REASON AND REVELATION: ABSOLUTE AGENCY AND THE LIMITS OF ACTUALITY

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Contemporary reluctance to consider any complicity between philosophy and religion has led to an inability to consider, in Hegel studies, how the revelatory agency of the Absolute necessarily complements the narrative of human reason. According to Hegel, reason alone can do no more than end in the endless limitations of actuality, in the infinite approximations of a moral summum bonum and in the ad infinitum strivings for concrete political freedom. Recognizing where revelatory agency occurs in Hegel’s Science allows us to recognize the Idea’s freedom in the worldly, human expressions of art, religion and philosophy, in their philosophical study within the state University. Without such recognition, both Left and Right fields of Hegel interpretation tend to evaluate the success (or failure) of his philosophy based on inflated, unrealistic expectations of what is meant by “actuality.”

Commentators of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* often seem dismayed when they come to chapter seven. Why, having finally reached the neat satisfaction of moral community at the end of chapter six, where the triumphant reconciling “Yea” expresses the shared freedom prefigured hundreds of pages earlier in the self-conscious “I that is We,” are we now plunged into the dogmatic obscurantism of religion? Why not just get on with the more frankly philosophical problem of understanding Absolute Knowing in chapter eight?

Solutions to such disappointment are various, but may nonetheless be grouped together under several defined approaches. Hegel can be seen as the proto-Feuerbachian “precursor of atheistic humanism,”¹ (the approach that Emil Fackenheim, in his landmark work, *The Religious Dimension of Hegel’s Philosophy*, defines as typi-

cal of the Hegelian Left). In this context, Hegel’s extensive lectures on religion, some twenty years after the *Phenomenology*, at the University of Berlin, must be explained away as politically expedient, circumstantial or as not really about religion. Conveniently, the lack of any textual evidence for Hegel’s ascribed atheism becomes itself evidence for such atheism, i.e., the “proof” of supposed self-censorship in the face of political-theological repression.

A gentler version of the same humanistic, anthropological approach consists of emphasizing the communal dimension at play in religion. Thus, as H. S. Harris writes, “God becomes recognizable as the spirit of the actual community in which we live and move,” or as John Russon puts it, religion is “the rituals of mutual recognition in which a community says ‘so that’s who we are.’”

Another approach to the religion problem consists in identifying it as “a defective form of philosophy,” as Tom Rockmore writes. In this light, we may take the *Phenomenology*’s chapter seven as the place where “Hegel criticizes religion for its reliance on representa-

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2 Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension of Hegel’s Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967). Robert Solomon is paradigmatic of this approach, which essentially takes Feuerbach for Hegel. As Solomon puts it: “[Hegel’s] secret, abruptly stated, is that Hegel was essentially an atheist. His ‘Christianity’ is nothing but nominal, an elaborate subterfuge to protect his professional ambitions in the most religiously conservative country in Northern Europe” (Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, 582). Taking aim at Fackenheim, Solomon pronounces, “just how limited the ‘religious dimension’ of Hegel’s thought really is” (*ibid.*, 583).


4 John Russon, *Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 178. Russon’s more recent book on the *Phenomenology* presents a highly nuanced account of religion in that work, one that acknowledges the existence of the “infinite” or the “absolute” as a supra-human dimension toward which religion points. While the absolute does call out to us (234), our response, as religion, consists of “a determinate sphere of practices within a culture that mark themselves out as the explicit form of affirming the reality of the infinite object” (230). Religion thus appears (to us phenomenologists) as “a particular set of images, practices and narratives” (231). In other words, religion, while acknowledging something “beyond” (230) the human, remains a fundamentally anthropological phenomenon. In referring to “Revelation” in Hegel, in this paper, I am referring to the agency of the Absolute, whereby “the infinite” or “the beyond” gives itself to be known, perhaps what might be called the agency of “givenness,” in contemporary phenomenological parlance. John Russon, *Infinite Phenomenology: The Lessons of Hegel’s Science of Experience* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016).
tion that falls short of conceptual thought." This view is comforting in that it accords a place for religion within the state, where representation and picture-thinking (as Vorstellung is sometimes translated) are adequate for the benighted citizenry incapable of speculative thinking. Religious thought again becomes a form of anthropological knowledge for the Scientific community, which can now take religion as the object of study because systematic philosophy may recognize itself in this past form. This "progressive" approach allows Hegel scholars to acknowledge the existence of religion in Hegel’s thought, while relegating it to the status of error, i.e. an incomplete yet systematically necessary step in the path to the Truth, as found in the Absolute Knowing of Science. The final approach to the religion problem, of course, is simply to ignore chapter seven altogether, to leave it out.

Tom Rockmore perhaps best summarizes the general state of affairs when he writes, "One of the great, enduring mysteries of Hegel scholarship is the role of religion in his mature theory, including the Phenomenology." Rockmore’s diagnosis is particularly apt given what might be referred to as the current Anglo-American dominance in Hegel studies, when he further remarks that the “connection between religion and philosophy...never existed in the United States and was weaker in England than in continental Europe [and] has been appreciably weakened everywhere else in the philosophical world,” with the possible exception of France.

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5 Tom Rockmore, Cognition, An Introduction to Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 155-56

6 Kenneth Westphal, Hegel’s Epistemological Realism (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 185. When I capitalize “Science” or “Scientific” in this paper, I am referring to Hegel’s notion of speculative, systematic philosophy as Wissenschaft.


