

Rational Religion in the Modern World: Hegel's Conception and 21st Century Modernity

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Article Info

Article type:

Research Article

Article history:

Received 24 August 2024

Received in revised form

11 October 2024

Accepted 26 January 2025

Published online 20

Month 2026

Keywords:

Hegel, Phenomenology of Religion, Absolute Spirit, Consummate Religion, Christianity, Modernity

ABSTRACT

Hegel's philosophy of religion seeks to define a form of religion capable of preserving social unity in the context of modern transformation. At the center of his system stands the Absolute Spirit, whose historical manifestations appear in art, religion, and philosophy. Religion expresses these manifestations symbolically, and the degree of a religion's completeness determines the clarity of this expression. Hegel maintains that the development of religion and its reconciliation with philosophy provide a rational grounding for religious truth in the modern age and contribute to the self-consciousness of the Absolute Spirit. This study analyzes the rationalization of religion in Hegel's thought and concludes that only a complete religion aligned with absolute philosophy can fully shape human self-awareness. Hegel ultimately identifies Lutheran Christianity, through the doctrines of incarnation and the Trinity, as the consummate religion that reconciles historical determination with absoluteness. While this approach unifies religion and philosophy and emphasizes reason, it also invites criticism for its Christian exclusivism, secularizing tendency, and the weakening of religion's sacred character.

Cite this article: Esfandiar, H. & Fallahrafie, A. (2026). Rational Religion in the Modern World: Hegel's Conception and 21st-Century Modernity. *Journal of Philosophical Investigations, Journal of Philosophical Investigations*, 19(53), 225-240. <https://doi.org/10.22034/jpiut.2025.63121.3851>



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Publisher: University of Tabriz.

Introduction

Hegel presents the "concept of religion" within its historical context by analyzing three stages: the abstraction of the concept of God, awareness of God, and the relationship between action and religion. Unlike pure philosophy, the philosophy of religion does not begin with something purely immediate. Instead, ultimate knowledge resides within the philosophical system, with presuppositions dialectically derived from prior necessity.

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel examines the concept of God and awareness of God. He discusses faith, feeling, representation, and thought in relation to the philosophical approach to God. He also explores the relationship between action and religion. Hegel then moves on to classify religions based on their historical rationality. He categorizes them into three types: natural religion, personal religion, and complete religion. Complete religion, expressed through symbolic language, serves to display the Absolute Spirit. Hegel also discusses a "determined religion," meaning that the mental concept of religion has been objectified by humans throughout history. This has resulted in various determined religions, whether primitive or advanced. These religions are characterized by doctrinal, ethical, and practical teachings (Hegel, 1934, 70-140).

Among these, Hegel views Christianity as fully embodying the concept of religion. However, as a post-Kantian thinker, Hegel does not endorse a dogmatic metaphysics. Thus, "God" or the "Absolute Spirit" in Hegel's philosophy should not be understood as a superhuman or theological existence. Similarly, when Hegel refers to Christianity as the "complete religion," he does not mean the same thing as traditional Christian views. Christianity in Hegel's *Rational Interpretation* represents a "religion for the modern age," aligned with the demands of modernity. Rationalizing religion, along with other aspects of reality, is a key goal of Hegel's absolute idealist modern philosophy.

This research aims to examine the Possibility and how religion is rationalized within Hegel's philosophical system to fit modernity and the modern era. It will explore the role of religion in modernity and the modern world. We will first discuss the phenomenology of religion, explain the divisions of religions, and analyze the concept of complete religion according to Hegel. Using an analytical method, we will address the relationship between religion and modernity and discuss the role of Consummate Religion in this context. Based on Hegel's views on absolute religion and its relationship to modernity, it appears that, in the modern world—particularly the 21st century—religion and modernity coexist and play a reciprocal role in completing each other. The following sources will provide the background for this research:

All of these authors, except for Charles Taylor, are 21st-century commentators on Hegel who have written about his philosophy of religion. Taylor, in his book *Hegel and Modern Society*, argues that modernity has led to a decline in the role of religion in public life. Unlike Hegel, who was optimistic about the progress of human consciousness in modernity, Taylor is

critical of modernity's effects on religion and society. Thomas Lewis, in his book and article, considers Hegel a post-Kantian thinker. He interprets Hegel's philosophy of religion within the framework of critical philosophy, examining the role of religion in modern social and moral life. However, he neglects other aspects of the relationship between religion and modernity. Espen Hammer explores how Hegel can be viewed as a theorist of secularization. He believes the tension between religion and secularization can be resolved in this way. However, Hammer overlooks the theological aspects of religion from Hegel's perspective and the connection between the finite and the infinite. Will Dudley re-examines Thomas Lewis's work and emphasizes religion's role in social and moral life. Jörg Dierken focuses on the thought of the young Hegel. He addresses the union of the finite with the infinite and the inclusion of the absolute in multiplicity but does not discuss the relationship between religion and modernity.

