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**Graduate Essay Prize - Winner**

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**The Relationship between Religion and State in Hegel's Thought**

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**I.**

To say that Hegel's position on the relationship between religion and state is not easy to categorise would be a vast understatement. Eluding comfortable labels, his ideas on the subject diverge from historically prevalent conceptions, which together are often thought to be exhaustive. On the one hand, Hegel's position contrasts sharply with theocratic doctrines that propose a simple identity of political and religious institutions, or subjugate the former to the latter. Almost equally distant from Hegel's position, however, are liberal and Enlightenment views that urge the complete separation of religion from secular authority and mundane politics.

This tension is characteristic of many of Hegel's writings on the subject, from the earliest to the most mature. On numerous occasions, Hegel voices his vehement opposition to the notion of a radical split between religion and the 'ethical' (*sittlich*) institutions of political power. In an early fragment from 1798 he writes, 'if the principle of the state is a complete totality, then church and state cannot possibly be unrelated',<sup>1</sup> and similar sentiments are voiced in many other writings, including Hegel's very last lectures on the Philosophy of Religion from 1831. Yet, at other junctures he contends, rather, that only 'in despotism church and state are one'.<sup>2</sup> Of all Hegel's extended discussions of the subject, one — in the Remark and Addition to §270 of the *Philosophy of Right* — lays emphasis on the cleft between church and state; others — in §552 of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (Third Edition), the aforementioned 1831 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, and the final sections of the *Philosophy of History* — seem, on the contrary, to stress the essential and eventual unity of religious and political life. To reconcile such seemingly contradictory views within a coherent position (even a *dialectically* coherent one) and salvage Hegel's position from the muddle of apparent contradictions and oblique formulations is therefore a challenge.

The challenge is certainly not made any easier when we consider the respective places 'ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*, of which the state is the culmination) and religion occupy in Hegel's philosophical system. As is well known, ethical life, which encompasses the social and political institutions of the family, civil society, and the state, belongs to the part of the Hegelian system labelled 'objective spirit.' Religion, on the other hand, occupies the intermediary position between art and philosophy in the final part of the system, namely 'absolute spirit'. Religion thus occupies a higher place in the system than *Sittlichkeit*, and (in line with Hegel's metaphysical principles) is hence a more complete, or truer, manifestation of the spiritual substance.

Hegel's assertion that 'religion is the very *substance* of the ethical life itself and of the state'<sup>3</sup> is certainly in agreement, then, with the above hierarchy (bearing in mind that in Hegel's system, whatever is more complete and occupies a higher position can also be said to be the 'substance' of whatever is lower and less complete). But if this is true, how are we to understand Hegel's claim that 'outside the ethical spirit ... it is vain to seek for true religion and religiosity',<sup>4</sup> or that 'ethical life is the most genuine cult'?<sup>5</sup> Are we to interpret such phrases as meaning that *no* aspect of religion transcends or is 'higher than' political and social institutions? How can such an interpretation possibly cohere with the aforementioned hierarchy of Hegel's system, in which religion, being part of 'absolute spirit,' is considered a higher, more complete manifestation of spirit than any political or social institution? In what follows I shall attempt to sketch in outline the relationship between religion and *Sittlichkeit* in Hegel's system, and discuss some pertinent questions regarding the justification of political power in Hegel's thought.

One last introductory comment: for the sake of delimiting the current discussion, several concerns will remain outside its scope. I shall not discuss Hegel's views on religion and public life (and the related distinction between 'private' religion and 'public' religion [*Volksreligion*]) in the *Early Theological Writings*; his treatment of the relationship between church and state in the *German Constitution*; or the sections on religion in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The question of continuity or discontinuity between these earlier writings and Hegel's later works will also be left out. Neither will the following discussion assume a predominantly historical character, tracing the shifts of emphasis in Hegel's writings back to contemporary political developments, or explaining apparent discrepancies in terms of Hegel's varying responses to immediate political and intellectual challenges.<sup>6</sup> My aim, rather, is to explain how Hegel's views on the subject, particularly as formulated in the *Philosophy of Right*, in the 1830 *Encyclopaedia*, and in the 1831 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* can be construed as a coherent philosophical position.

## II.

A brief, preliminary review of Hegel's criticism of several historically prevalent conceptions of the relation between religion and state may serve as a convenient starting point for my discussion.

First, Hegel is a critic of the type of liberalism that, regardless of the faith (or lack thereof) of those who endorse it, calls without reservation for a formal separation of the religious and the political realms, on the grounds that religion is a purely private, individual affair. For the proponents of such a liberal view (whether they themselves are atheists or not), religion is a matter of personal belief and subjective faith only, and should therefore be strictly separated from the political sphere and have no bearing on state policy. The state should not interfere — in practice or in principle — in matters of religious faith, to which it should remain completely indifferent. Hegel's fundamental criticism of this view rests, firstly, on his insistence that religion is, on the contrary, a matter of objective, certain knowledge (though in the form of *representation* [*Vorstellung*]

