I. Hegel and the Problem of Religious Representation

I

DIFFICULTIES regarding the nature of religious language have been a central concern of contemporary philosophy of religion. This is consonant with the widespread emphasis in contemporary philosophy upon the exploration of language itself. The defense of religious language, generally within the context of a pervasive scientific culture, and particularly against positivistically minded attacks, represents an important strand in this widespread emphasis. Yet this contemporary concern restates a perennial problem: namely, concerning the precise status of religious representation, especially vis-à-vis the norms of rational reflection. The representational and imagistic dimension of religious language has frequently been noted as one of its chief characteristics. Yet sometimes religious representation and rational reflection seem to tussle on the same terrain and enforce different demands. Religious representation invites man to participate in a sacred universe with its rituals of worship and reverent invocations of divinity. Rational reflection, by contrast, seems to introduce a critical pause in this participation, demanding a certain detachment from naive commitments, asking the thinker to consider crucial ambiguities that may mark religious representation.

Thus rational reflection and religious representation sometimes appear in tension; let us call it the tension between critical detachment and reverent participation. Indeed taken to the extreme, the critical bent of rational reflection might seem corrosive of religious reverence. This tension has repeatedly surfaced in different guises throughout history. For instance, in the ancient era we come across the tension of *logos* and *mythos,* revealed very clearly in Plato's *Euthyphro* in the respective approaches of Socrates and Euthyphro to the definition of piety. In medieval times we come across it in the attempt to relate reason and faith. In the modern era, the attack

of the *Aufklärung* on superstition and fanaticism expresses one aspect of the problem; while in our own time, scientific reason, particularly in its positivistic interpretation, raises for the philosopher continuing questions about the role of religious language. The drive for 'demythologization' contains a related desire on the part of religion itself, namely to acknowledge and come to terms with the rights of rational norms.

The problem comes to the fact that religious representation is often ambiguous. Religious representation does not carry, as it were, its own immediate interpretation: it is not always self-interpreting. Different responses to this are possible. We might react negatively, and in positivistic fashion, dismiss such ambiguity as a sign of the inherent untenability of religious representation. We might also react more positively, say in the manner of some hermeneuticists: modern, scientific man does have difficulties, especially in understanding the representations of another, non-scientific culture; yet with proper discernment he may undertake the interpretation of these representations, and from within appropriate again something of their inherent meaningfulness. With regard to this ambiguous character of religious representation, and the different responses possible for reason, one thinker deserving continued attention is Hegel. For one thing, Hegel's philosophy of religion, as Fackenheim indicates, is not concerned with 'object' theology, but with 'relational' theology.[1] And we must say that religious representation is not just an 'object' for external investigation, but a 'relation' for reflection: religious representation does not just pin down some fixed 'object' and classify this as 'God'; rather it attempts to give some concrete articulacy to the living relations possible between the human and the divine. In addition, the relation of representation and rational thought, between *Vorstellung* and *Denken,* and more generally between religion and philosophy, continues to be controversial among Hegel's commentators. This is partly conditioned by the predominance of Left-Hegelians after Hegel's death, and the anthropological reduction of theology by thinkers like Feuerbach and Marx. The controversy continues because this reduction squares uneasily with the subtleties of Hegel's own somewhat elusive teachings.[2]

Most importantly, however, the issue remains controversial because Hegel, I believe, did attempt to do genuine justice to the ambiguity of religious representation. He did so in a manner which inevitably appears unsatisfactory to those who would completely criticise religion and those who would brook no criticism at all. His position tries to avoid these alternatives. On the one hand, it does not dodge the difficulty by separating religious representation and reason, defusing the issue with the claim that religion and philosophy have nothing essential to do with one another, as is a temptation, say, in Wittgensteinian 'fideism'.[3] There is a genuine tension between the