Ultimately, no comprehensive study has yet addressed the phenomenology of religion in Hegel and demonstrated its harmony with Hegel's absolute idealism. Such a study would also need to examine the relationship between religion and modernity. The present article, with a focus on Hegel's works, is dedicated to discussing these issues.

1. Phenomenology of Religion in Three Realms

In his study of consciousness and various religions' conceptions of the Absolute Idea, Hegel seeks to approach the concept of religion. This effort is essentially a phenomenology of religion, as it examines diverse historical forms of consciousness regarding the Absolute Idea. The phenomenology of religion can be analyzed both internally and externally.

Internal Analysis: This involves examining three stages:

1. **Abstract and Mental Concept:** Here, God is understood through religious texts, symbols, and representations.
2. **Practical Relationship:** This stage involves engaging with the divine or the metaphysical concept of religion, which is the concrete embodiment of the religious idea.
3. **Practical Commandments:** This pertains to the practical application of religious principles.

External Analysis: This aligns with the three fundamental categories of logic: being, essence, and concept. Existing religions exhibit these categories in specific ways. For instance, in Eastern Hinduism, the absolute is understood as the undifferentiated and formless Brahman. In Judaism, the absolute is conceived as distinct and with a specific form. In Greek philosophy, the absolute is seen as necessity or fate governing the world, while in Roman thought, it is viewed as goal-oriented and utilitarian. Hegel argues that Christianity integrates these disparate elements from previous religions. Based on this analysis, Hegel categorizes religions into three realms:

1. **Natural Religion:** In this stage, the spirit has not yet overcome nature. Humans, unable to grasp the absolute as spirit, perceive it through natural phenomena imbued with

supernatural powers. The absolute is not yet free as spirit but is bound to nature. Magic serves as a prime example of this type of religion. The concept of religion arises from recognizing the separation between the universal spirit (God) and the individual spirit (human). The goal of religions is to bridge this gap. Magic, however, does not acknowledge this separation, assuming unity between the universal and the individual. Even today, primitive societies like the Eskimos practice this form of religion. Hegel includes Buddhism, Hinduism, and Chinese religion under this category.

- 2. determinate religion:** According to Hegel, religion progresses from a substantial stage, where the divine absolute is conceived as a substance, to a stage where the divine is seen as a spirit. Hegel considers this stage intermediary, where the divine does not possess an abstract and universal form but rather a concrete and specific universal form. It is not only determinate but also determines the particular. It emanates the particular from itself while simultaneously encompassing it. At this stage, the spirit attains individuality, and religion becomes individualistic. The absolute becomes a spiritual being with specific attributes. Greek, Roman, and Jewish religions fall into this category.

The Iranian religion stands at the boundary between natural religions and determinate religion. This religion separates man from the universal essence; the Iranian god is not unified with man and nature. Ahura Mazda and man are two distinct essences, although human individuality shares a common essence with that of Ahura Mazda. (Hegel, 1977, 303). Hegel, while praising the Iranian faith, considers this prominent feature unique to Iranian religions and remarks that we do not see it in other religions such as the Chinese, Indian, Greek, or Roman faiths:

This unity in the Iranian faith is manifested as light... This light, in both its natural and psychological meanings, elevates the spirit or liberates it from pure nature... Thus, in Iran, earlier than in other lands, unity takes on a spiritual and mental form rather than becoming an external, lifeless system. This faith grants each individual a personal sense of dignity and honor. (Hegel, 1977, 304).

- 3. Consummate Religion:** According to Lewis's interpretation of Hegel, the philosopher attempts to align historical religions with various elements or "moments of development" of his concept of religion. Each religion exhibits a limited aspect of this structure (Hegel, 1934, 215; Lewis, 2011, 180-181). However, absolute religion reveals it in its entirety. Hegel insists that the spirit only returns to itself or becomes "reconciled" with itself through the knowledge of the complete concept. The knowledge of absolute religion is fundamentally realized through "conceptual representation." For Hegel, the Rational Idea (Begriff) is fully realized only in Christianity. Therefore, other religions are still insufficient and incomplete in relation to the concept of the absolute spirit (Lewis, 2011, 135). Because, other religions remain more in the state of imagery rather than progressing

towards rational form, in comparison to Christianity. According to Hegel, Christianity represents the absolute truth because it embodies the Absolute in a specific, concrete form. Unlike other religions, where God is abstract and transcendent, in Christianity, God manifests Himself as an embodied spirit—Jesus Christ. Hegel argues that God's infinite, absolute nature necessitates His manifestation in the finite realm. In this view, the historical Christ is where the Absolute Spirit unites with the finite spirit, making God's essence fully conscious and present in the world (Hodgson, 2005, 80).