8 Rockmore, Cognition, 155.

Indeed, what Rockmore shows us is that the dismay and unease some commentators feel when arriving at chapter seven, on religion, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the result of the disappearance, in our own time, of any pre-existing bond between religion and philosophy. This is significant because the explicit goal of Hegel’s philosophy of religion is to strengthen and reinforce this very bond, which he already considers to be at risk. He clearly summarizes this project, at the end of his own lecture notes manuscript to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, “Instead of allowing reason and religion to contradict themselves, we must resolve the discord in the manner appropriate to us – namely, reconciliation in the form of philosophy.... These lectures have attempted to offer guidance to this end. Religion must take refuge in philosophy.”¹⁰ The last sentence expresses the urgency Hegel perceives to his project, an urgency already anticipated in the writings of other authors from the late German Enlightenment, where the radical separation between faith and reason is felt as politically dangerous, particularly for the free pursuit of philosophical enquiry.¹¹

Our contemporary incapacity to conceive of the link between religion and philosophy or between faith and reason is symptomatic of a condition which Hegel himself viewed as a clear, contemporary malaise when he was pronouncing his courses on religion, in Berlin and which he makes explicit in his preface to H. F. W. Hinrichs' work on religion.¹² The pernicious theology of feeling that Hegel associates with Schleiermacher arises from the unreconciled dichotomy within the understanding (*Verstand*) itself, *i.e.*, between inner intuition

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¹¹ See, for example, Kant’s attempts to arbitrate between reason and faith in the *Pantheismusstreit* (i.e., the public epistolary debate between M. Mendelssohn and G. Jacobi) with his short essay “What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thought” (1786) or in his later book, *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* (1793), where Kant, unsuccessfully, attempts to reconcile religion with rational morality in order to stave off political threats to the Enlightenment project of reason-based freedom.

(a.k.a. faith) and calculative reasoning (a.k.a. categorical judging).\(^\text{13}\) Perhaps our own inability to come to terms with the philosophy-religion dichotomy reveals a postmodern condition that Hegel already foresaw, where we have come to be torn, as Peter Hodgson puts it, between “philosophical agnosticism and religious fundamentalism, the reigning dogmatisms of our time.”\(^\text{14}\) In his Preface to Hinrichs’ work, Hegel laments the disjunctive tenor of his own times, in Berlin, in 1820. It is no accident, for Hegel, that the terrorist murder of the Russian diplomat and playwright August Kotzebue (1819), which gave rise to the subsequent policies of state censorship and repression, was carried out by a fanatical theology student. As Kant had already foreseen, the radical separation between reason and faith could only bring about arbitrary, dangerous fanaticism and reactionary repression.\(^\text{15}\)

I believe that the problem posed by chapter seven, on religion, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is indicative of a misunderstanding that goes to the very core of how we have tended to comprehend Hegel’s systematic philosophy, namely our reluctance to consider the role of Revelation in Hegel’s idea of Absolute Knowing and therefore, in his notion of Science. The misunderstanding thus also involves how other key expressions of systematicity in Hegel are understood: “Concept,” “Spirit,” and “Idea.” Throughout all of these terms, Absolute Knowing is present, not just as our knowledge of a distinct, absolute substance or content but also and above all, as the subjective, knowing agency of the Absolute itself. The agency of the Absolute gives itself to be known and makes itself available to us, in religion (albeit in representational form), as Revelation. Religion, in Hegel, does not merely reveal the fact that the Absolute exists (i.e., the recognition of something infinite beyond us that religion “points to,” as John Russon puts it, in the reference above) but the knowable content of what the Absolute is. As human knowledge, Absolute Knowing must recognize itself as participating in the self-knowing of

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\(^\text{15}\) This is the underlying theme of Kant’s writings, Religion *Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, mentioned above, and his *Conflict of the Faculties*: protecting the freedoms of the *Aufklärung* against fanaticism and repression from the new Prussian emperor, Frederick William II.
the Absolute itself. In other (Hegelian) words, Absolute Knowing is both content (substance) and form (subjectivity), and it is in such a subjectively substantive way that Hegel’s expression, “The Absolute alone is true, or the truth alone is absolute,” from the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*\(^{16}\), can express anything other than an empty tautology. Without further muddying these already highly speculative waters, allow me to get away with simply stating, at this point, that the content/form of such knowledge is nothing other than freedom. Indeed, the highest expression of freedom is the revelatory agency of the Absolute, which is consequently an essential aspect of knowledge, of Absolute Knowing, and therefore of Hegelian Science.

What the above-mentioned contemporary accounts of religion in Hegel have in common, is that they reproduce the error that Hegel himself remarks on in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*; humanity has come to ignore the self-revelatory agency of God, and now understands religion exclusively in terms of human experience: “Taken with religious fervor, we tend to speak only of our relation to God...but a one-way relation is not one at all...God, in his perfect autonomy in-and-for-itself exists for the human spirit, communicates Himself to man...God exists and puts himself in relation to man.”\(^{17}\)

The Absolute’s revelatory agency grounds the possibility of Truth itself, to the extent that human knowing, the process that Hegel presents through his concepts of Reason and Spirit, must come to know itself as participating in the self-knowledge of the Absolute. Absolute self-knowledge is made possible through Revelation, an act that involves humanity in divine self-consciousness, where all that is known, and that which knows, are never merely human. Once again, Hegel states this clearly in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, in a pronouncement that perhaps best summarizes the thesis of the present article: “[God] has revealed Himself and continues to reveal Himself, and clearly, in this Revelation, it is not human reason with all its limits that knows God but, on the contrary, it is the spirit of God in man [that knows God]; in speculative terms, it is the self-consciousness of God that knows itself in human knowledge.”\(^{18}\)