rather than conceptual thought), and not merely a matter of private, subjective conviction. Furthermore, as we shall see, Hegel insists that the distinction between the religious and the 'ethical' realms is a distinction in *form* only, whereas in their *content* they are identical: 'there is *one* concept of freedom in religion and state.'<sup>7</sup> In addition, the liberal view of the relationship between church and state — with its emphasis on an atomistic conception of freedom and liberty of conscience — contrasts with Hegel's non-atomistic conception of the state, according to which the ethical substantiality of human life is not to be found in the isolated individual as such, but in the *state* as an organic totality of human relationships, in which the particular individuals find their 'truth' (and hence also their genuine freedom). And since the inner convictions of the citizens of the state constitute part of this organic totality, the state cannot treat these convictions with mere indifference.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, Hegel is strongly adverse to Enlightened calls for the complete eradication of religion (rather than simply for the dissolution of its political power over secular authorities). Such demands as Voltaire's entreaty that 'theology be destroyed absolutely'<sup>9</sup> — on the grounds that religion in all its manifestations is sheer folly and mere superstition, starkly opposed to the rule of Reason — clearly conflict with Hegel's insistence on the *truth value* of religious imagery and 'representational thinking'. Whether Hegel's own worldview can be considered theistic in any meaningful sense of the word, other than a purely metaphorical one — and I believe that it cannot — is certainly open for exegetic debate. What is incontestable, however, is the pivotal and *substantial* (i.e. not merely instrumental or cynical) role of religious vocabulary and imagery in Hegel's political thought (as in the entirety of his philosophical system, in which religious imagery is the penultimate manifestation of Reason). It is the peculiar nature of what may be described as Hegel's idea of a *secularised religion* that needs to be explained then.

As is evident from the above, it would also be a gross mistake to identify Hegel's position with an insincere utilitarian standpoint — namely, with the view that a state should cultivate religious convictions in its citizens simply in order to solidify their sense of communal belonging (again, without regard for religion's truth value). Even if Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* may be likened to a 'civil religion' of sorts, the religious imagery has in Hegel's view a measure of truth that transcends mere instrumentality. While Hegel most certainly acknowledges the expediency of religious sentiment as a means to political stability and loyalty, he nevertheless insists that the relation between religion and state is essential rather than 'external', purely utilitarian, merely prudential, or the like.<sup>10</sup> Again, religion and *Sittlichkeit* (the latter culminating in the state) share the same content. Thus, the state, according to Hegel, is not a 'spiritless' institution, to which religious spirituality is added as an external, auxiliary means, but is itself an embodiment of the same free, rational spirit that manifests itself also in religion, albeit in a different form.<sup>11</sup>

But although Hegel likens the (modern) state to an 'earthly divinity',<sup>12</sup> this substantial unity of the mundane and the divine (or the divine as idiosyncratically construed by Hegel) should not be mistaken for a *theocratic* conception of the state. Two

variants of theocracy are clearly at odds with Hegel's insistence that the divine and the earthly realms are neither simply identical, nor mutually external. In the first, which Hegel often identifies with the ancient Asian world,<sup>13</sup> an 'immediate', undifferentiated *identity* exists between religious and political affairs. Catholicism, on the other hand, demands that all secular power be subjugated to a transcendent, heavenly realm (and to its earthly representatives in the form of papal authority), from which it is hopelessly *separated*. In both cases — which correspond to the first two 'moments' of Hegelian dialectical development in general: unmediated unity, followed by a separation into mutually exclusive opposites — the self-subsistence of secular political power is denied. The Hegelian *telos* of this development, however, consists in the reconciliation of these opposites, in a way that nevertheless preserves their distinctness from each other.

Lastly — and perhaps surprisingly, given his own self-proclaimed Lutheranism — Hegel is no less opposed to Luther's Two Kingdoms doctrine, in which a chasm remains between a worldly kingdom of imperfect secular law and a divine kingdom of salvation and moral perfection.<sup>14</sup> Luther's pessimism as regards the possibility of a union between 'God's word' and the 'word of man' is therefore clearly at odds with Hegel's optimistic vision of morality — at once human and divine — fully actualised in the political arena of the modern state.

### III.

In contrast to what he calls the 'one-sidedness' of all the above conceptions, Hegel considers divine spirituality and mundane authority to be neither mutually exclusive, nor simply undifferentiated, for while they are similar in *content*, they differ in *form*. 'Generally speaking', writes Hegel, 'religion and the foundation (*Grundlage*) of the state are one and the same; they are identical *in and for themselves*'.<sup>15</sup> To let such a position cohere with Hegel's seemingly opposed claim that religion and state are distinct, this somewhat cryptic phrase (though no more cryptic than Hegel's usual formulations) may have to be interpreted as follows: religion and the 'foundation of the state' are identical 'in themselves' (i.e. implicitly) since they share the same content. Both are manifestations of the same essence or concept (and 'essence' or 'concept', in Hegel's system, always constitute a merely implicit potentiality, which, in order to become actual, must develop or 'externalise' itself into explicit forms that accord with it to a lesser or greater extent). But religion and the state can also be said to be identical not only 'in themselves' but also 'in *and for themselves*' (i.e. also explicitly), for at the height of their rational development (which, as we shall soon see, can occur, according to Hegel, only in a certain ideal variant of a Protestant state), they become moments of the same totality, differing only in *form* (or, differently put, differing in their degree of completeness as manifestations of this totality). The difference between religion and the state lies, then, neither in their unified (yet merely hidden or implicit) starting point, nor in the eventual totality in which the two are reunified and reconciled, but rather in the differentiating path that mediates between their simple unity and their re-convergence within a complex, differentiated totality.