However, Hegel faces a challenge: his dialectic requires the concept to transcend its historical form. If so, how can Christianity, a historically determined religion, be considered the absolute, true, and complete religion? Hegel reconciles this by interpreting Christianity as the culmination of the Absolute Spirit's historical development. The unity of the finite and infinite spirits in Christ is the basis for Hegel's interpretation of Christianity, where the Absolute Spirit reveals itself progressively through history.

2. The Phenomenology of Absolute Spirit

Hegel's philosophy centers on the spirit's historical journey toward self-realization. Knowledge and awareness are crucial in this process, as the spirit transforms into knowledge, recognizing itself. Religion, in Hegel's view, represents the finite human spirit's awareness of the Absolute Spirit. This awareness evolves over time, moving towards growth and perfection. The manifestation of the Absolute Spirit, due to the necessity of gradual completion, occurs progressively and through stages. Based on this, Hegel considers religion as the "consciousness of the Absolute Spirit embodied by the finite spirit" (Hegel, 1971, 748). Embodiment here means that, due to the inability to confront the absolute and pure essence in its entirety, humans strive to create a definite and objective form of it. This form, within a specific and limited framework, reflects each nation's unique embodiment of the Absolute Spirit, sometimes differing from other nations. This concept does not remain static but evolves over time through a historical process, advancing towards growth and perfection.

2-1. Religious Ontology: Unity of Infinite and Finite Spirit

Hegel also transforms phenomenology into ontology by establishing a correspondence between human knowledge of the Absolute Spirit and the Absolute Spirit itself. The finite spirit's knowledge, though limited, is united with the infinite spirit's knowledge through revelation. This unity is fully realized in Christianity, where the finite human spirit ascends to divinity, and the infinite spirit descends to human form, culminating in the incarnation.

The primary background of the phenomenology of spirit is absolute knowledge and human knowledge. These two are not only inseparable but also united. Human awareness, in the process described by Hegel, unites into absolute awareness. After this process, it is indeed the absolute that becomes aware of itself. According to Hans Küng's interpretation, this process of becoming absolute awareness has both a negative and a positive meaning. The negative

meaning is that the philosopher should not confine himself to a structure devoid of reality, implying that reality cannot be conjectured from above. The positive meaning is that the philosopher bases his observations on what he perceives, and then hypothesizes, describing reality as it reveals itself to him within his historical realm. Therefore, he experiences reality beyond all theoretical, scientific, moral, legal, religious, and philosophical awareness limitations, as awareness is acquired by the world and, simultaneously, the world is recognized through awareness (Küng, 2006, 145).

Hegel regards the formulation achieved through revelation as religion and believes that at this stage, religion engages in ontology rather than phenomenology. He views this religious ontology, from his perspective, as specific to Christianity because, in Christianity, the finite spirit ascends to divinity, and the infinite spirit descends from its unattainable position. Hence, at this stage, the embodiment is fully realized, and the finite human spirit unites and merges with the infinite Absolute Spirit.

3. Incarnation and the Historical Christ

In Hegel's view, the necessity and certainty of the historical and experiential representation of God in the world required His embodiment in Christ. He states:

The Absolute Being, which within its unity implicitly and covertly included both the divine and human natures, had to become conscious after enduring infinite suffering, but only in the context of hidden existence and essence. This means that limitations, weaknesses, and other aspects could not impair the essential unity of these two natures. In other words, the unity of the divine and human natures manifests in human consciousness in such a way that the human being appears as God and God as a human being. (Hegel, 1934, 454)

This necessity, according to Hegel's philosophy, is based on the logical necessity of the return of the particular into the universal. Just as logic necessitates that something engenders its opposite within itself, here, the essence of God necessitates the creation of the world, which is His opposite. This world, seemingly detached from His essence and opposing Him, must ultimately return to Him based on that necessity. The universal permits the particular to detach from it, causing a separation and alienation between the two, symbolizing the estrangement between Him and the created world. In religious terms, this estrangement, especially in the human domain, is articulated through the concept of original sin or the story of Adam and Eve. Humanity, as a particular distanced from the universal, experiences finitude and inherent evil due to this separation. Evil occurs when humans act without alignment with the universal purpose, pursuing their individual and personal goals. Hegel considers this estrangement a truth beyond time, even though the creation story presents it as a historical event.