two, such that philosophy and religion may clash. On the other hand, this clash need not generate the corrosive criticism of the *Aufklärung*, nor the reductive criticism of post-Hegelian humanisms, nor yet again the destructive criticisms of scientism or positivism. For this real tension of religion and philosophy also reveals a relation, a bond. consequently, philosophy must assume a complex stance: at once entirely open to what religious representation may reveal; and yet at the same time capable of reflecting upon its complete adequacy. That philosophical reason can take up a position both affirmative and critical reflects, as we shall see, something of the rich ambiguity of religious representation: that religious representation may reveal man's highest attainment, yet even in this, it may be marked by a limitation. The issue here with Hegel is not just historical, but philosophic and systematic. Hegel helps us understand the ambiguity of religious representation; yet in addressing this, his account is not itself always free from ambiguity. This, coupled with the recurrent nature of the problem, makes a rethinking of Hegel's view instructive.

Of course, Hegel ranges widely over the many sides of the religious phenomenon.[4] But for present purposes we can concentrate on three essential facets of the issue: first, Hegel's characterization of religious representation; second, the ambiguity or 'doubleness' in this account which allows it, despite its ultimately positive account of representation, to be exploited for negative purposes by a Left-Hegelian reading; third, the question whether religion itself within its own resources can deal with its own ambiguous representations, or whether ultimately only the movement to philosophical reason can do so, as Hegel seems to suggest.

II

Let us first rehearse some of the chief features of Hegel's account of representation. The intricacies of Hegel's view, spread over many of his writings, need not detain us[5] but the following points are necessary. Representation, or what Hegel speaks of as *Vorstellung*, is essential to the articulation of the religious consciousness. *Vorstellung* is not purely rational thought, for it is always marked by some sensuous or imagistic dimension. At the same time, it is not a sensuousness devoid of significance. On the contrary, *Vorstellung* is something intermediate between purely rational thought and thoughtless sensuousness. Indeed, *Vorstellung* expresses a form of thinking, though a form of thinking not fully free from the need of a sensuous image.[6] Moreover, as such a form of thought, religious representation entails a process of *mediation*. In its religious representations the human spirit mediates with itself in terms of its

own sense of religious significance, and also mediates between the
human spirit as finite and God conceived of as infinite Spirit or *Geist*.
As a form of mediation bound up with a sensuous and imagistic
medium, religious representation always has an essential root in the
finite world, even though the meaning it aims to convey cannot be
exhausted by the sheerly finite, taken alone. Thus the representations
of religion are inevitably *particular* representations, though *what* they
represent can never be confined to the level of a mere particular thing.
Invariably, then, religious representation exhibits a tension between
the sensuous and the supersensible, between man's own self-
mediation and his mediation with more ultimate powers, between
finiteness in the mode of representing and the infinitude of the content
thought to be represented. All this follows from the fact that any
religious representation purports to be a disclosure, through a finite
reality, of a 'reality' that is not itself just finite. Thus the Thomist
doctrine of analogy might be seen as responding to this dilemma
forced on us by the tension between the finite and the infinite in
religious representation. Analogy serves the role of mediator, since it
brings to articulation a certain complex conjunction of finite and
infinite. The more postivistically inclined response, by contrast, starts
from the finite, but also just stays there, since any mediation with
something further is excluded by its principles of meaningfulness. The
positivist view, is, of course, an extreme. But any empirically minded
philosophy must face this difficulty, as the doctrine of analogy tries to
do. Likewise Hegel — contrary to the still widespread view of him as
the abstract thinker *par excellence* — insists strongly on contact with
the concrete, and attempts to meet the problem of mediation in his
own terms.

Hegel focuses on this aspect of religious representation by
speaking of its *form* and *content*. He is quite willing to grant religion
its involvement with a reality that carries ultimate significance. Its
involvement with and articulation of the ultimate, constitutes the
content of religious representation. Religion reaches this attainment
in its own right and on its own terms. It does not have to wait upon
philosophy for a certification of genuineness. Within religion itself a
'lifting up', an 'elevation' (*Erhebung*) of the finite to the infinite is
already in the process of being accomplished.[7] Thus, for Hegel,
religion (along with art and philosophy) is one of the three highest
modes of meaning that comprise the realm of Absolute Spirit.
Religion is marked by an absolute dimension, which comes most to
the fore when we discern that the content of its representations is
God. But though this, its content may confer on it its absoluteness, its
mode of representing the Absolute, may not be correspondingly
absolute. The form of religious representation always exploits the
finite as disclosing the infinite, and so this form never completely shakes
itself free from finitude. Put differently, the sensuous, imagistic