Religion and the state thus share, according to Hegel, the same content — 'absolute truth' or the 'free spirit' — which is the substance of both.<sup>16</sup> In each, however, this identical content assumes a different form. In the state, 'absolute truth' takes the form of 'objective' institutions, of a positive constitution and of determinate laws — and the individual's relationship to these 'objects' (in which, claims Hegel, one's subjective freedom is given external validity) takes the form of *rights* and *duties*. In religion, on the other hand, the 'absolute' assumes the representational form of a divine being, God. Hence, whereas in the 'ethical' realm spirit's essential (though at first implicit) freedom becomes fully actualised once it receives its explicit expression in free 'objective' institutions, in the religious realm spirit's freedom is realised once a reconciliation between the earthly and the celestial, the human and the divine, is achieved. Again, while religion and the state share the same content, essence or 'truth', they differ in form. To simply identify them with one another — as regards their form and not only their content — is to deny to the state its distinctive institutional form.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, whatever form is assumed by the 'absolute' content of religion and of the state, at their root, suggests Hegel — i.e. in essence — the religious and the political realms, though *distinct*, are not truly *separate*. The state, as we have seen, is for Hegel not a spiritless construct to which spiritual content is appended 'externally', but is itself an embodiment of the free and rational spirit (although in contrast with the three constituents of 'absolute spirit' — art, religion, and philosophy — in which spiritual *form* and spiritual *content* converge, the state is an embodiment of spirit which does not yet take a purely spiritual form, but is rather confined to the form of 'objective' institutions that stand 'over against' spirit). And whatever appears different in form, *philosophy* (being a manifestation of spirit in its truest form as *pure conceptual thought*, and therefore revealing the conceptual content implicit in each of the previous forms taken by spirit) sees as one and the same — or, rather, as differentiated moments of the same totality.<sup>18</sup>

Now, since Hegel considers religion to be part of 'absolute spirit' (i.e. of spirit manifesting itself explicitly *as spirit*), religion occupies a higher hierarchic position in his philosophical system than do the socio-political forms of 'objective spirit'. And by claiming that religion is a *higher* moment than the state, Hegel also maintains that religion is the *foundation* or substantial ground of the state: for in Hegel's system, the movement towards a higher or more complete stage of development is always also a movement towards the 'foundation' or 'groundwork' of that which preceded. Only in a higher, more fully developed totality do the earlier stages or 'moments' — abstract when taken in themselves — become part of, and can therefore be said to be 'grounded' in, a concrete whole. Thus, Hegel writes:

as is the case with all speculative process (*wie überall im Spekultativen*), this development of one thing out of another means that what appears as sequel and derivative is rather the absolute *prius* of what it appears to be mediated by.<sup>19</sup>

It is in this sense — derived from the Aristotelian conception of ‘priority’ in which whatever is subsequent in the order of development, i.e. more fully realised, is said to be ‘prior in substance’ — that religion can be said to be ‘the foundation (*Grundlage*) of the state’,<sup>20</sup> or its ‘*prius*’.

Yet, lest we stop at this identity between religion and the foundations of the state, in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel adds: ‘If, then, religion constitutes the *foundation* which embodies the ethical realm in general, and, more specifically, the nature of the state as the divine will, it is at the same time only a *foundation*; and this is where the two [the state and religion] diverge’.<sup>21</sup> Again, what Hegel seems to be emphasising here is the distinction in form between *Sittlichkeit* in general (and the state in particular) and religion: whereas religion is the ‘foundational’ totality, of which the entire ethical realm is but a moment, religion’s proper form is not that of binding political institutions. Thus, it is ‘only a foundation’ for such institutions, which properly belong in the distinct (though not separate!) realm of *Sittlichkeit*.

We may now be in a better position to understand the apparently contradictory relationship between *Sittlichkeit* and religion in Hegel’s system — i.e. to understand Hegel’s insistence on the legal and, more broadly, the ethical authority of political institutions over religious ones, despite the fact that religion occupies a higher position in his system than ethical life. As social or ‘ethical’ institutions, religious communities should always be subjugated to secular political authority. Metaphysically, however, as well as cognitively, religion is superior to ethical life, for while the latter gives its spiritual substance the form of ‘objective’ institutions (which, in spite of their inherent spirituality, are not *manifestly* spiritual), the former gives that same substance a more appropriate spiritual form. Therefore, says Hegel, religion as doctrine (*Lehren*) should remain ‘outside the domain of the state’, but as soon as such doctrines claim the status of ‘ethical’ or ‘objective principles’ — of rights, duties, mandatory laws, and so forth — they are to be brought back ‘into the province of the state’.<sup>22</sup>

To put Hegel’s position in more precise terms, it would perhaps be helpful to make here the terminological distinction (albeit one which Hegel himself does not always follow systematically) between the couplets *church-state* (‘church’ being merely the institutionally or socially organised form of religion) and *religion-state*.<sup>23</sup> While it is quite clear that, in Hegel’s opinion, ecclesiastical institutions must always obey political authority in all matters pertaining to ‘rights and duties’, the relationship between religion and *Sittlichkeit* in his system — where the former is clearly more privileged than the latter in certain respects — is yet to be elucidated more precisely. To shed light on this, it would be helpful to examine how this relationship changes, according to Hegel, in the transition from Catholicism to Protestantism.

