chatto and Windus 1969.
19 Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, 152–160 / *VPR*, Part 2, 58–66; *LPR*, vol. 2, 423–454 / *VPR*, Part 2, 323–353; *LPR*, vol. 2, 669–687 / *VPR*, Part 2, 561–579; *LPR*, vol. 2, 738–742 / *VPR*, Part 2, 625–628. For secondary literature on Hegel's treatment of Judaism, see Timo Slootweg, "Hegel's Philosophy of Judaism," in *Hegel's Philosophy of the Historical Religions*, ed. by Bart Labuschagne and Timo Slootweg, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2012, 125–155; Peter C. Hodgson, "The Metamorphosis of Ju-

Creator. Prior to the Creation God is alone. There is no universe and no other thing or person. There is no other by means of which God can be determined. According to Hegel's theory of determination, a thing is what it is in relation to other things. But when God only exists on His own, then there is no relation and hence no determination.[20] If God were the only thing in the universe, then He would be indeterminate. If there were only one thing or entity, it would be impossible to think it since this thinking always requires other things to contrast it with. A thing is what it is in contrast to other things. With the creation of the universe there is now a contrastive term to the divine: God and the universe. God is then able to be distinguished from something else, from some other. This is, according to Hegel, a necessary development in the actualization of the divine.

God must thus separate himself or distinguish something from himself in order to become a determinate being vis-à-vis something else. This original act of separation is the creation: God exists and creates the universe out of nothing.[21] According to Hegel's speculative methodology, there is always a movement from an initial unity or immediacy to a separation. He believes that this is demanded by speculative logic. It lies in the nature of the concept or spirit to develop; it cannot remain static. Nothing can be determined on its own, but rather determination only comes with distinction and difference. The Jewish conception of the divine must externalize itself in order to distinguish itself from something else and thus set this development into motion. The very first form of distinction is the act of creation.

Hegel tries to capture this with a word play on the German noun *Urteil*, meaning judgment. Hegel suggests that the etymology of this word is that of the original division or separation (*Ur + Teil*). In the Book of Genesis creation is the original separation that preceded all other divisions and distinctions, for example, between light and darkness, the heaven and the earth, the water and the dry land, etc. The very first original division is between God and the universe. With the first or original separation there are then two original things: God

daism in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1987, 41–52. Cyril O'Regan, "Hegel and Anti-Judaism. Narrative and the Inner Circulation of the Kabbalah," *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1997, 141–182; Nathan Rotenstreich, "Hegel's Image of Judaism," *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1953, 33–52; Emil L. Fackenheim, "Hegel and Judaism: A Flaw in the Hegelian Mediation," in *The Legacy of Hegel. Proceedings of the Marquette Symposium 1970*, ed. by Joseph J. O'Malley et al., The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1973, 161–185; Emil L. Fackenheim, *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy. A Preface to Future Jewish Thought*, New York: Basic Books 1973, 81–126.

20 Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, 673 / *VPR*, Part 2, 565.

21 Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, 426–427 / *VPR*, Part 2, 326; *LPR*, vol. 2, 672 / *VPR*, Part 2, 564; *LPR*, vol. 2, 739 / *VPR*, Part 2, 625 f.

and the universe. God can then begin to be determined by contrast to the universe, i. e., God is what is not the universe. In contrast to the gods of the polytheistic religions which are associated with natural forces, the God of Judaism is beyond nature. He is the opposite term to nature, that is, to the Creation. For Hegel, this represents a form of religious alienation since this means the God is and remains transcendent, beyond the human sphere.

As noted, Hegel concludes with his account of Christianity as the highest form of religion. He is particularly drawn to the doctrine of the Trinity. The first part of the Trinity, the Father, Christianity shares with Judaism, that is, the idea of a transcendent Creator deity. But the key is that Christianity does not remain at this stage but instead develops it further. This God does not remain transcendent but, with the Incarnation, enters into the immanent sphere and reveals himself. Here the idea of the divine as being human, which we have traced above, reaches its culmination. But the idea of an incarnate divinity is also only a single step in the process. After the death of Christ, the Son returns to the Father, and his spirit continues to live in the Church. Thus the idea of the Holy Spirit represents for Hegel the sublation of the finite and the temporal. Hegel believes that this dynamic conception of the divine is superior to the static one of Judaism. Moreover, Christianity unites the natural religions with their focus on nature and Judaism which radically separates spirit from nature. He takes the theological dogma of the Trinity to be a speculative doctrine, which mirrors the concept (*Begriff*), that is, the movement from universal to particular, to their unity.[22]

Hegel believes that Christianity achieves the true conception not only of God but also of human beings. Christianity recognizes the absolute value of the individual as it conceives each person to have his or her own special relation to the divine. Likewise, Hegel associates Christianity with the culmination of the development of freedom since it takes the individual to be not just a physical being or a mere product of nature but rather something higher: spirit. Thus, Christianity led the way for the elimination of oppressive institutions such as slavery that failed to grasp the divine aspect in every human being. Moreover, Christianity laid the foundation for the modern world and our ideas of, for example, universal human rights and the value of conscience.