Hegel does not consider the understanding of the unity of God and humanity a purely intellectual or philosophical matter. Instead, he believes that this understanding is inherently assumed by humanity as a certainty or a presupposition. He argues that the unity of the divine and human nature becomes immediately evident to humans through intuitive sensory perception. Citing the Gospel of John 1:14, he states: "For this unity [of God and humanity] to become certain for humans, God had to appear in the world in the form of human flesh (and skin). because only in this way could that truth become certain for humans" (Hegel, 1934, 455).

Why does this unity of God and humanity appear precisely in the form of a human being? According to Hegel, the reason lies in human thought. Only humans, in the true sense, are universal and can conceive the universal, attaining certainty in it. All these philosophical interpretations by Hegel are based on the belief in the Bible, leading to a biblical foundation for his philosophical interpretation of embodiment. He says:

Religion of a people is their awareness of their own existence and of the supreme being. This awareness reflects their universal essence and its relationship with God. Therefore, the religion of a people represents their self-conception. A people who sees nature as their god cannot be free. Only when they view God as a spirit superior to nature do they attain spiritual attributes and freedom (Hegel, 1977, 138).

When examining religions, each religion's status depends on whether it recognizes truth in a state of dispersion or true unity. In dispersion, God is understood abstractly as the Lord of heaven and earth. He exists above this world and is separate from human reality (Hegel, 1977, 138). In this part of his discourse, Hegel discusses unity and plurality. He introduces the transcendent or extrinsic nature of God, as well as the immanent or intrinsic nature. He asserts that the transcendent God—meaning the God who possesses a higher existence and is worthy of creation—is a result of humanity's perception of the plurality of truth. Consequently, he elaborates further on the concepts of unity and plurality., stating:

In true unity, God is conceived as encompassing both the universal and the particular because even the particular element in the concept of incarnation (or humanity of God) gains a positive meaning. The idea of God encompasses the unity and universality of spirit and awareness in their true existence; in other words, the finite and infinite are united. Where these two are separated, finite understanding prevails. But in Christianity, the idea of God manifests as the unity of human and divine nature. This is the true concept of religion (Hegel, 1956, 138).

In this passage, Hegel refers to the concept of the unity of existence and addresses the issue of finitude and infinity, as well as the universality and particularity of the Absolute Truth. He

attempts to reconcile both aspects. To illustrate this, he refers to Christianity, which, according to him, embodies both universality and particularity—that is, the human nature and divinity are united in it. According to some of Hegel's interpreters, while he does not adhere to the doctrine of the unity of existence and distances himself from this accusation, he still considers it a necessary but insufficient explanation of God (Beiser, 2012, 244).

According to Hegel, this true concept of religion is realized only in Christianity, as it is within this faith that the unity of the divine and human nature has been achieved. Hegel connects this philosophical interpretation of unity to the unity of mind and object, considering the subject matter of religion to be the truth and unity of mind and object. Therefore, the concept of incarnation in Christianity is not merely the notion of God embodied in a human form but rather provides a correct understanding of God. This means that, according to Christian belief, God can manifest in an individual, which is not a contradiction but rather the perfection of God; for individuality is positively present in the essence of God, and personality is conceivable within God's essence. This conscious freedom existed among the Greeks and, more perfectly, now exists among Christians (Hegel, 1956, 141). In this interpretation, humans are not merely finite and individual spirits; they are also universal and infinite spirits. In Hegel's interpretation of the incarnation, God becomes not only finite but reaches the utmost finitude, which is death. However, this death is accompanied by resurrection.

Hegel considers this death a necessary consequence of conceiving God as spirit, and His resurrection means His ascension back to the Father. Christ, as the Son of God, is not merely an individual as the person of Jesus but represents universal humanity as it truly manifests in human nature. He transcended the real world, which includes baseness and limitation, and thus died to this stage (Hegel, 1934, 455). The philosophical interpretation of the Christian spirit involves the dual and even opposing movement of the spirit in existence, as Hegel describes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "The spirit and its pure thought are two aspects of that absolute unity. The alienation of the divine nature involves two descending stages, each distinct from the other. On one hand, the essence is alienated from itself and distant, and on the other, it has an ascending movement to become the essence: (Hegel, 1971, 778). In other words, in one movement, the essence becomes 'self-awareness,' and in the other, 'self-awareness' becomes the essence. In religious terms, this is the historical presence of Christ in this world, which has both divine (self-awareness) and human (essence) aspects. These two movements converge in Christ, meaning that in Christ, the human nature reaches the divine, and man becomes God. This unity also signifies the possibility of human transcendence and the movement beyond finite limitations toward the infinite.