#### IV.

As already mentioned, Hegel is strongly opposed to the notion that religious and political affairs should be unified without differentiation. Just as mistaken in his opinion, however,

is the converse view of religion and state as two irreconcilable opposites — a view that leads, paradoxically enough, to the very same result as the first: religious authority having legitimate power over the state. Hegel finds such a theocratic view in the Catholic conception of the relationship between religious and political affairs. In Catholicism, 'something else that is supposed to be more exalted' — namely, the 'abstract' religious ideal of a transcendent Kingdom of God — 'is set in opposition to the substantial foundation, to what is genuine', i.e. to the concrete realisation of such abstract ideals in the 'substantial actuality' of ethical life in the temporal world.<sup>24</sup> Parenthetically, it should be noted that whereas in the previously cited excerpts from the *Encyclopaedia* and the *Philosophy of Religion* (see above, p. 101), it is *religion* that is described as the *prins*' or 'foundation' of ethical life and the state, in this last passage the relation seems to be reversed, and ethical life is surprisingly construed as the concrete 'foundation' of merely abstract religious ideals. This strange reversal can be explained by the different contexts in which the two passages appear. In the *Encyclopaedia* excerpt quoted earlier, Hegel discusses religion and ethical life as they are understood 'speculatively' — i.e. from the point of view of speculative philosophy, which, assessing religion and *Sittlichkeit* as forms of consciousness or spirit, acknowledges the superiority and priority of the former over the latter *in this respect*. In the last passage quoted above, in contrast, Hegel discusses this relationship in the context of legal rights and duties, emphasising the priority of ethical 'principles of right' (as embodied in concrete social and political institutions) over 'religious precepts', which are abstract in the sense of having no binding legal validity and authority.<sup>25</sup> In this last, 'institutional' context, then, it is ethical life — and not religion — that is considered to be 'substantial' or 'foundational' (in the sense of constituting a more concrete totality, of which religious principles are but an abstraction).

It is Hegel's view, then, that religious precepts *as such* should not have the binding authority of political law. In Catholicism, on the contrary, as in other theocratic models in which secular law is taken, by definition, to be a corruption of religious ideals, the former is by necessity made subservient to the latter. By envisaging a radical split between the divine and the worldly, Catholicism sees in religious duties an ideal wholly transcendent, sometimes even opposed, to earthly ethical duties. In the Catholic view, then, spiritual salvation (*Heil*) and temporal well-being (*Woh*) are diametrically opposed.

To illustrate this Catholic 'embargo' on earthly duties, Hegel opposes to each of three Catholic precepts an antithetical 'ethical' duty, in a tripartite comparison that corresponds to his own threefold division of *Sittlichkeit* into the family, civil society, and the state: (a) celibacy versus conjugal love and familial obligations; (b) the renunciation of earthly possessions versus the accumulation of property through labour and economic industriousness (the latter, in Hegel's view, being how human beings liberate themselves from natural, 'unspiritual' necessity); and, finally, (c) the renunciation of one's own subjective will by way of total obedience to an external, transcendent divine authority, versus free participation in the state (i.e. in an institution that is an 'objective embodiment' of the subjective will rather than its purely alien negation).<sup>26</sup> Interestingly,

Hegel's choice of words in assessing the Catholic breach between religious and ethical duties — 'a monstrous distinction'<sup>27</sup> — recalls the way in which he formulates, in a passage from the *Encyclopaedia*, his allegations against secularised *liberal* conceptions of the state, which take the two 'inseparables', religion and state, to be indifferent to each other: this, says Hegel, is 'the *monstrous* blunder of our times'.<sup>28</sup> Again, Hegel is equally averse to these two apparently opposed worldviews — the exclusively religious and the formally secular — on quite similar grounds, and using a similar vocabulary: both deny, in his language, an essential 'spiritual' content to the state.

Hegel finds a similar, peculiar affinity between another pair of rival moral conceptions: the transcendent, otherworldly morality of Catholicism and the 'abstract' morality of the radical revolutionary Enlightenment. This strange affinity is insinuated in two of Hegel's rather well-known phrases. Firstly, it is Hegel's belief that '[a] people that has a bad concept of God, has also a bad state, bad government, and bad laws'.<sup>29</sup> And in an equally striking passage, which clearly alludes to the French Revolution, he calls it 'nothing but a modern folly' to imagine it would be possible to 'make a revolution without having made a reformation'.<sup>30</sup> The targets of Hegel's criticism here seem to be (a) the aforementioned rupture between religious sentiment and political institutions, which in Hegel's view has a politically destabilising effect; and (b) the political destructiveness of 'abstract' principles — be they religious tenets or moral postulates grounded in a purely abstract rationalism — which are wrongly perceived as transcending any 'determinate' socio-political traditions and institutions.

As to the first of these points, Hegel imputes the French Revolution's inability to establish a stable political order and its ultimate collapse to the Reign of Terror, to the fact that 'disposition (*Gesinnung*) and religion', so crucial for political stability, 'were not taken into account'.<sup>31</sup> They were not taken into account precisely because Catholicism, still dominant in France, precluded the possibility of a union between religious sentiment and political rationality — and the radical French revolutionaries, however vehement in their enmity toward religious tradition, nevertheless shared with Catholicism this deeply grounded attitude.

But Hegel's critique of the Revolution and of what he considers to be the philosophical formulation of its moral and political principles (particularly in Rousseau and Kant) — and here we come to the second aforementioned point — parallels his criticism of Catholicism in yet another crucial respect. A structural similarity can be traced, in Hegel's account, between the mutual alienation of the divine and the earthly realms in Catholicism, on the one hand, and the Enlightenment's inability to bridge the gap between an abstract concept of freedom and the determinate political institutions through which such freedom could become concrete, on the other. The gist of Hegel's criticism (directed here against Catholicism, among other theocratic conceptions, but applicable to all 'abstract' moral conceptions) is presented in the following passage:

Those who refuse to go beyond the form of religion when confronted by the state behave like those who ... claim to be right even if they invariably stop at the *essence* instead of proceeding beyond this abstraction to existence.<sup>32</sup>

In Catholicism, as in any other manifestation of what Hegel calls religious 'fanaticism',<sup>33</sup> it is divine authority that is construed, in the above terms, as pure 'essence'. What Catholicism fails to understand, Hegel charges, is that earthly, political institutions constitute an embodiment of that ideal essence, rather than its corruption.