Although Hegel celebrates Christianity as the highest form of religious development, it should also be noted that this is not the final word. In his system, he places philosophy as higher than religion and thus higher than Christianity. Critics have sometimes taken his defense of Christianity to be misleading since in

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22 Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, 271–274 / *VPR*, Part 3, 196–199.

the end it is not the final truth, but there is something even higher.[23] Hegel claims that while religion in general and Christianity in particular express the speculative truth of the concept in terms of representations, philosophy, which grasps it in terms of the form alone, that is, speculative thought, is higher. For our purposes, the key point is simply to note that the conception of the divine in Christianity is one that, for Hegel, reflects the freedom of human beings.

III The Application of Hegel's Theory to Other Religions

It is possible in a sense to test Hegel's theory by applying it to other religions that he knew nothing about. The Mesoamerican religions can serve as one example of this. The Aztec and Mayan deities offer a rich field for comparison with the gods of, for example, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Egyptian polytheism, which, as we have seen, Hegel does explore. In his accounts of the world religions in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, there is no analysis of native American religious beliefs.[24] The field of Mesoamerican studies developed only after his death, and so even if he were inclined to do so, he had no real possibility of informing himself adequately about these religions.

It can be safely said that the Mesoamerican religions would fall under Hegel's category of natural religions. Their gods are primarily taken from objects of nature, for example, the Mayan jaguar god Bahlam, Cabrakan the god of mountains and earthquakes, the maize god Yum Kaax, and the deer god Wuk Sip.[25] Like the other religions treated, the Mesoamerican deities are conceived

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23 This is a larger discussion. See Walter Jaeschke, *Die Religionsphilosophie Hegels*, Darmstadt: WBG 1983; Karl Löwith, "Hegels Aufhebung der christlichen Religion," in *Hegel-Tage, 1962. Vorträge und Dokumente*, ed. by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Bonn: Bouvier 1962 (*Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 1), 193–236; William Desmond, *Hegel's God. A Counterfeit Double?*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2003; Falk Wagner, "Die Aufhebung der religiösen Vorstellung in den philosophischen Begriff," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, vol. 18, 1976, 44–73.
24 Regrettably, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel is profoundly condescending about the native cultures of the Americas. See *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, vol. 9, in *Hegel's Werke*, 100 (*Jub.*, vol. 11, 122 f.).
25 For an account of the Aztec and Mayan gods, see Ferdinand Anders, *Das Pantheon der Maya*, Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt 1963; Karl Andreas Taube, *The Major Gods of Ancient Yucatan*, Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection 1992; Cottie A. Burland and Werner Forman, *The Aztecs. Gods and Fate in Ancient Mexico*, London: Orbis 1985; Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Fifth Sun. Aztec Gods, Aztec World*, Austin: University of Texas

as both natural objects and as personified figures. For example, Chaac the Mayan god of rain, represents at first the natural force of rain, and then in the course of time becomes personified as a kind of blue monster with a long elephantine nose. But this process is still not yet complete since Chaac does not yet have a wholly human form. Similarly, the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl (and the Mayan pendant Kukulkan) originally had the form of an animal, specifically a serpent. But in the course of time he also became personified and represented in a more human form.

One striking point of comparison that Hegel presumably would have been attentive to is that, like the Egyptians,[26] the Mesoamerican cultures developed a hieroglyphic writing system, which uses animals and natural objects to represent the concepts and phonetic values. Both the Aztecs and the Mayans used primarily animals familiar to them, so to speak, as letters: the crocodile, jaguar, lizard, etc. In all of these cases this resulted in religions that were rich in symbolism.

Since the religions of nature regard natural objects as what is highest and humans as subordinate, it makes sense that the ancient peoples tried to appropriate the different powers of nature for themselves in order to be successful and gain good fortune in different areas of life. Here again we find another compelling similarity when we look at the visual representations of the Egyptians and the Mesoamerican cultures. The Egyptian priests put on masks of their animal gods (for example, Anubis) when performing sacred rituals. Similarly, the Aztecs and the Mayans wore skins, bones, and heads of animals in both sacred and secular contexts also in order to appropriate the powers of these creatures.

Greek polytheism also offers some points of commonality with the Mesoamerican religions. Although immortal, the Greek gods still have human needs and desires. They required sacrifices of food and drink. Likewise, the gods of the Aztecs and the Mayans were thought to be nourished by human blood. This created the need for the widespread institution of human sacrifice. Another commonality between the Greco-Roman deities and the Mesoamerican ones can be found in the fact that the gods also had a dialectical nature. When positively disposed, they helped people negotiate the difficulties of life, but if they were provoked or insulted, they could be nefarious and cause untold harm. Thus the role of prayer, sacrifice and ritual was of tantamount importance.