4. Hegelian Interpretation of the Christian Trinity

In Hegel's effort to reconcile the finite human spirit with the infinite divine spirit (the ascent of the finite spirit and the descent of the infinite spirit in Christianity), the process of humanity's return to its divine origin is completed. From Hegel's perspective as a devout Christian, Christianity embodies absolute truth, which necessitates that God manifest His entire essence in the form of an objective and specific spirit. The Trinity is the exemplary manifestation of this appearance. He notes in **Phenomenology of Spirit** that the absolute spirit achieves a form of intrinsic self-awareness that becomes determined and specified, embodied in a real human existence. In essence, the spirit becomes an objective entity that directly enters our experience. Here, the thought of God merges with existence, showing His divine presence immediately (Hegel, 1971, 758). Hegel categorizes religions into three levels: natural religion, the religion of art, and revealed religion, providing a philosophical interpretation of each. In the natural religion stage, the divine is worshipped in the form of natural and material objects. At this stage, the absolute is not understood as spirit, and even human-made artifacts are not given significance. Magic and substantial religions fall into this category, considered primitive religions. "The distinguishing feature of these religions is their immediacy. It is as though the gods present themselves directly to people in the form of natural and material entities, without any intermediary (Hegel, 1934, 219).

Gradually, deities like water and fire lose their immediacy and become manifestations of divine attributes and will. Water becomes a symbol of His purity, and fire a sign of His luminous realm. In a higher stage, seen among the Egyptians, the emergence of art and aesthetics marks this phase, as architecture, pyramids, and sculpture from animals to human forms begin to reveal the artistic spirit. Entering the phase of the religion of art is where pure moral spirit arises. Although this art is not merely ethics, mutual influence is observed in the customs and rituals of this religion, with a type of freedom resulting from balance and harmony, representing the freshness and youth of the spirit. This phase serves as an intermediary between a human who was nothing against nature and had not yet ascended to their human status and the human of the next stage, who becomes aware of their infinity with the advent of Christianity.

Hegel interprets the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, based on the faith of the Christian community. According to this belief, the spirit has become tangible and incarnate through Jesus. Through the dialectical process of becoming, the immediately present spirit within itself nurtures the possibility of negating this immediacy, and with this cultivation, the potential for the unity of humans with God emerges, calling itself forth in the temporal appearance of Jesus. The metaphysical existence of the spirit meets the historical existence of Jesus. Lukács, referring to Hegel's early theological writings on the nature of religious transcendence over contradictions, writes: "The hill and the eye that sees it are object and subject, but in the relationship between man and God, between spirit and spirit, objectivity and subjectivity are not separated in this

way; one is to the other as another meaning that it recognizes; both are one thing." Here we see the theory of the identity of subject-object expressed decisively and mystically: "True knowledge of the world can be self-knowledge, and absolute idealism must discover a subject that is both creator and knower of the world's process." (Lukács, 1995, 251). Hegel considers this subject to be God. However, since this unity must be tangible, sensible, and objective for humans to have a comprehensible relationship with it and live with it, "God exists as a community (comprising three elements).

The first element is the idea in its simple universality, for itself (in itself). In this self-contained state, which has not yet accepted any division and has not moved towards the other, it is the "Father". The second element is the particular element, the idea in its state of appearance and manifestation (tangible and sensible), the "Son". In this state, the idea externalizes and brings external manifestation to the original state of the idea, and in this state, it is known as the divine idea, forming the unity of God and man. The third element is consciousness, that is, the consciousness of God as spirit. The spirit as it exists and gives reality to itself is the community (Hegel, 1934, 473). Hegel's discussion of the community represents the Christian belief in the association of the concept of community, or in other terms, the state, with the determinate being of God. "The principle of the state, or the universal concept on which the existence of the state depends, is considered an absolute matter and a determination of the determinations of the same being of God" (Hegel, 1977, 138).