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I want to argue that reason and Revelation are two distinct and yet complicit elements of Science, representing what Hegel refers to, in a Jena aphorism, as the two cycles of the Absolute, an essentially Neoplatonic logic of emanation and return, which is why Hegel, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, promotes Neoplatonism and Jakob Böhme as the last words in Ancient and Modern philosophy. Both currents anticipate the speculative reality of the Hegelian Idea and the philosophical enactment of its emanation (Revelation) and return (reason qua spirit) in the circular movement known as the Concept. Without Revelation, reason remains “human, all too human,” essentially limited in its scope, an expression of freedom of the will, as we find in Kant and Fichte, that must constantly position itself against nature. Conversely, however, without the activity of reason, from the perspective of human self-realization, Revelation remains the expression of authoritarian dogmatism. In other words, on its own, reason can do no better than Kantian (i.e. abstract) moral freedom, endlessly striving within and yet against a recalcitrant world, endlessly progressing towards a never attained supreme Good; and Revelation alone is experienced as form of heteronomous necessity, of “positivity,” to use the word of the time. Thus, to take the reconciliation between reason and Revelation a step further, on a path that I will return to further on, Hegel’s systematic project can be seen as bringing together freedom and necessity, in the organic, universal singularity that is Science, where the Absolute Idea presents itself as true, good and, perhaps above all, beautiful, following Kant’s definition of beauty as a singular work conjoining freedom and necessity.20

If we accept the dual agency of reason and Revelation in Hegel’s theory of Absolute Knowledge, then we might well wonder how the content of Revelation takes place in the world. Above, I asserted that such content was essentially freedom. If that is the case, then surely the path of human reason that Hegel lays out in the *Phenomenology* and in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, where the story of

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20 I remind the reader that Hegel’s *Logics* end with reference to the Ideas of the True and the Good, followed by the Absolute Idea, in the place where we might expect the Idea of the Beautiful. When I refer to “Logics” in the plural, I mean both the *Science of Logic* and *Encyclopaedia Logic*. Of course G. E. Lessing’s influential *Letters on the Education of the Human Race* (1778) had already outlined, for an entire intellectual generation, the project of reconciling reason and Revelation, on a world historical level.
Spirit is explicitly presented as the story of human freedom, through the progressive history of states and their constitutions, should immediately be the terrain where we also find the agency of Revelation. In other words, human political (in the broadest sense) actuality (Wirklichkeit) should enact the immediate coincidence of human reason and divine or absolute Revelation. The communal path of human consciousness, the story of what Hegel calls Spirit should also be where the agency of Revelation plays itself out. History should be providential. This is Emil Fackenheim’s conclusion, which I would like to now examine and challenge. In doing so, I want to establish the absolute limits of what Hegel calls actuality, the worldly instantiations of human reason and its aspirations. My challenge has repercussions beyond Fackenheim, on other (Left) Hegelian readings as well, i.e., on those who evaluate his philosophy against the failings of the real world, failings which, I maintain, Hegel readily recognizes in his definition of reason-based actuality.

Emil Fackenheim, in his book, *The Religious Dimension of Hegel’s Thought*, certainly recognizes the essential complicity of Revelation in Hegel, which he describes as the “overreaching [i.e. agency] of the Idea” into the world. For Fackenheim, the Idea/God’s revelatory agency combines with the contrasting “over-reaching” agency, that of Spirit (human reason) in order to establish what he refers to as the Hegelian middle, which takes place as worldly actuality. “Hegel’s life-long endeavour was to find the Absolute not beyond but present in the world,” he writes.21 The human world is the meaningful result of the confluence between reason and Revelation. In Fackenheim’s words, our world is thus “doubly overreached”: “This modern world, then, already is doubly overreached, by a creating, preserving, and redeeming God and by a Spirit which, manifest in man, accepts itself as created, preserved and redeemed.”22 The worldly truth of this middle is for Hegel, according to Fackenheim, incarnate in the actuality of the bourgeois Christian world. Since this middle, as actuality, is the locus where the entire system’s realization or Truth takes place, and upon which its success depends, the failure of bourgeois Christian actuality, in 20th-century totalitarian horrors and particularly those of the Holocaust, must therefore also mean the failure of the

22 Ibid., 111.
whole Hegelian enterprise. According to Fackenheim’s theodicy of Hegel, the political failure of the actual world refutes the system.\textsuperscript{23} I am recognizing Fackenheim’s noted complicity between reason and Revelation as integral to Hegelian systematicity. However, whereas he sees the two as working together throughout the system to produce Truth in the form of actuality, I am claiming that the revelatory agency of the Absolute is specifically carried out in the “absolute” elements of Hegel’s philosophy, in the manifestations of Absolute Spirit: in art, religion and philosophy, and in the subjective side of Hegel’s Logics\textsuperscript{24}, \textit{i.e.}, in the “Logic of the Concept,” and perhaps, although I offer the idea only as a hypothesis, in the appearance of organic life in the \textit{Philosophy of Nature}. Conversely, the agency of human reason has its own place in the system, notably in the first six chapters of the \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, in the Subjective and Objective Spirit sections of the \textit{Encyclopaedia’s Philosophy of Spirit} and in the Objective Logic part of the \textit{Science of Logic} (I have provided a schema, below, that hopefully makes this extensive list of references easier to envision).