In quite the same way, Hegel criticises those who take themselves to be guided by 'abstract' rational principles of moral freedom and who regard any 'determinate' embodiments of such principles (such as political parties and factions) as a corruption of the pure concept of freedom. In Hegel's terms, they too stop at the 'essence' without advancing to the level of determinate 'existence'. Revolution was ineffectual without a reformation, then, not merely because the French revolutionaries' principle of freedom was radically opposed to a still culturally dominant Catholic ideal of servitude, but also because the revolutionaries' very conception of freedom suffered, on Hegel's account, from the same type of rupture that characterised Catholicism: that between abstract (either religious or moral) 'essence' and the determinate social and political manifestations of that essence.

Formulated differently, we can understand Hegel as criticising both Catholicism and the abstract morality of, say, Kant, for letting political authority be judged *against external* or transcendent criteria — in the former case, against the authoritative standards imposed by a transcendent divine being; in the latter, against moral criteria wholly abstracted from any determinate political and social reality, a 'beyond' (*Jenseits*) to which the world of political and social action can only aspire asymptotically. The attempt to defend the sphere of political action and the socio-political institutions of 'ethical life' as *immanently* moral — or, which amounts to the same, to understand *Moralität* as but an abstract 'moment' of *Sittlichkeit* — is, in stark contrast, one of the main aims of Hegel's political philosophy. In other words, Hegel wishes to vindicate political institutions by construing them as concrete and rational manifestations of moral principles, which, taken in themselves (i.e. abstracted from or unmediated by such institutions), are not yet fully rational.

As the above shows, a parallel can be drawn between this view of an abstract morality that can be fully actualised only in and through the determinate political institutions of ethical life, on the one hand, and Hegel's notion of an abstract divine principle that can be fully realised only in and through earthly human activity, on the other. The submergence of God in the world parallels in this sense the immersion of moral ideals in the sphere of social and political action: in both cases, the result is a negation of transcendence. And — now linking together the two sides of the analogy — such an *immanent* vindication of ethical life can occur, in Hegel's view, only once it is understood that abstract divinity becomes actual or 'concrete' *through the mediation of*

worldly human activity (rather than in *opposition* to it) — once it is grasped that ‘human beings are not passive within divine grace [but] participate in it essentially with their subjective freedom’.<sup>34</sup> Such a reconciliation of the divine with the worldly (and, analogously, of morality with the realities of social and political life) is realisable, according to Hegel, only where certain Protestant convictions hold sway (although precisely what sort of Protestantism Hegel has in mind is yet to be explained — it differs, as has already been noted, from Luther’s position on the relationship between secular authority and religious piety).

The dissolution in Hegelian Protestantism of any transcendent ground for the justification of political power seems, however, to present Hegel with a new difficulty regarding the legitimacy of political rule. In a particularly abstruse passage from the 1831 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* he writes:

This relationship [i.e. one in which political rule is thought to be *immanently* justified, as if ‘originating from God’] has come about in Protestant states and it can occur only in such states, for in them the unity of religion and the state is present. The laws of the state have both a rational and a divine validity due to this presupposed original harmony, and religion does not have its own principles that conflict with those that are valid in the state. *But through fixed adherence to the formal principle a wide scope is granted to arbitrariness, tyranny and oppression.*<sup>35</sup>

The ‘formal principle’ mentioned in the last sentence — ‘fixed adherence’ to which might result in tyranny — is, as Hegel mentions a paragraph earlier, the principle that ‘one ought to heed the laws whatever they may be’.<sup>36</sup> If I understand Hegel correctly (and due to the difficulty of this excerpt and of the passages surrounding it I shall exercise caution), what seems to trouble him here is the possibility of deriving a ‘might makes right’ conclusion from what he considers to be the Protestant union (or rather, reunion) between religious ideals and political realities, and from the consequent loss of any ‘external’ relations between the two. When political power breaks the stranglehold of external ecclesiastical authority and transcendent criteria for judging its legitimacy are done away with, what can prevent the law of the state, conceived as an *internally* justified ‘immediate revelation of God’s will’,<sup>37</sup> from falling into arbitrariness?

Hegel’s apparent solution, offered later on in the paragraph from which the above quotation is taken, combines the aforementioned principle of immanent justification with what Hegel construes as a Protestant principle of manifest exotericism, according to which what is justifiable (because rational) does not remain hidden or esoteric, directly revealed to a privileged (ecclesiastic or political) class alone, but is ‘open to everyone’,<sup>38</sup> i.e. open to public critique. It is the *exoteric*, universal accessibility of what is both right and rational that is supposed to make up for the loss of ‘external’, transcendent moral or religious yardsticks for justifying political rule, and thus to guard against the sheer arbitrariness of power feared in their absence.<sup>39</sup> In order to do away with such potential