According to Hammond, "For Hegel, Christianity is a commitment that 'sets aside the specific interests of the particular spirit (i.e., individual and subjective desires) and directs a nation towards its common spiritual goal. Moral life follows the general sense, awareness, and will (personality and common interests in general), not the individual personality and its interests'" (Hammond, 2018, 2). For Hegel, the concept of incarnation in Christianity does not reduce God to a human form unworthy of His divinity; rather, it makes a correct understanding of God possible. This possibility and truth of awareness and knowledge of God are achieved in religion. Although art also facilitates this recognition, and the content of art is the same as that of religion, art does so through sensory intuition. Similarly, while the content of philosophy is also this awareness and knowledge, its medium is thought. Hegel considers only these three domains—religion, art, and philosophy—to be responsible for understanding the absolute spirit. Art, in its essence, is the creation of beauty and should exist only where the power of imagination and imagery serves as the primary means of understanding God, who is not yet recognized as the universal spirit. In philosophy, the deepest aspects of the spirit can be grasped abstractly through thought. In philosophy, the content of awareness is not a sensory element; rather, the means to express the concept of God is thought. However, in religion, this awareness is expressed in the form of spiritual and sensory metaphor. The more complete the religion, the more tangible and complete this metaphor will be.

Therefore, according to Hegel, Christianity expresses this awareness of the spirit in the embodiment and incarnation of God's Son. Thus, what is understood in religion through metaphor as a living relationship is achieved in philosophy through intellectual comprehension. Hegel responded to Tulloch (a member of the Lutheran pietist movement) who opposed any philosophical interpretations in religion, including the "Trinity," by explicitly identifying himself as a Lutheran: "Is not the high knowledge based on Christianity concerning God, which considers God manifested in the Trinity, worthy of respect and attention entirely different from what is gained by describing it as a merely historical process? Throughout your book, I could not find any sign of a native understanding (derived from the teachings of Christianity) of this doctrine. I am a Lutheran, and through philosophy, I have immediately accepted the Lutheran faith. I have not allowed myself to deviate from this fundamental doctrine with seemingly historical explanations. In the world, there is a higher spirit than the mere spirit considered in such a human tradition" (Hegel, 1984, 144). According to Hegel, only in Christianity does the divine existence appear as a revealed incarnation in the person of Christ. It is here that divine existence is recognized as spirit (Hegel, 1971, 759-762). This incarnate spirit is the manifestation of divinity:

God has two manifestations, one as nature and one as spirit, and both are temples He fills and in which He is present. God, as an abstraction, is not the true God; His truth is the overcoming of His other, the living process, which is the world. When this process takes on a divine form, it becomes His Son. (Hegel, 1970: 205)

In the Christian era, the divine spirit descends to the earthly realm and is embodied within an individual human. This reconciliation represents the harmony of the objective spirit with the subjective spirit. According to Lewis's interpretation of Hegel, God is not another for man; He is human thought or spirit when it attains its absoluteness. Similarly, this point can be stated in reverse—when the limited human spirit fully comprehends itself, it becomes divine (Lewis, 2011, 12).

The spirit, after emerging from its natural state and adopting a subjective character, experiences internal separation and becomes reconciled and unified with itself during the Christian era.

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5. Religion and Modernity

After understanding Hegel's concept of religion, especially absolute religion, the question arises about the role of religion in modern society according to Hegel's perspective. In other words, how does Hegel's rational interpretation of absolute religion contribute to its preservation in the modern world and, conversely, how does it help maintain modern values? Hegel wanted religion

to be a matter for all people, from ordinary individuals to spiritual elites and philosophers, and believed that humanity should feel modernity in their everyday lives. Free mentality, in reality, exists in modern society and modern philosophy (which he believes appears in absolute philosophy). Therefore, if religion is correctly understood, due to its emotional power and symbolic capacity, it can be the primary means of conveying such a modern mentality. The ability of religion to console, educate, and express the ideals and lofty aspirations of a people goes beyond the capacity of philosophical thought. Thus, modern religion must provide awareness suitable for the senses and imagination and, as such, occupy an influential place in the absolute spirit (Lewis, 2011, 236). The spirit becomes "absolute" when it recognizes itself as truth through art, religion, and philosophy. Each of these modes of knowing embodies a different kind of knowledge, creating an interesting tension. On one hand, Hegel aims to show the agreement between philosophical reason and a genuinely existing religious tradition (rather than an abstract one). In fact, Lutheran Christianity and the religious community shaped by its faith and practice reflect the content of philosophy in its representational thought. Philosophy places this content in an appropriate conceptual thought, but as Hegel says, "it always remains the same." However, the nature of symbolic thought (which appears in religion) is that it cannot fully encompass the truth. The insufficiency of the vessel directs the spirit towards the domain of conceptual knowledge or philosophy. Yet, most people cannot follow this path (philosophy) to its end. Although the philosophical motivation elevates Christianity to a higher degree than any other religion, the vast majority of its followers will remain at a lower level of unity with the absolute spirit (Lewis, 2011: 231, 205). Here, Hegel distinguishes between ordinary people, whom he considers the majority, and a group that can be termed religious elites, or mystics, who reach the level of unity with the absolute spirit (a subject that should be detailed from Hegel's perspective).