**Schema: Reason and Revelation in Hegel’s Main Works**

\textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}
Chapters 1–6 = Reason: actuality as Morality
Chapter 7 = Revelation (art/religion)
Chapter 8 = Reason and Revelation as Absolute Knowing = Science

\textit{Science of Logic}
Objective Logic (Being and Essence) = Reason (“Actuality” chapter)
Subjective Logic (the Concept) = Revelation as logos (judgement and syllogism)
Absolute Idea = Reason and Revelation = Science (the University)

\textit{Philosophy of Spirit (Encyclopaedia)}
Subjective and Objective Spirit = Reason (actuality as world political history)
Absolute Spirit (Art and Religion) = Revelation

\textsuperscript{23} “The problem of the Hegelian middle \[on which the success of the system turns\] thus turns into the problem of the relation between religious life \[a.k.a. Revelation\] and philosophical thought \[a.k.a. Reason\]” (\textit{ibid.}).
\textsuperscript{24} Only the \textit{Science of Logic} makes explicit the binary distinction between Objective and Subjective Logic.
Absolute Spirit (Philosophy) = Reason and Revelation = Science (the University)

*Philosophy of Nature*
Mechanics and Physics = Reason (actuality as chemical process)
Organics = Revelation as purposive, unified organism
Death = Reason and Revelation = “resurrection” as species/Spirit?

My contention is that the Absolute is never realized in worldly actuality per se, but rather in the systematic embrace of Science itself, which is expressed as Absolute Knowing (in the *Phenomenology*), in the Absolute Idea (in the *Logics*) and in Absolute Spirit (in the *Philosophy of Spirit*) and perhaps with the appearance of organic life in the *Philosophy of Nature*. Consequently, far from constituting the essential Hegelian middle, as Fackenheim calls it, actuality is the highest but necessarily flawed iteration of (human) reason. As such, it is essentially limited, endlessly limited and onto-logically incapable, on its own, of embodying Truth in the full Hegelian sense of the word.

Actuality, within the Hegelian oeuvre, always appears in contexts where the Truth is anticipated but never realized: this is how the category of “Actuality” occurs in the final subchapter of Objective Logic, in the *Science of Logic*, just before the Logic of the Concept (Subjective Logic), and how it is found in moral striving, at the end of the *Phenomenology’s* chapter six (subchapter on “Morality”), just before Religion, and again as the infinite, always unrealized progress of political freedom in state constitutions and world history, at the end of the Encyclopaedia’s philosophy of Objective Spirit, just before we move onto the forms of Absolute Spirit articulated in art, religion and philosophy. In each case, human reason ends in the never-ending limitations of actuality. Nonetheless, and it is crucial to note, the fact that human reason persists, in spite of its failures, already attests to a content beyond that of reason itself, a content that is the proffered, self-posited substance of the Absolute, which is experienced, in religious terms, as Revelation.

Let us return briefly to the reciprocal and yet distinct agencies of reason and Revelation in the *Phenomenology*. We are generally familiar with the account of the progress of reason in this work: from consciousness, through self-consciousness, to Reason itself in chapter five, and finally in Spirit (chapter six), we trace the movement of free human selfhood as it comes to know itself in ever richer, freer, more self-imbued forms of objectivity. From the Enlightenment individual’s certainty of finding itself, qua reason, in all of reality (chapter five), we come to recognize the historical truth of
this realization as humanity’s self-reflection in world-historical spirit, in chapter six. But this is where I believe the journey of reason alone meets its limits: in the endless striving postulated by Kantian morality, towards a cosmopolitan community of the *summum bonum* that it can never actually reach. Reason ends in the endless approximations of human, moral actuality.25

The story of reason ends, however, where the story of Revelation begins, in chapter seven on Religion. It is only through the narrative “rounding out” provided by Revelation that there is anything to morally strive for: true freedom, instantiated in nature rather than struggling against it, the realized aim of Kant’s categorical imperative, posited not in the world of actuality but rather in the “worlds” of art, religion and philosophy.

Having looked, briefly, at the story of reason in the *Phenomenology*, let us look, again briefly, at the story of Revelation as told in chapter seven of the *Phenomenology* and fleshed out in the *Lectures on the Philosophies of Art* and *Religion*. The Absolute (the Idea/God/Light) first reveals itself to us as incarnated in individual, natural objects, *i.e.* where this tree, this stream, this rock may be “illuminated” as sacred or godly. The multiplicity of individual objects betrays the impossibility of the Universal fully inhabiting any one of them. Their bad infinity collapses into an empty universality, a kind of acosmic pantheism where anything in nature may indifferently be taken as holy. Next, the sacred is embodied in the quasi-human art forms of man-made Greco-Roman sculpture, in the syllogistic moment of particularity, where each human-like and yet lifeless stone god represents a particular power: the sea, the hunt, wisdom, war, etc.