arbitrariness, however, it is necessary to go beyond the merely 'formal principle' of deeming earthly law inherently justified, and to show precisely in and through *which* earthly laws the divine law manifests itself. What makes this possible, according to Hegel, is the fundamental principle, realised in Hegel's version of Protestantism, that the divine law can (and eventually must) be the object of certain *and* exoteric knowledge. Whereas in Catholicism God's word is considered to be the object of certain knowledge, yet only esoterically so (i.e. for only a limited, privileged group); and whereas in Lutheran Protestantism the divine realm is equally accessible to everyone, but such access is reduced to the level of merely subjective faith and *feeling*; in a fully developed, rational Protestant society, as Hegel conceives it, certain knowledge of the divine (which for Hegel, let us not forget, is nothing but the 'representational' form of the *rational*) can become manifest to everyone. Thus, insofar as secular authority becomes an adequate manifestation of the fully developed relationship between human consciousness and God (that is to say, in non-religious terms, a relationship in which nothing in the world remains alien or purely external to the rational human consciousness), it can escape arbitrariness in spite of the absence of any *external* criteria for its justification.

#### V.

That Hegel's notion of a fully rational state — one in which 'the principles of the religious and of the ethical conscience at last become one and the same: free spirit knowing itself in its rationality and truth'<sup>40</sup> — is linked in his thought with Protestantism should by now be clear. As mentioned earlier, however, this union of 'religious and ethical conscience' is *not* to be identified with the political ramifications of Luther's early Protestantism. In Luther's so-called 'Two Kingdoms' doctrine (formulated in his 1523 essay, 'On Temporal Authority'), an inevitable chasm remains between a 'worldly kingdom' of secular law and a 'heavenly kingdom' of salvation. In brief, for Luther, moral perfection is a matter of pure subjective faith and devotion, not of adherence to laws and to political institutions (to what Hegel would call the 'objective' manifestations of spirit). Devout believers, writes Luther, 'need no temporal law or sword'.<sup>41</sup> If they should nevertheless obey these, this is merely for the sake of their morally imperfect fellow human beings, who regrettably do need such forceful external guidance.<sup>42</sup>

What Hegel advocates, in contrast, is — as several commentators have discerned<sup>43</sup> — some sort of 'neo-Protestantism' or 'second Reformation', under which ethical life itself would become 'the most genuine cult'.<sup>44</sup> In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel uses this last term (cult, *Kultus*) to refer to the unity of the internal and external aspects of religion — i.e. the unity of religious disposition and religious *practice*, the outward expression of religious convictions in 'actions and duties'.<sup>45</sup> For the social and political institutions of *Sittlichkeit* to become 'the most genuine cult' is, then, for them to become (and for them to replace religion as) the ultimate institutional source for the *practical obligations* that express such inner convictions. Of course, this last assertion needs to be qualified: obviously, Hegel is not claiming that under the conditions of modern

social and political life religion can no longer have its own distinct practical manifestations — church services and ceremonies, participation in the socially organised activities of religious communities, and so on. Hegel does not deny that religion — even his version of the Protestant religion, attuned as it is to the demands of modern *Sittlichkeit* — can still have its special institutional practices, governed by its own distinct systems of rules. What Hegel denies, however, is that such religious practices can retain the absolutely *binding*, duty-imposing status that they previously enjoyed. It is this aspect of religion that is wholly subsumed by *Sittlichkeit*, which now remains the only sphere in which the compulsory language of binding duties is proper.<sup>46</sup>

Yet, the subjection (in this sense) of religion to ‘ethical’ practice does not stand in conflict with what we established earlier — namely, Hegel’s insistence on the essential unity of these two practices. That secular institutions fully inherit the supremely authoritative role previously assigned to religious ones in no way implies, in Hegel’s view, the radical separation of the religious and the ethical, but, on the contrary, their ‘immanent interpenetration’.<sup>47</sup> The institutions of modern *Sittlichkeit* are seen as *fit* to inherit the above role precisely because, as noted earlier, Hegel thinks they share the same content with religious phenomena: the ethical relationship between the subjective will and the social and political institutions in which it is ‘objectified’, on the one hand, and the religious relationship between human subjects and their divine object, on the other, are just two different forms of the same fundamental spiritual relationship. Admittedly, this last statement may seem a trivial truism within the Hegelian context (after all, would Hegel not consider *any* two phenomena, of whatever kind, as manifestations of the same ‘implicit’ essence?). The stronger and more interesting claim, then, is that in the Protestant state, as Hegel conceives it, the unity of religion and the state is finally ‘present’,<sup>48</sup> or fully explicit, and this is so, presumably, because it is only in rational *Sittlichkeit*, on the one hand, and in rational Protestantism, on the other, that both these relationships, the ethical and the religious, attain their highest respective forms — ones in which subjective consciousness finally recognises itself in, or is ‘at home’ (*bei sich*) with, its own object.