5-1. Religion in the Modern Era

Reflecting on Hegel's works, the role of religion in contemporary modern life can be summarized in the following points:

1. **Historical Development and the End of History:** Hegel sees religion as part of the dialectical progress of spirit (Geist) in history. For him, "absolute religion" represents the peak of religious development and encompasses the highest manifestation of the self-consciousness of spirit. As modern times advance towards the realization of freedom and self-consciousness, absolute religion represents the culmination of this historical process. Modernism, from this perspective, is the period when the realization of this historical development begins to take shape.

2. **Union of Religion and Modern Reason:** Hegel proposes the integration of religious beliefs with reason and argues that absolute religion aligns with the rational structure of reality. He considers religion as revealing the meaning of life through reason. In the modern world, Hegel suggests that absolute religion must be understood in a way compatible with rational thought

(Luchi, 2022, 190). Although this statement by Luchi regarding religion in the modern era may not be exclusive to Hegel, what is significant is that Hegel, first, has paid attention to the various dimensions of this claim and elucidated it, and second, has developed a philosophical theory on it; a task that others have not undertaken.

Thus, the integration of religion and modern rationality means that religion in the modern world should not be opposed to reason but should be seen as the realization of the highest rational and ethical principles. Therefore, absolute religion functions as a means of harmonizing spiritual and rational insights. At this stage, humanity contemplates the absolute with pure rationality, free from mental and imaginative imagery. Thus, the role of absolute religion (Lutheran Christianity) in preserving modernity is both essential and dependent on the existence of modernity. In other words, it has a reciprocal relationship with modernity. This religion helps modernity preserve modern values established by absolute philosophy, and modernity provides the conditions for its survival, but only if it aligns with the general rationality prevailing in modernity.

3. Religion's Role in the Development of Freedom in Ethical and Social Life: For Hegel, absolute religion contributes to the formation of an ethical life essential for the development of freedom in the modern state. In this context, religion provides a foundation for both individual and collective ethical life. Absolute religion helps form the ethical frameworks in which freedom can be realized and offers a conception of how to organize individual and collective life according to ethical principles (Lewis, 2013, 40-45). Thus, Hegel considers religion crucial for social cohesion in modern society because it enables empathy with institutions and supports a just and rational social order that promotes rational freedom.

4. Perpetuity of the Absolute and the Secularization of Religion: Hegel considers modernity to be secular while also being a Christian thinker who views religion, particularly Christianity, as the manifestation of the absolute. To address the challenge of religion and secularization, he suggests that the absolute is internal and enduring, and a sufficient explanation of religion must necessarily accept secularization as the endpoint of the spirit's development. In other words, religion is evolving towards secularization within his philosophical framework (Hammer, 2013, 230-233). Hegel views absolute religion in modernity not as worship of a transcendent deity but as transformative, enhancing self-awareness through collective participation and symbolizing philosophical truths (Dudley, 2014, 315). Thus, the function of religion changes with its transformation in modernity, emphasizing the attainment of self-awareness of spirit and the representation of philosophical truths and organizing collective participation and self-awareness—symbols of the secularization of religion.

5. Evolutionary Stages of Religion and Religious Pluralism: Although Hegel's philosophy specifically emphasizes the finality of Christianity as absolute religion, he also acknowledges the historical and logical necessity of religious diversity. He views different religions as stages in the development of the absolute spirit. In the modern world, this perspective allows for the

recognition of the role that various religious traditions play in the ongoing development of the spirit, even while he maintains a specific philosophical stance on the evolution of this development in Christianity (Hodgson, 2005, 282-285). In summary, for Hegel, absolute religion, as the highest manifestation of spiritual and moral development, integrates with the rational structure of the modern world and contributes to the ethical life of modern societies. This religion responds to the challenges of modern secularization and emphasizes the importance of maintaining spiritual insights while also considering the historical and logical role of religious diversity.

6. Religious Rationalism and the Denial of Rituals: Hegel, with his specific interpretation of the evolutionary stages of religion, regards religious rituals and practices as characteristic of the representational and symbolic stage of religion and denies any such rituals and practices in the final stage or absolute religion.