side of *Vorstellung* has its purpose not completely *in itself,* but rather in its purported manifestation and articulation of a significance that is spiritual (*Geistig*). And this is where we come across the inherent ambiguity of religious representation. For the sensuous form itself tends to function in a *double* way. On the one hand, we need to pass through and beyond its mere sensuousness, in order to apprehend its non-sensuous content. On the other hand, since we have to pass through the sensuous form to attain contact with the content, invariably the sensuous forms seems to separate us from the content. As a mediator, the sensuous form of representation both unites us with the content and separates us from it. The sensuous form of representation reveals itself as relative to the finite and the condi-tioned, while the content it claims to reveal is said to be infinite and unconditioned. If you like, it seems to be both a gateway giving us access and a gate that bars our path.

This double way of apprehending the religious representation is reflected in a certain 'doubleness' in Hegel's own evaluation of representation. For this evaluation is at once critical and affirmative. It is affirmative in that religious representation can disclose a genuine, indeed absolute content. It is critical in that, while the content disclosed may be absolute, the form or mode of its disclosure may not be itself absolute. There results an incommensurability between the form and the content which produces ambiguity at the heart of the religious representation. Indeed this result generates a certain internal instability in religious representation which forces Hegel to consider a further form of disclosure of the absolute content, namely the philosophical concept, or *Begriff.* The sensuous form of religious representation sets the content at a distance before the mind (the *vor-* of *Vorstellung*); so it tempts us to think of the absolute content in the form of finite things. There is the additional difficulty for Hegel, that this setting of the content at a distance tends to impart to it an inappropriate otherness. On the one hand, the *Vorstellung* intends to manifest or make present the content. On the other hand, its form tends to fix this content as a *Jenseits.* The content is re-presented; it is not fully presented, made present in the fullest form. In a word, the form of *Vorstellung* makes the content to be both present and 'else-where'.

The chief difficulty with this is, I think, that if we inappropriately accentuate this 'elsewhere', then the 'doubleness' of representation begins to turn into a *dualism* between man and God, with the result that their mediation, in and through the representation, may tend to collapse into their *opposition.* Hegel, I believe, is not saying that this *inevitably* happens. Rather this is a perennial danger, given the character of religious representation. The real affirmative intention of representation is to mediate the opposition of finite and infinite, man and God, and thus to transcend the separation that may alienate the

two. The form in which it effects this mediation, however, may be liable to reinstate the estranging separation it purports to transcend. For this reason the form of representation may not itself be completely adequate to *its own religious* task. Seen in this light, religious representation might be said to point *internally* to the limitations of its own form. I will return to the significance of this crucial point below.

The richest of religious representations all point towards the annulling of the alienation of man and God.[8] Not surprisingly, then, for Hegel, Christianity appears as the Absolute Religion, or the religion in which this annulling is most completely effected. Indeed, the central representation of religion inevitably becomes the Incarnation: the Logos made flesh, the spiritual and the sensuous wed together in intimate union. The Incarnation is *the* representation which mediates finite and infinite, and annuls their alienation. The difficulty for Hegel here is that even this representation, given that it can be interpreted to portray a merely historically contingent happening, is liable to misrepresentation. Its significance may be then set as a distance in time and place, and it may be thought that the reconciliation it reveals just happened in that time and place. We neutralize its significance in an event that just happened then, and that is already gone by. We may then consign it to an historical event we externally regard as spectators, not grasping it as a significance that spans time and is the interior meaning of all history. We misrepresent the meaning of the representation and fail to bring out its full rationale. Indeed, for Hegel, it is the coming of Spirit, the appearance of *Geist* in *its own form,* that annuls the sensuous externality of the form of *Vorstellung. Geist* is the meaning of *Vorstellung,* its true content, even though its sensuous form may sometimes mislead us on this point. Hence *Geist* must be grasped in its indwelling, but the mode of its indwelling can never be fully grasped in the form of sensuous externality. The limits of representation become evident but again from sources *immanent* within religion itself. *Geist* itself dismantles the claims to absoluteness of every form of religious representation, since no representation, given its form of sensuous externality, can be completely commensurate with *Geist* in its non-sensuous absoluteness.