Finally, the absolute comes to inhabit or incarnate the ultimate “art object,” the perfect individual form that is both divine and natural, human and godly, dead and alive, and above all, beautiful: the individuality of Christ. Christ himself, *i.e.*, the son of God who *is* God,

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25 While there is a tendency on the part of commentators, as I wrote above, to stress the moral community, at the end of chapter six, thus rendering questionable the importance of chapter seven (Religion), the Morality section remains shot through with dialectical iterations of good and bad, confession and absolution, in what Jay Lampert, at a recent meeting of the Ontario-Quebec Hegel Organization (2016) described, extemporaneously, as “a morass of mutual contempt.” In any case, whether we subscribe to the idea that the Morality section replays the contradictions of ironic Romanticism (evoking figures of Fr. Schlegel, Novalis and Hölderlin) or the articulations of Kantian/Fichtean morality, there is no reason to establish a definitive ending in chapter six. Otherwise, once again, why add chapters seven and eight?
can be seen as the last “art object,” the truly universal singular, the beautiful union of absolute form and content. Christ marks, for Hegel, the end of art, the end of the Ancient world, and the beginning of religion per se, *i.e.*, the modern era and the truth that the Absolute cannot be contained in any single, natural or man-made being. The human body of Christ is ripped apart from within, we might say, by its own universality. God is dead, as Hegel puts it, not so much because he is crucified but because his finite body cannot contain the infinite universal. Revealed (*Offenbare*, which has a more active sense than “revealed”) religion presents a new form of Revelation, where the Absolute comes to inhabit sacred words in the texts of religious doctrine.

The stories of reason and Revelation, which I have just outlined, are, of course, interrelated. In the *Phenomenology*, human spirit rises (and the story of reason begins) as the tragic, unhappy quest to re-enact the lost instance of God in the World. The re-enactment of this condition is indeed the goal of reason and actuality. However, actuality, as such, must fail, a failure that is endlessly renewed and reiterated, as we find in the *Phenomenology*, at the end of chapter six. For the Absolute to again take place in the world, we must bracket reason, as the human, all too human quest to regain the lost, punctual unity of the Christly individuality, and look to the more spiritual, less immediately natural instances of Revelation that we find in the Religion chapter. Absolute Knowing, the short final chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* recognizes the complicity of human spirit and Revelation, the fact that they are both aspects of the Concept, the truth that, as I quoted above, “the self-consciousness of God...knows itself in human knowledge.” Absolute Knowing is not humanly possible without the Absolute having given itself to be known. However, as we know from his dialectical logic generally, the Hegelian unity between reason and Revelation can only happen if we first acknowledge and celebrate their difference, within the system itself.

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26 Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 547/Phenomenology of Spirit, §752.
27 Hegel refers to the religious community celebrating “content in the form of picture-thinking [*Vorstellens*].” I believe such “representing” is essentially linguistic and different from the *Darstellen* [presenting] that characterizes art. The translation of *Vorstellung* as picture-thinking misses the crucial difference between it and the artistic instantiations of Revelation in singular sacred objections. The doctrinal language of Revelation is further spiritualized, further reflected upon and thus, re-presented as a communal ritual. Hegel probably had in mind such doctrinal language as the Nicene Creed, which affirms the Trinity, as well as his divinity of Christ.
The *Phenomenology*’s Absolute Knowing chapter prefigures what Hegel refers to as Science, systematic philosophy as expressed in his *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* and taught in the modern state university (of which the University of Berlin provided the model), comprising the Logic, the Philosophy of Nature and the Philosophy of Spirit, whose final chapter, Absolute Spirit, presents the revelatory expressions of art, religion and philosophy. If the Absolute and the human are to be again one in the world, it is in those forms where human reason and Revelation are one. Human actuality, on its own, strives for but never achieves such unity. On the other hand, to actually be, Revelation must also take place in the world; and if we look at the worldly forms that Revelation does take, we notice that they themselves adopt forms that are increasingly human. Referring again to the Religion chapter in the *Phenomenology*, we see how the fetishistic religions of nature, where any natural object may be sacred, give way to the human/divine presentations of Greco-Roman gods, sculpted by human artists, and then to the last Ancient “art form,” the human God himself, where the human and the divine meet in a singular, living moment. Revealed religion, the second Hegelian form of Absolute Spirit, following art, continues the narrative. However, here, the cohabitation of the human and the divine goes beyond the singular form of the art object, to embrace the sacred in a form that involves an essential aspect of humanity: the intersubjective, linguistic reality of human community, which now takes place, in Hegel’s terms, in the communal worship and consecration of revelatory church doctrine (*Lehre* = teachings). In this shared, free celebration of doctrine, church dogma loses its “dogmatic,” positive, imposed aspect. In fact, as is the case with the other expressions of Absolute Spirit (art and philosophy) religious worship brings together human freedom (worship) and revelatory necessity (dogma) in a concrete form that replays the Kantian ideal of the beautiful, which Hegel presents as the cohabitation of the human and the divine.