6. Critical Perspective on Hegel's Concept of Rational Religion

Hegel's concept of rational religion is a fundamental aspect of his philosophical system that requires a more nuanced examination and critique. Hegel seeks to define religion as a rational form of truth, where absolute truth manifests itself through historical and cultural expressions. This approach can be critically analyzed in several dimensions:

1. **Hegel's Conception of God; In the Tension Between the God of Religion and the God of Pantheism:** This is the point that can be inferred from the critiques of William Desmond and Charles Hartshorne. They fundamentally critique Hegel's conception of religion and God. They argue that Hegel's particular conception of God—as an all-encompassing whole—inevitably leads to pantheism or panentheism, especially when Hegel attempts to unite opposites such as necessary and contingent, finite and infinite, universal and particular. In their perspective, this ultimately results in atheism rather than genuine religiosity (Desmond, 2003, 222; Hartshorne, 1941, 230-232)
2. **Limited Definition of Religion:** One of the main criticisms of Hegel is that he interprets religion in a predominantly rational and limited way. This interpretation may overlook the emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of religion. As a complex human phenomenon, religion cannot be reduced solely to a rational and logical form.
3. **Centrality of Christianity:** Hegel specifically focuses on Christianity as the complete and absolute religion, which may lead to his religious bias. This bias causes him to disregard the status of other religions, particularly Islam. However, one must ask him: What is the position of Islam as the last and most complete religion in the history of religions or the phenomenology of religion?
4. **Dialectical Internal Contradictions:** Hegel's philosophical system is based on dialectics; however, this dialectic may be accompanied by internal contradictions. Particularly regarding the possibility of reconciling historical determination and

absoluteness—an idea Hegel presents as a fundamental principle of rational religion—this issue may raise questions about the compatibility and coherence of religion with his philosophical principles.

5. **Secularization of Religion:** Through his rational interpretation of religion and the process of its secularization, Hegel effectively strips revealed religion of its sacred content. This could lead to a weakening of the deeper meanings and sacredness of religion, transforming it into a philosophical tool that primarily responds to the rational needs of modernity rather than the spiritual needs of humanity.
6. **Lack of a Comprehensive View of Religion:** Overall, it can be said that Hegel, due to his focus on rationality and a limited interpretation of religion, is unable to offer a comprehensive view of the phenomenon of religion. This lack can result in the neglect of the diversity of religions and their various manifestations throughout human history.

Conclusion

In his religious thought, Hegel aims to develop a concept of religion that provides continuity for a rapidly evolving modern society. His explanation of religion addresses social concerns without reducing it to merely a tool. Hegel seeks to elucidate Christian teachings as metaphorical and narrative expressions of the absolute. In philosophy, the content of self-consciousness of the spirit is expressed in pure conceptual terms. In religion, this awareness is conveyed through spiritual and sensory symbols. Thus, the content of philosophy, which expresses the manifestations of the absolute spirit, is presented symbolically in religion. The more complete the religion, the more tangible and complete this symbolism becomes. Hegel integrates religion into philosophy, aiming to justify authentic religious teachings in the modern world. He demonstrates the role of religion in the stages of self-consciousness of the absolute spirit. The spirit, according to Hegel, is the subject of all religions except Islam, evolving from natural religion to Determinate religion, and ultimately to absolute (complete) religion. Absolute religion forms awareness of itself as a self-conscious and self-determining spirit. It reveals the content of the spirit as a being and self-consciousness present in societal actions. This perfection of religion does not preclude further development; absolute religion can evolve alongside modernity, as cultivating awareness of the absolute spirit remains crucial. Only in Christianity is the spirit incarnated in Christ, reconciling humanity and divinity. Hegel argues that only Christianity can reconcile the historical determinations of the spirit with its absoluteness through the doctrine of incarnation and the Trinity. The role of absolute religion in modernity and contemporary society is multifaceted.

Hegel views religion, particularly Christianity, as the embodiment of the absolute. He acknowledges the secular nature of modernity and emphasizes the neutrality of the state towards religion, accepting a form of religious pluralism. Hegel's philosophy highlights religion's importance in uniting a fragmented society, fostering social cohesion, and promoting a just and

rational social order that enhances freedom. Additionally, his theoretical thinking addresses the unity of the finite and infinite, emphasizing the realization of unity through difference and the absolute as spirit, always for and recognized by the other.

Despite the insights that Hegel's perspective on religion in the modern era provides us, there are fundamental criticisms of his approach, including: Limited Definition of Religion, Centrality of Christianity and Insufficient knowledge of Islam, Dialectical Internal Contradictions, Secularization of Religion, Lack of a Comprehensive View of Religion. With these criticisms, Hegel's philosophical interpretation of religion cannot be fully accepted.

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