Hegel’s conception of religion as an elevated form of consciousness — indeed, as a form of *knowledge* rather than mere faith — also has implications for his position on religious tolerance. If Hegel allows religious practice and doctrine some measure of autonomy within the state — and if, relative to his times, his attitude toward religious minorities may indeed be viewed as tolerant — this is certainly not because he considers the object of religious faith to be something unknowable, some Kantian ‘thing in-itself’ that exceeds in principle the reach of human reason. On the contrary, Hegel asserts that the highest object of religion — the absolute idea in the representational form of God — is amenable to complete rational (human) knowledge; it is not merely a conjecture which *ought* to be posited on the *moral* grounds of practical reason but can never be theoretically verified (or refuted).<sup>49</sup> It is Hegel’s view that the objective ‘truthfulness’ of various religions *can* be judged. Thus, even if we were to define Hegel’s position as religiously

tolerant, it is quite clear that his tolerance in no way stems from a pluralistic view of religious faith as a merely subjective matter, unsusceptible to *knowledge*. Hegel's position is indeed one of 'toleration in the proper sense of the word'<sup>50</sup> in that it consists merely in the willingness to *put up* with variants of religious faith that deviate from what is (purportedly) known to be objectively truthful. This sort of tolerance has nothing to do with agnosticism, or with an attitude of indifference toward inner, subjective beliefs: there *is*, in Hegel's mind, a difference between a loyal citizen of the state whose inner religious convictions cohere with his ethical duties, and one who grudgingly acquiesces in these duties with sighs of resignation.<sup>51</sup> A strong state, says Hegel, can tolerate the latter as long as he or she fulfils his or her ethical duties and acts *outwardly* in accordance with the law of the state (and the stronger a state is internally, the more tolerant it can be in this regard). Furthermore, even a sect that does *not* fulfil all political duties — the Quakers are given as an example — can be tolerated, if small enough, by an internally secure state.<sup>52</sup> It is evident, however, that in Hegel's view the state cannot be completely indifferent to the inner religious convictions of the general mass of its people. Since the state, according to Hegel, is not a mere 'mechanical' or utilitarian instrument directed solely at the attainment of non-spiritual ends, but is itself a spiritual 'organism' that actualises itself through the subjective consciousness of its citizens, it cannot sever itself from the citizens' inner dispositions, which are an essential moment of its own totality.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, let us remember that Hegel's religious tolerance, and the degree of autonomy he accords to religious practice, are only in effect as long as the activity of religious communities retains its proper *voluntary* form and does not attempt to assume the form of legally binding rights and duties. As soon as inner religious subjectivity (which in most cases can be treated *as if* it were a private matter) is externalised to become an 'objectively' existing institution (which owns property, employs people in its service, and so forth), 'it emerges from the inner realm into that of worldly affairs and hence into the province of the state, thereby placing itself *immediately* under its laws'.<sup>54</sup>

It is evident, then, that the institutions of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* leave no room for religion conceived as a supremely authoritative source of social and political obligation. If religion can possibly survive its supersession by 'ethical life' and retain some measure of autonomy, it is only in its capacity as an 'absolute' form of spiritual self-consciousness — a form of self-consciousness in which reality's essential spiritual *content* assumes an appropriately spiritual *form*. Whether, in the advent of Hegel's own self-proclaimed consummation of philosophical thought, religion can retain its autonomy *even as a privileged form of consciousness* is another question — one that surpasses the scope of the current discussion and should be addressed within an inquiry into the relationship between religion and philosophy in Hegel's thought. Are we to understand Hegel as suggesting in this respect the 'end of religion' in much the same way that he announces the 'end of art'?<sup>55</sup> Suffice it to say that in such a case, not only would the institutional aspect of religion 'pass over' to ethical life and the state, but the entirety of religion would

be swallowed whole by the Scylla of *Sittlichkeit* and the Charybdis of philosophical thought.

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## Notes

I wish to thank Klaus E. Kaehler, Frederick Neuhouser, Zvi Tauber, and Stephen Houlgate for their valuable comments and criticisms on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke 1: Frühe Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 444. In the few cases where, to the best of my knowledge, a text has not been translated into English, or where the existing English translation seems unsatisfactory, I provide my own translation, with reference to the German edition. In all other cases, only English editions will be cited.

<sup>2</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophie des Rechts: Die Vorlesung von 1819/20*, Hrsg. von Dieter Henrich (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), p. 225. See also G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, tr. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §270R, p. 301.

<sup>3</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind: Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)*, tr. William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), §552, p. 283 (my italics; substituting 'ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*) for Wallace's 'moral life').

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Vol. I)*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, tr. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 446.

<sup>6</sup> An example of such an approach would be Laurence Dickey's 'Hegel on Religion and Philosophy,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 301–347. Of course, to gain a more complete understanding of Hegel's views, one must engage in such historical inquiries into the immediate political and intellectual circumstances of their development. This, however, would call for a different kind of study, and one much more comprehensive in scope.

<sup>7</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Vol. I)*, p. 452.

<sup>8</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 297.

<sup>9</sup> Voltaire, *Political Writings*, ed. David Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 145.

<sup>10</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind: Encyclopaedia III*, §552, p. 284. Here, for example, Hegel rejects the instrumental view that religion is merely desirable for the sake of strengthening one's sentiments of group loyalty. See also *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 292: though 'partly [a] means to education', religion is also an end in itself.

<sup>11</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 295.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, §272A, p. 307. What can be understood here as a *simile* ('wie ein Irdisch-Göttliches' – *Werke 7: Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, p. 434; my italics) should not be confused with the dictum often — and falsely — ascribed to Hegel (e.g. with slight variations in both translations of the *Philosophy of Right*), namely, that the state is 'the march of God on earth.' As both Walter Kaufmann (*Hegel's Political Philosophy*, ed. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Atherton Press, 1970], pp. 3–4) and Shlomo Avineri (*Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972], pp. 176–7) long ago made clear, this is a mistranslation of what is actually asserted in §258A of the German text: 'es ist der Gang Gottes in der Welt, dass der Staat ist' ('it is God's way in the world, that the state is'). Of course, this is not to underplay the religious vocabulary Hegel does use in relation to the state, or to sidestep the necessity of explicating it.