Indeed, building on the aesthetic reference, we can trace the destiny of the empty temples that Hegel evokes in chapter seven of the *Phenomenology*, following the shocking affirmation that “God [as Christ] is dead,” back to the discussion on architecture as geometrical space inhabited by stone statues of the gods, in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*. It is these empty “temples” that are now, in

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revealed religion, filled with human worshippers freely consecrating the given words of doctrine.\textsuperscript{29} I believe we can follow the trajectory of the architectural “temple” even further, beyond its religious determination, to where it becomes the highest space of Hegelian “worship,” that which takes place in the shared discourse of systematic, philosophical Science, at the state university. The vocation of philosophical Science, as the ultimate form of Absolute spirit, is not to abandon the earlier content of Revelation (art and religion) but to grasp its speculative nature and thus conserve it as \textit{aufgehoben}. This means acknowledging the histories of Revelation as philosophically meaningful, precisely the project that Hegel carries out in his copious lectures on the \textit{philosophies} of art and religion.\textsuperscript{30}

Consequently, Hegel’s philosophy of religion, as the philosophical interpretation of Revelation, and ultimately, of church doctrine\textsuperscript{31}, brings a new, fully human form to the Absolute’s agency, a worldly place (of “worship”) where human reason and divine Revelation are again at home together, in the communal celebration of Absolute knowing. The empty temples are “ful-filled” in the state university, the worldly embodiment, the “temple” of Hegelian Science. It is here that the content of both reason (the human history of Spirit, including the imperfect pursuits of history and politics) and Revelation (Absolute spirit: the philosophical histories of art, religion and philosophy) are taught together in their \textit{Encyclopaedic} form. The state university is, for Hegel, where the re-Incarnation truly takes place, as a mediated, singular form that acknowledges the complicit agency of the human and the Absolute. As such, the state university enjoys an ontological status that participates in actuality (as the expression of human freedom) while recognizing the metaphysical source of that freedom in the Idea.

\textsuperscript{29} This is why Schleiermacher’s religion of feeling represents such an existential threat for Hegel: for Schleiemacher, doctrine is no more than, “a mausoleum of religion,” as he writes in the second of his \textit{Speeches on Religion}, a testimony to an absolute absence. Thus, the words in which Revelation takes place are desacralized, evacuated of their divine content.

\textsuperscript{30} In becoming historical, Revelation participates in human time, in the human narrative. Otherwise, the Truth of Revelation is eternally “now” and present. The reconciliation between reason and Revelation, in Hegel, thus unifies the two apparently divergent temporal backgrounds for Truth: the Ancient, Aristotelian idea of Truth as eternal is brought together with the modern, Christian, historical story of Truth, resolving the fundamentally tragic dichotomy that Karl Löwith ascribes to Hegel (and his successors) in his, \textit{From Hegel to Nietzsche}.

\textsuperscript{31} As I mentioned above, Hegel generally refers to church doctrine in terms of \textit{Vorstellung} (representation).
Saying that the university is, for Hegel, the place where reason and Revelation are at home (bei sich) together in Science, requires comprehending their relation in terms of how he presents the process of “knowing” (Erkennen) generally: as a process of self-recognition in otherness. Knowing, in this sense, always involves “recognition,” a fact obscured by the habitual translation of Erkennen as “cognition.” For Hegel, to know something is to know oneself in it and to know oneself (the goal of philosophy) is to also recognize the “otherness” in oneself. In the sphere of Absolute Knowing, reason has come to recognize itself (to know itself) in the absolute otherness of the Absolute’s own self-recognition/self-revelation. In Science, therefore Erkennen becomes Wissen, a category of knowledge akin to wisdom, in the form of Wissenschaft (Science). The process of knowing (Erkennen) as mutual recognition is what Hegel recounts in the Phenomenology, where the narratives of reason are rounded out by those of Revelation, in religion.

Therefore, the stuff of Revelation is not to be found immediately in human actuality generally, and this is again Fackenheim’s problem, to the extent that he presents Hegelian “actuality” (Wirklichkeit) as the immediate “synthesis” between the divine and the worldly, which he calls the Hegelian middle. As I have been arguing, Revelation does, of course, embrace the human, through the histories of art, religion and philosophy, but it does so because its agency is “first of all” distinct from that of human reason.

Divorced from the agency of Revelation, reason must end in the logic of actuality. This is the same logic that informs the endless strivings of “Morality” and which prevents Hegel, at the end of Objective Spirit (a.k.a. the political Philosophy of Right) from subscribing to a cosmopolitan political vision of the happy end of history where freedom is fully realized in a global state constitution. Just as there will never be a terrestrial sumnum bonum (supreme good, heaven on earth), there will never be a perfectly harmonious instantiation of the perfect political constitution. Humanity is just too human. Actuality is just too... actual. Of course, that does not prevent Hegel from dealing with the failing features of actuality, qua reason, Scientifically, which he begins doing by examining the category itself, in his Logics.

Consequently, in order to comprehend the onto-logical failings of actuality, according to Hegel’s Science, we must turn, at least briefly, to how the category itself appears in Hegel’s Logics, where it is presented on its own, as distinct from the agency of the Absolute. The flawed ontological nature of actuality has profound repercussions on how Hegel is read and interpreted, not only for those, like
Fackenheim, who see it as the sole theatre of the divine, but for all of those Hegelians who refuse the divine entirely and are forced to place all their dialectical hopes (and disappointments) in the successes or failures of the actual world.

Clearly stated, the accounts of those who judge the philosopher’s contemporary relevance on the basis of whether the “actual” world lives up to or even contradicts the absolute demands of his system should be confronted with Hegel’s own recognition of the endless limitations of actuality itself. This is especially pertinent because Hegel is arguably the only important modern philosopher whose thought is continually questioned on the basis of its relation to the “real world,” by critics on the Left (e.g. Marx and Engels) or on the Right (e.g. Fackenheim) of the Hegelian spectrum of interpretation.32 Those on the Right, who accept the agency of the Absolute, the Idea or God and acknowledge the systematic pretentions of their philosopher may be disheartened by the horrible excesses of atheistic, materialistic, totalitarian etc. actuality. Conversely, those on the Left, like Frederick Beiser, feel that ironic, atheistic contemporary actuality has rendered null any systematic, absolute pretentions Hegel might have had.33 However, in recognizing where actuality actually stands in Hegel’s thought, we are able to recognize where the true “Hegelian middle” is really to be found: in the expressions of art, religion and philosophy, where the revelatory agency of the Absolute comes together with the aspirations of human reason. Once again, the endless limitations of actuality are only scientifically appreciated if we recognize the dialectical difference at play between the agencies of reason and Revelation.