Press 1979; David Carrasco, *Daily Life of the Aztecs. People of the Sun and Earth*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press 1998.

26 Hegel, *LPWH*, vol. 1, 352 ff. / *VPWG*, vol. 1, 291 ff.

Along with the Mesoamerican religions, we can find a similar set of examples to test Hegel's theory in the Sumerian pantheon. Once again, Hegel never writes about the Sumerian religion, and so we are obliged to infer what his assessment would be based on what he says about the other religions of nature. The Sumerian god, Enki, is the god of water.[27] Initially, the natural force was revered, and then over the course of time this took on a personality and became anthropomorphic. He is represented as a human figure but with the natural element of water, that is, with the rivers of the Tigris and the Euphrates, which flow from his body.

Similarly, Utu or Shamash was originally the sun, that is, the physical entity of nature, like the god of light in Zoroastrianism. Later human elements such as ethics and justice were attributed to him, and he emerged from being a purely natural force and became personified, in much the same was as Ormuzd in Zoroastrianism. Even in the anthropomorphic depictions of him, the bright rays of the sun are seen emanating from his body. Sumerian and Mesopotamian art in general abounds in depictions of mixed deities that very much resemble those of the Egyptians. There is the "griffin demon" with the head of a bird and the body of a man, centaurs with the torso and head of a man and the lower body of a lion, the "lion demons," which have the heads of lions and the body of a human being with claws of birds instead of feet, and merman which look very much like depictions of the Greek god Oceanus with the head and torso of a man and a lower body of a fish.[28]

We can also look to Old Norse paganism for examples.[29] Hegel presumably knew something about this religion from his reading of Tacitus (if not else-

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27 For an account of Enki and the other Sumerian gods, see Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology. A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C.*, revised ed., Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1961 [1944], 30–67; Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians. Their History, Culture and Character*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1963, 112–164; Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia. Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, trans. by Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieroop, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1992, 201–286; Charles Jean, *La religion sumérienne*, Paris: Paul Geuthner 1931.

28 For these depictions and many others, see Jeremy Black and Anthony Green's useful *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, London: The British Museum Press 1992, 100, 120 and 131.

29 See Christopher Abram, *Myths of the Pagan North. The Gods of the Norsemen*, New York and London: Continuum 2011; Hilda Roderick Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, London: Penguin 1990; Hilda Roderick Ellis Davidson, *The Lost Beliefs of Northern Europe*, London and New York: Routledge 1993; Thomas A. DuBois, *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1999; John Lindow, *Norse Mythology. A Guide to Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*, New York: Oxford University Press 2002; Heather O'Donoghue, *From Asgard to Valhalla. The Remarkable History of the Norse Myths*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris

where), although he never writes anything about it. The Nordic gods seem to fol-
low the same pattern discussed above. Like Jupiter, the god Thor, was originally
the natural force of thunder and then becomes personified. He carries a hammer,
which produces the sound of thunder, which, to the Nordic mind, sounded like a
blacksmith working metal. Indeed, sometimes thunder seems to have a metallic
ring to it. Also like Jupiter, Thor took on human characteristics associated with
warfare. The god of the sea Ægir corresponds to the Greek Poseidon. He is the
force of the sea but also an anthropomorphic entity with his own court at the
bottom of the ocean.

IV Conclusion

Although Hegel never knew anything about the religion of the Mayans, Aztecs, or
Sumerians, and he never really wrote anything about the Nordic gods, his theory
of the development of the conception of the divine can been fruitfully extended
to these and other religions. While his teleological and chronological scheme is a
bit complicated and difficult to defend, his basic observation of the movement
from nature to spirit seems to hold. While in themselves the comparisons
made among the religions above might seem trivial, taken together they raise
some interesting prospects. What is compelling is that although the cultures in
question had no contact with one another, nonetheless they developed similar
religious concepts and ideas. This seems to imply that there is something correct
about Hegel's analysis of the way in which human culture develops through spe-
cific stages.

The vast number of ideas that constitute human culture are all related to one
another under the rubric that Hegel calls "spirit." All of these are reflections of
the human mind, and this includes religious beliefs and practices. We live in an
academic world of extreme specialization, and Hegel is an instructive reminder
that this specialization, as much as it might help to uncover new things, can also
distort the sphere of investigation by making us blind to important connections. I
hope to have established the important connection between philosophical an-
thropology and the philosophy of religion, which are usually treated entirely sep-
arately.

This account shows that there seems to be something universal in human
development as people gradually liberated themselves from nature and came

2008; Edward Oswald Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North. The Religion of Ancient
Scandinavia*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press 1975 [1964].

to regard themselves as spirit. At some point a shift occurred when human culture and civilization struck people as more powerful than nature, despite the long period of several millennia when people presumably believed exactly the opposite. This shift is closely connected to philosophical anthropology since it is dependent on a specific view of what human beings are.