III

In response to this limitation of religious representation, Hegel holds it necessary that we move to another level of consideration where we may meet these difficulties with the form of sensuous externality. The philosophical concept (*Begriff*) is thought to effect this movement: it provides us with a form of thought where form and

content are commensurate, for the philosophical concept reveals *Geist* as dealing with itself, and moreover in the form of *Geist* itself.[9] Here in the purity of rational thought, the sensuous and imagistic side of *Vorstellung* is laid aside, or at least its limitationis suspended. The precise character of rational thought is not our chief concern here but rather the relation of rational thought and representation. This relation, I suggest, must now be conceived in accord with the 'double' way of reading the religious representation, above detailed.

In accordance with this, Hegel's evaluation of representation, once again, must be seen as both affirmative and critical. If we first grant the affirmative side, this means that Hegel cannot be spoken of as 'reducing' the significance of religious representation to rational concepts. His purpose is rather to understand the complex significance *already inherent* in representation, to bring it to a further explicitness or self-consciousness. Religious representation, in Hegelian language, is meaningful in-itself (*an sich*), but not always for-itself (*für-sich*). The movement to the second state is one towards a condition of rational self-consciousness, and indeed here might be seen as Hegel's version of *fides quaerens intellectum*. Yet, it is crucial to insist, this movement has a preserving, safeguarding aim. Even if rational self-consciousness transcends the sphere of simple religious representation, Hegel nevertheless intends the significance of the latter to be sublated, *aufgehoben*: what we transcend we may negate in one form, but we may also affirm and conserve it in another form, within another more inclusive context. It is the form of representation that is negated but its content is affirmed, reaffirmed and conserved in another form. Hegel is often said to 'cancel' or 'replace' representations with concepts, or even to 'swallow up' religion in philosophy.[10] But it is a simplification of the sublating side of Hegel's philosophy to see it as displacing, even destroying religion. To 'transcend' religious representation here means rather to 'release' representation from the restriction of sensuous externality, and so to reaffirm its content, now more fully freed into its absolute dimension. Here we must think of Hegel's philosophy, certainly in its intention, as one of the great conservatives of the significance of religion.

The second side of Hegel's evaluation, the critical, is not to be denied. Historically this has perhaps been the most influential aspect, especially as turned to their own purposes by the Left-Hegelians.[11] We need to critically approach the ambiguity of religious representation, not only on philosophical grounds, but on religious grounds. Now if the 'double' reading above is correct, once again this necessary criticism need not be intended destructively. It might be, if you wish, intended purgatively; or to employ more contemporary terms, it might aim to 'demythologise' a too literal reading of the representation. Criticism here serves the purpose of mediating a more discerning, discriminating understanding, particularly against the

circumscribed mind that interprets religious representation in too
literalist, perhaps we should say, too fundamentalist a fashion. For
the literalist loses touch with the complexity of the content because of
his narrow fixation with the form.[12] Hegelian criticism might thus be
seen as a freeing of the content from its fixation in any merely finite
form. When Hegel speaks of philosophy as *absolute,* this absolute
dimension might thus be seen, not as *dissolving* or *enclosing* ('closing
up') the content of religion, but as *absolving* us, in this sense of releas-
ing us from that fixation with merely finite form.