The difference between the activity of reason and that of Revelation (and thus the possibility of their speculative reconciliation) is

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32 In spite of Heidegger’s Nazi failings, his philosophy is rarely, if ever, evaluated against contemporary actuality, other than in a positive light, as with his naturalist writings on technology.
33 See the Introduction to Beiser’s After Hegel: German Philosophy Between 1840 and 1900 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014) where he argues that the second half of the 19th century is more philosophically interesting than the first because its avowed materialistic secularism has gotten over questions of religious faith in its relation to reason. I would argue that given the current tenor of the times, and the reigning “dogmatisms” that Peter Hodgson refers to as, “philosophical agnosticism and religious fundamentalism,” the questions dealt with in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, regarding faith and reason, are more philosophically germane than ever! In any case, the “modern movement toward secularization” (5) that Beiser mentions certainly seems either to have stalled or to be running backwards, except, perhaps in philosophical academe.
fundamental to Hegel’s *Logics* and explains the often over-looked binary distinction that underlies his *Science of Logic*: the distinction between Objective Logic (the Doctrines of Being and Essence) and Subjective Logic (Doctrine of the Concept). As is the case at the end of the *Phenomenology*’s sixth chapter (with the moral community), the end of the Objective Logic appears to leave us within the comforting embrace of a meaningful reality, which is explicitly presented as *Wirklichkeit* (Actuality). Just as we may ask ourselves, in the *Phenomenology*, why we must leave the communal “being at home in otherness,” in the Spirit chapter, and plunge into the apparently unreasonable obscurity of religion, similarly, in the *Logics*, we are reluctant to leave the meaningful reality of “Actuality” for the apparently abstract forms of judgement and syllogism that we discover in the Doctrine of the Concept. If the binary distinction between Objective and Subjective Logics is just as puzzling to Hegelian Trinitarians as is the break between chapters six and seven in the *Phenomenology* or perhaps the move from Objective Spirit (the state and world history) to Absolute Spirit in the *Encyclopaedia’s Philosophy of Spirit*, it is because the *Logics* present the fundamental distinction between two points of view or rather two different narratives, each with its own protagonist. Actuality represents the limits of the human story, and an opening onto a new perspective.

In the *Logics*, *Wirklichkeit* is presented as shot through with bad infinity and endless regression. In causality, for example, the relation between cause and effect produces a “progress in finitum,” an infinite, meaningless chain of efficient causation where each becomes the other endlessly. The lack of any first/final cause is precisely what distinguishes his own take on actuality, Hegel acknowledges, from Aristotle’s promotion of the same category as actus. (EL, §142Z) The same logic of endless, efficient reflection is played out in the other reciprocal, oscillatory relationships explored in the ontological categories of the “Actuality” section: between substantiability and accident, and again in the modal character that runs

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35 In the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, §142Z, Hegel remarks that Aristotle’s view of “actuality” is the “principle of philosophy”; Aristotle’s “actuality is that of the Idea itself and not ordinary actuality of what is immediately present.”
through the section, for example, in the continual interplay between conditions, necessity, possibility and contingency, and more fundamentally, between identity and difference.\(^{36}\)

The dizzying dance of Actuality’s relational and modal ontological categories allows Hegel, in the Additions to the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, to refer repeatedly to instances of human existence that are endlessly recalcitrant to definitive realizations: to “constitutions and laws” (EL, §156Z), to “systems of taxation” (EL, §142Z), or to the contingencies of language, “law, art etc.” (EL, §145Z); “the Sultan and the Pope” (EL, §143Z) are even mentioned. Hegel’s examples are significant in their familiar banality. They are expressions of human reason (laws, taxation, language, modern artistic expressions) that we recognize as caught up in the bad infinity of contingent reality, and which characterizes our everyday lives: the meaningful, meaningless actuality of our world.

The Objective Logic (Doctrines of Being and Essence) recounts the path of reason in its thoughtful determinations of objectivity, which, from the initial point of empty being, become increasingly essential or meaningful. The goal of the Logics, in my view, is the ontological determination of scientifically significant being qua nature, the object of the natural sciences and the theme of the subsequent tome of the *Encyclopaedia*: the *Philosophy of Nature*. However, the path of determinant being stalls at “Actuality,” where, as we saw, being gets caught up in the endless regressions of causality, subject and accident, and modal contingency. The holistic rounding out, the completion of the Logics’ narrative, i.e. the full determining of being as existing, knowable nature, for Science, is only made possible through the agency of the Absolute, an expression of Revelation that takes place in the second half of the Logics, in the Doctrine of the Concept. Here, the determination of nature takes on its holistic, unified, purposive quality, without which, as Kant had seen in his *Critique of Judgement*, we cannot do natural science. The holistic, organic aspect of nature cannot be derived from human reason alone but must be “supplied” by the agency of the Absolute qua Revelation, where being is determined as One and whole. Only then can we fully grasp the sense of the famous, much discussed ending of the Logics, where the Idea (God) freely de-syllogises itself (*sich entschliesst*), discloses itself as nature. In a word, in order for nature to constitute a purposive whole, and thus be the object of knowledge in the subse-

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\(^{36}\) Essentially, worldly things that are supposedly self-identical are undermined by self-differencing, which, in turn, is only possible within a pre-supposed identity.
quent Philosophy of Nature, it must be presented as the proffered content of the Idea. In the Doctrine of the Concept, being becomes the revelatory Word or logos of the Idea’s posited selfhood, articulated through the ontological grammar of judgment and syllogism, the two main sections of the Subjective Logic (Logic of the Concept).