<sup>13</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 301. See also G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 113.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, 'Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed,' in *Selected Political Writings*, ed. J. M. Porter, tr. J. J. Schindel (Lanham: University Press of America, 1974), pp. 55–56.

<sup>15</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke 16: Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion I* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 236; I have slightly modified Hodgson's English translation (*Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Vol. I)*, p. 452).

<sup>16</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Vol. I)*, pp. 451–2. See also Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 299.

<sup>17</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270R, pp. 301–2; Hegel repeats much of this line of argumentation in the Addition to this clause.

<sup>18</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 299: 'It is philosophical insight which recognises that church and state are not opposed to each other as far as their content is concerned, which is truth and rationality, but merely differ in form'.

- <sup>19</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind (Encyclopaedia III)*, §552, p. 283.
- <sup>20</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Vol. I)*, p. 452.
- <sup>21</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 292.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, §270R, p. 299. See also the Addition to the same clause, §270A, pp. 303-4.
- <sup>23</sup> A similar distinction is suggested by Walter Jaeschke in his *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 261.
- <sup>24</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Vol. I)*, p. 455.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 454.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 455-6. See also Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind (Encyclopaedia III)*, § 552, p. 286.
- <sup>27</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Vol. I)*, p. 456.
- <sup>28</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind (Encyclopaedia III)*, §552, p. 284 (my italics).
- <sup>29</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Vol. I)*, p. 452.
- <sup>30</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind (Encyclopaedia III)*, §552, p. 287. See also *The Philosophy of History*, p. 453.
- <sup>31</sup> Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 449. Briefly put, Hegel's position on the role of *Gesinnung* (normally translated as *disposition* or *conviction*) is that a truly rational state requires both 'objective' laws and institutions, and the appropriate subjective dispositions to support them. Cf. *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Vol. I)*, pp. 458-9.
- <sup>32</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270R, pp. 292-3.
- <sup>33</sup> Hegel's comments on 'fanaticism' as 'the refusal to admit particular differences' (*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270A, p. 304) can equally be applied to theocratic regimes, in which religious tenets take on the form of political duties, and to the revolutionary Reign of Terror.
- <sup>34</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Vol. I)*, p. 456.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 453 (my italics).
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 453-4. The notion of a covenant running 'from God through the laity to the King, and not through the King to the laity' (see the notes to G. W. F. Hegel, *Political Writings*, ed. L. Dickey and H. B. Nisbet, tr. H. B. Nisbet [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], p. 317, n.12) resembles what I call here the 'exoteric' principle.
- <sup>39</sup> In this context, it may be worthwhile to note that it is a principle of Hegel's thought in general that arbitrariness and 'caprice' are done away with precisely through the dialectical negation (*Aufhebung*) of simply external relations.
- <sup>40</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke 10: Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), §552, p. 365 (my translation, slightly altering Wallace's in the *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 291).
- <sup>41</sup> Luther, *Selected Political Writings*, p. 54.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-59.
- <sup>43</sup> See Dickey and Nisbet's 'General Introduction' to Hegel's *Political Writings*, pp. xxv-xxvii.
- <sup>44</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Vol. 1)*, p. 446.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190, n14; see also p. 142.
- <sup>46</sup> I thank Stephen Houlgate for asking me to clarify my formulation of this point.
- <sup>47</sup> See Hegel, *Werke 10: Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III*, §552, p. 359: 'Der göttliche Geist muss das Weltliche immanent durchdringen' ('the divine spirit must interpenetrate the worldly realm immanently' — my translation, slightly altering Wallace's in the *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 286).
- <sup>48</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (Vol. 1)*, p. 453.
- <sup>49</sup> Contrast this with Kant: 'This idea of a moral ruler of the world is a task for our practical reason. Our concern is not so much to know what he is in himself (*an sich selbst*) (his nature) but what he is for us (*für uns*) as moral beings', Immanuel Kant, 'Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,' tr. George di Giovanni, in *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 165. A central Hegelian idea is, of course, the 'sublation' of precisely this opposition between '*an sich*' and '*für uns*'.
- <sup>50</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 295.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, §270R, p. 294.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, §270R, p. 295. Note, however, that while Hegel writes in favour of awarding all civil and political rights to religious groups that deviate from what he considers to be the true or 'consummate' religion (e.g. the Jews), his religious tolerance (much like John Locke's) is not extended to atheists: since religion is an

'integrating moment' in the state, the state should require that all its citizens belong to *some* religious community (ibid.). Cf. John Locke, *A Letter on Toleration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 135.

<sup>53</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 297; §270A, p. 303. True, §270A asserts: 'what [the state] requires has the shape of a legal duty, and it is indifferent to the emotional attitude with which this duty is performed'. Yet, if we are to remain within the contours of Hegel's general argumentation on this point, such assertions of 'indifference' cannot be taken literally. The state's lack of *interference* with the inner dispositions with which legal duties are performed cannot be confused here with genuine *indifference*.

<sup>54</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §270R, p. 296.

<sup>55</sup> For a fairly recent 'end-of-religion' interpretation of Hegel, see Walter Jaeschke's 'Philosophical Theology and Philosophy of Religion,' in *New Perspectives on Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, ed. David Kolb (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 1-18. For a counter-argument, see M. J. De Nys' 'Philosophical Thinking and the Claims of Religion,' in the same volume, pp. 19-26. Again, this time-honored interpretative controversy, whose historical origins extend back to the writings of Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Feuerbach, will not be expounded here.