Of course, this freeing of the content can be easily mistaken for an
evaporation of content, a making of the content into almost nothing.
If we cannot fix the content, in this case the absolute content, the idea
of God, into finite form, the suspicion may arise, based on his
misinterpretation, that this idea has no content: that God is nothing.
It is this difficulty, coupled with the 'double' reading of representa-
tion, that confers sufficient ambiguity on Hegel's overall position to
allow it to be exploited by Left-Hegelians for purposes at odds with
Hegel's complex intentions. Left-Hegelians just simplified the
ambiguity in Hegel's complex critical stance, cutting rather than
untying this Gordian knot. Criticism now becomes a matter of
'reducing' the representation, not a matter of bringing to explicit self-
consciousness its genuine, religious meaning. Or better: representa-
tion is understood to be an image, but in line with the above remarks,
an image of 'nothing', except perhaps a projection of human need or
power. Thus Left-Hegelians affirm man as the true content of
religious representation, not the conjunction of man and God, as in
Hegel. Or rather, for Hegel religious representation mediates the
movement to conjunction of the divine and the human; philosophical
criticism must release into the light of reason the true content revealed
in this conjunction. For Left-Hegelians, religious representation
portrays only the movement of the alienation of man's power into an
opposing principle; and philosophical criticism does not reveal a
movement to conjunction of the divine and the human, but a move-
ment of reduction of the divine to the human.

Put differently, Hegel criticizes the form of religious representa-
tion, but not the content. The Left-Hegelian criticizes both the form
and the content, and moreover reduces both to human proportions.
In one final formulation, Hegel is cognizant that the ambiguous form
of religious representation always runs the risk of *anthropomorphism,*
or the mistaking of the infinite for the finite: criticism must free the
infinite content from the finite form. Relative to this same ambiguity,
the Left-Hegelian discovers *nothing but* anthropomorphism in
religious representation: criticism must free finite man — now said to
be the true content — from entanglement in an alienating infinite, and
release in him his own infinite promise. Hegel would have us guard
against anthropomorphism in religion, not just for humanistic but

also for religious and philosophical reasons. Left-Hegelians, by contrast, would disengage anthropomorphism from its falsifying form in religion, but in other domains of life they would elevate anthropomorphism into the principle of a new humanism. We see the elements of their view in Hegelian sources, but we also see how their exploitation of these elements diverges from these sources.[13]

IV

Thus far we have noted a certain twofoldness in representation, which Hegel's account attempts to acknowledge, and how this twofoldness may generate an ambiguity sufficient to be exploited for different aims, as we saw with the Left-Hegelians. I now wish to further explore this twofoldness in relation to a crucial point, previously noted but not developed: namely, that the limits of representation sometimes arise from *within* the religious context itself. Hegel, I believe, is cognizant of this fact; but he also tends to think that difficulties arising on one level of experience can be resolved only by another, purportedly more comprehensive form of experience, and so at a second level transcending the first. This approach is, in fact, at the core of any dialectical concept of experience, applicable to all experience and not only to its religious form. It is true that Hegel intends to preserve in the higher form what is transcended in the lower. Yet, given the two sides of Hegel's view of religion, its affirmative and critical sides, we can see how with less penetrating minds the transcending of the limits of representation easily loses the preserving moment of *Aufhebung*, and becomes just a simple supersession of representation. Why is it important to emphasize the way the limits of representation arise from within the religious context itself? Its importance lies in the manner religious representation initiates a *questioning of itself*.[14] The further importance of this is that it makes evident the possible *continuity* of representation and the questioning of philosophical reason. And, as I now hope to indicate, religious representation displays resources of its own for dealing with the difficulty Hegel presses, namely, the disparity of form and content.

First, we must grant that all religious experience requires some representation for the articulation and conservation of its own significance. An image, a name, a depiction of the divinity is essential to mediate the gap between the seen and the unseen, the sensuous and the spiritual. Without some image or representation, the divine becomes the Nameless, and the Nameless has an inevitable tendency to dissolve into the merely nebulous. In naming and representing God, of course, we always run the risk of anthropomorphism. Man's discourse about the divine imbues the divine with sometimes incongruous, human attributes. This follows from the necessary reliance of representation on some form of sensuous image. Here,