Actuality, which closes Objective Logic, is the highest determination of objectivity that human reason, left on its own, is capable of. Actuality is certainly more meaningful than the emptiness with which the Logics’ narrative begins; actuality is the locus of human political history, human morality, and even the human, all too human re-iterations of modern, romantic art, of biblical hermeneutics and ironic, un-systematic philosophizing. Indeed, if these worldly, contemporary pursuits strike us, still today, as recognizable, it is because they are logically never-ending. The endlessly tragi-comic play of demise, renewal and demise, in all human pursuits, the nauseating “slaughter bench” that Hegel refers to in the Introduction to his Lectures on the Philosophy of History, and which we still see around us today, is what justifies the negative theodicy of Hegelian philosophy, shared by commentators on both the Right and the Left of the interpretive spectrum. My point is that it is wrong to unduly promote the category of actuality in Hegel, and then to judge his philosophy with respect to how that category compares to the “real world.” For him, actuality itself and the strivings of the human world must always disappoint and scandalize us; the actual world can never live up to the beautiful reconciliations of the human and the divine that are incarnate in art and religion, and realized in philosophical Science. Actuality alone must always fail and yet “always failing” already implies a constantly renewed effort, an endless striving for something that only revelation can offer, namely the ideas of the good, the true and the beautiful, i.e. the dynamic unity of freedom and necessity that Hegel presents as the Absolute Idea, with which the Logics end.

Actuality can only posit the unity of freedom and necessity as a summum bonum and constantly strive toward it without ever attaining it. What is missing is the subjective agency of the Idea/god. The binary division we find in the Science of Logic, between Objective and Subjective Logics, clearly establishes the distinction between the human and the divine, a distinction necessary in order for their reconciliation to take place in philosophical Science. For Hegel, the state university is the reincarnated beautiful individuality where human reason (the Faculties of Law and Medicine) and divine Revelation (the Faculty of Theology) are truly reconciled in a universal singularity (the Faculty of Philosophy). It is an existing state institu-
tion where human knowledge is freely carried out along with the realization that “what is to be known,” the revealed content of knowledge, is necessarily much more than human.

Many of today’s jaded professors, together with business people, journalists, politicians, disenchanted students, and their parents, would certainly find such a promotion of the public (state) university bewildering, perhaps especially in the United States where private universities thrive. It is indeed difficult for us, today, to imagine the ontological status that the founders of the University of Berlin, all philosophers (Fichte, Humbolt, Schleiermacher and, later, Hegel), invested in that pioneering state institution, and how its mission necessarily involved coming to terms with the Aufklärung’s fundamental conflict between faith and knowledge, exemplified in the Pantheismusstreit between Jacobi and Mendelssohn, and which Kant had already unsuccessfully attempted to resolve at the university level in his essay on the “Conflict of the Faculties.” Of course, as a state institution, the university is de facto political, and actual to the extent that it is in the world. However, I believe it is fair to say that, for Hegel, the actuality of the state university is truly, “[the actuality] of the Idea itself and not [the] ordinary actuality of what is simply present.” (EL, §142Z, where Hegel refers to Aristotle)

The difficulty that we have in recognizing the absolute ontological status of the state university perhaps lies, once again, with us. Because we no longer ascribe agency to the Idea (to God, to the Absolute), we remain stuck at the “end of chapter six,” caught up in the endless endings of human actuality, where the university project is nothing special and certainly not the unique realization of logos, the discursive reality where both Revelation and reason are at home (bei sich).

Have we responded to the qualms referred to at the beginning of this article, regarding the religious dimension of Hegel’s thought? Perhaps, it might be objected that in seeking to recognize the religious dimension, I have, in fact, denied it. Indeed, if Science allows us to understand Revelation as the agency of the Absolute or the self-consciousness of the Idea, do we really need religion? May we not now jump straight to chapter eight, on Absolute Knowing, the very move that I have been arguing against through my discussion of Revelation? Of course, while such an omission has always been possible, I hope to have shown that it would be deeply unfaithful to Hegel’s thought. To know the Truth of the Absolute is to recognize its agency and this is only possible if we not only recognize that the
Absolute exists but how It has given itself to be known in the religious forms of Revelation.\textsuperscript{37} This knowledge takes place in those increasingly human forms of the sacred, celebrated in communal forms of religious worship and study. It is in these absolute forms of actuality that Truth as self-knowledge is carried out, thereby making knowledge itself possible.\textsuperscript{38}

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\textsuperscript{37} Hegel, \textit{Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion II}, 383. In Hegel’s words, philosophical Science must take us from knowledge “that God exists” to “what He is.”

\textsuperscript{38} We may notice here and affinity with Plato’s response to the Eristic argument: (prior) acquaintance with the Idea(s) is what makes knowledge itself, even knowledge of earthly, actual things possible.