however, the important point is that the problem of anthropo-
morphism can be approached from two opposite directions. On the
one hand, it can be exploited by those hostile to the holy, like Marx,
who use the charge of anthropomorphism as a device to explode
religious representation: the images of the gods are, religiously
speaking, really images of nothing, except perhaps of man's own lack
and need; positively, they are projections of human power and ought
to be reappropriated as such. On the other hand, the problem can be
approached in a contrary manner: anthropomorphism is an issue for
both the sympathizer and the antagonist of religion. Thus those
sympathetic to the sacred may grant the difficulty of anthropo-
morphism, but having done this, instead set out to purge the
representation   of   any   falsifying   anthropomorphism.   Thus
Xenophanes' criticism of anthropomorphic gods, it seems, was in the
service of a truer, non-anthropomorphic conception of divinity.
Similarity with Plato's criticism in the *Republic*: the representations
of the gods ought to be images of proper perfection, but turn out to be
depictions, reduplications of human imperfections; criticism must free
divinity from such distortions, not destroy divinity as such.

With Hegel, given the link of *Vorstellung* with some form of
sensuous image, anthropomorphism expresses but another aspect of
the risk of reducing an infinite content to merely finite form. In
Hegelian terms, because *Vorstellung* implies reference to an 'other'
which is *Jenseits,* it risks the 'reification' of its own content; it risks
the 'objectification' of the infinite *Geist,* the turning of it into a merely
finite 'object' (*Gegenstand*). Since some such danger is always
possible with every religious representation, Hegel is correct if we
understand him to insist that the sophisticated mind cannot avoid
some critical stance towards representation. Hegel's protest against
the 'positivity' of some forms of religion, particularly in his earlier
writings, can be understood here: 'positive' religions treat the content
of the religious consciousness as a mere thing or object 'out there',
and as a consequence just insist on their own truth in the manner of a
sheerly external authority. The truth in its inwardness has not been
fully appropriated, the genuine truth where the form corresponds to
the content, that is, where both form and content are known as spirit,
as *Geist*.

Where Hegel is not always straightforwardly clear is when he does
not insist strongly enough, nor draw the full implications of the fact
that the religious consciousness itself tries to deal with these inherent
difficulties with its own form of representation.[15] For the dangers of
'anthropomorphism', of 'reification', of 'objectification' are fully
acknowledged by the developed religious consciousness itself. This
same consciousness is developed precisely because it tries to rectify,
to counterbalance these dangers inherent in its own form of
representation. We could say that one mark of what we might call the

sophisticated religious consciousness is this: it possesses an essential *self-consciousness* about the form of its own mode of representation.[16] That is, it refrains from investing the form of representation with an absolute status. Hence representation is not misunderstood as the simple 'objectification' of a divine content; it is seen to entail, as it were, some element of 'self-objectification'. As entailing some 'self-objectification', representation may be seen to involve the revelation or disclosure of *Geist,* which now comes to recognise something of *itself* as articulated in the 'otherness' of representation. For the sophisticated religious consciousness, spirit recognises spirit in the representation, a recognition indeed that Hegel himself strongly recommends to our attention. The form of religious representation, I repeat, becomes an insurmountable obstacle only when the religious consciousness is excessively literal-minded. To be excessively literal-minded is *not* to understand something essential about the form of representation. The sophisticated religious consciousness knows this already, prior to the point where developed philosophical reason might supervene. The sophisticated religious consciousness is not deceived. Indeed, it may well be on its guard against all representations, precisely because it is inwardly attuned to their ambiguous complexity. It may be quite willing to admit that there is no absolute sensuous representation of God completely free of this ambiguous complexity. The genuine content of the representation is not to be treated as a mere thing 'out there', a *Jenseits* existing in simple separation. Rather the sophisticated religious consciousness 'interiorizes' the divine content in and through the form of representation. In this process the very form itself ceases to be a mere external trapping and becomes itself progressively 'interiorized'. For it a merely external relation to God proves to be impossible.

My purpose here is not to offer some knockdown argument against Hegel. Hegel himself is one of the most searching critics of any such merely external relations. Rather I am trying to clarify an ambiguous complexity intrinsic to religious representation which shows the continuity of religion and reason in a manner consonant with Hegel's view, and also shows the internal resources of religion itself which preserve it against the onslaughts of an exclusively negative, 'critical' rationality. The point comes to the fact that in its most sophisticated forms, the religious consciousness increasingly ceases to be rigidly literalist. While recognizing its own need for representation, it increasingly becomes keen to the temptation of mistaking the image of God for the original itself. Thus the Hebrews insisted that no representation could completely encapsulate the divine content. But in recognizing the problem of representation, the response was to counter it on religious grounds and in religious terms. The response was not simply to try to conceptualize the representation in a new unambiguous rational form, but to purify religious consciousness of

its own proclivity to *idolatry*. This connection of representation and idolatry is suggested by the Greek word for image: *eidolon*. When representation becomes an idol, it is not necessarily due to any special character intrinsic to the sensuous representation itself. It is rather because we take the representation with a literalness, with an undiscriminating consciousness, without proper understanding. One might almost say, we take the representation mindlessly. Indeed when we take the representation in this way, we really misunderstand its very form; for in idolatry we worship the image *for itself*, and not for what it represents — as a mindful appropriation of its form would require. Idolatry testifies to the lack of discerning spirit; *Geist*, with respect to both form and content. No religious representation is ever absolutely free from the possibility of misappropriation, and so every representation might be used, abused rather, to serve the purposes of idolatry. For when the representation is mistaken for the Absolute itself, consciousness can become shackled to it, in bondage to it. Instead of the representation elevating a finite reality into a revelation of the divine, the infinity of the divine content is diminished to the level of a finite fetish.

The sophisticated religious consciousness responds to the problem of representation because, in being attentive to the difficulty of anthropomorphism and the possibility of idolatry, it already knows the form of representation in its essential 'doubleness' — that it may both reveal and conceal the divine. Its response is not just to negate representation, but to call for the appropriate orientation to the representation, a qualitative attention informed by the character of *both* the form and the content. A different light, other than that generated by the literalistic, that is to say, idolatrous mind, is to be thrown on the representation. This light does not so much replace representation as transfigure it, transform it. The religious consciousness does not just deal with its own form by retranslating its own content into conceptual form, though it may do this too. Rather it transforms the ambiguous form of its own representations by differently indwelling within them with qualitative attention. It does not review their content from an external vantage point; it transforms them from within by progressively penetrating to their true spiritual content. For Hegel it is the Christian consciousness which attains the acme of this transformation. But we can see the possibility of this transformation present in all religious representation.

Religious *Vorstellung*, as Hegel grants, incorporates its own form of thinking or *Denken*. And the more sophisticated the representation becomes, the more it frees itself from whatever is extraneous to its own inherent content. This sophistication of the religious consciousness which is attentive to its own character, in both its limits and strengths, only accentuates its kinship with philosophical consciousness. Both, we must say, insist on proper self-knowledge.

Philosophical consciousness need not replace religious consciousness for Hegel, as some commentators have mistakenly implied. This mistake is somewhat understandable if religion has only the absolute content but not the absolute form, while philosophy has both absolute form and content. The danger with this characterization, which indeed tends to be Hegel's own, is that it misleads us into thinking of philosophy as supplying something positively, which religious representation of itself lacks: in this case, the form of spirit. This characterization of the contrast of religion and philosophy is not complete. The fuller characterization I have suggested is not incompatible with a certain reading of Hegel's basic position. Sophisticated religion, in the dimensions we have adumbrated, itself tries to appropriate its own form. For it knows that what makes representation genuinely religious at all is that it is *informed* by the spirit, without which it would be lifeless and dull. Indeed, it might be claimed that the mystical dimension of religion, properly understood, constitutes a certain acme of indwelling, informing spirit, in that it repeatedly calls attention of the limits of representation, and insists upon us avoiding the pitfall of mistaking the image for the original. Mysticism, in this sense might be seen as religion in the process of purifying its own religious representations. And it is not incidental here that Hegel himself couples his own notion of speculative reason (*Vernunft*) with the mystical.[17] But this relation of reason and the mystical is a further story.

Loyola College, Maryland   WILLIAM DESMOND

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1. Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimensions in Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967) 178 note. Here Fackenheim points out that in 'naive ancient theology' God is the 'object', one object among others; whereas in modern reflexive theology, the focus is on 'the religious divine-human relationship'.

2. A recent, very perceptive account of the anthropological versus the speculative reading of Hegel's view of religion is Walter Jaeschke's 'Speculative and Anthropological Criticism of Religion: A Theological Orientation to Hegel and Feuerbach', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, XLVIII/3, 345-364. The import of Jaeschke's argument seems to be that, granting the difficulty of reconciling Hegel with more orthodox religious views, the speculative treatment of religion has to be kept apart from the anthropological reduction, à la Feuerbach to other Young Hegelians.

3. Peter Winch, D L Phillips, W D Hudson have held to 'Wittgensteinian fideism'. See W D Hudson, *Ludwig Wittgenstein — The Bearing of his Philosophy Upon Religious Belief* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968). See also Kai Nielsen's criticism, 'Wittgensteinian Fideism', *Philosophy*, 42 (1967) 191-209; Patrick Masterson, 'God and Grammar', *Philosophical Studies* (Ireland), vol. XXIX, 7-24.

4. Some representative studies of Hegel's philosophy of religion include Fackenheim, *op. cit.*; Quentin Lauer, SJ, *Hegel's Concept of God* (Albany: State

University of New York Press, 1982); Bernard Reardon, *Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); Darrell Christensen (ed.), *Hegel and the Philosophy of Religion*, The Wofford Symposium (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970).

5. On the place of representation in Hegel's system, see Malcolm Clark's excellent study, *Logic and System: A Study of the Transition from 'Vorstellung' to Thought in the Philosophy of Hegel* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971).

6. On *Vorstellung* as such a form of thought see, for instance, G W F Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969) vol. I, 26-27.

7. On the proofs of God's existence as presenting this 'elevation' in a more abstract way, see *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, I, 165 and 254; see Lauer, *op. cit.* 216-217; 226-227.

8. On this annulling and worship, see William Desmond, 'Hegel, Philosophy and Worship, *CITHARA*, 19:1, 1979; 3-20.

9. See, for instance, G W F Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften* in *Werke* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969-1971), Bd 10, #573: Philosophic knowing is 'the recognition of this content and of its forms; it is the *liberation* from the (onesidedness) of the forms (i.e. of art and religion), the elevation of them to the absolute form which determines itself as content, remaining identical with the content'.

10. Quentin Lauer rightly insists: '. . . philosophical knowing neither swallows up nor dispenses with faith; it simply transforms faith into an explicit awareness of its own implications' *op cit*, 288.

11. See Lawrence S Stepelevich (ed.), *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology* (New York & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Also, David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London: Macmillan, 1969); Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx* (New York: Humanities Press, 1958).

12. On 'literalism', 'demythologization' and 'symbols', see Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957) 48-54.

13. See Henri De Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans E M Riley (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1963).

14. See Tillich's remark, *op. cit.* 52: 'In the last analysis it is not rational criticism of the myth which is decisive but the inner religious criticism'.

15. See *Enzykopädie*, par. 573: 'Philosophy indeed can recognize its own forms in the categories of religious consciousness, and even its own teaching in the doctrine of religion — while therefore it does not disparage. But the converse is not true: the religious consciousness does not apply the criticism of thought to itself, does not comprehend itself, and is therefore, as it stands, exclusive.'

16. See John MacQuarrie's remark in *God-Talk* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 176: Jews and Christians have decisively revolted 'against the idea that the divine can be objectified, so as to manifest itself in sensible phenomena'. Hegel also is congnizant of what he speaks of as 'the more highly cultivated consciousness' in *Berliner Schriften*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1956) 15. But there still remains the ambiguity on the question of form, as is indicated by what he says in par. 573 of the *Encyclopaedia*, cited in note 15.

17. *Enzyklopädie*, par. 82, *Zusatz*.