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Editor's Introduction

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This is an exciting time for Hegel's philosophy of religion. With the publication of the new critical edition of Hegel's lectures on the subject, readers have for the first time the opportunity see more accurately what Hegel said and how he connected his topics. Previous editions had run together material from different years; now we can compare and contrast the different sequences of lectures. We can follow the unity of the different treatments and the changes in Hegel's thought. With the appearance of the excellent English translation of the lecture series (and the one-volume presentation of the 1827 lectures) this resource has become available to readers in other fields. Interest in Hegel's thought on religion has grown and old impressions have had to be revised.

Hegel's discussions of religion are intellectually profound and historically informed. They challenge standard theological and philosophical pieties. With the new edition the field is open for discussion; whether we end up agreeing with Hegel or not we will all learn from the investigation.

This book presents current essays on Hegel's philosophy of religion. They include global interpretations of Hegel's stance toward religion and the relation of religion and philosophy, examinations of Hegel's treatment of particular points of religious imagery or doctrine, and historical comparisons of Hegel with other thinkers.

Despite the variety of subjects addressed in these essays, one set of issues comes up again and again: the relation of religious practices and representations to philosophical concepts. What happens to religious images and symbols when the thinker interprets them philosophically? For Hegel, does religion provide only material to be taken up into philosophy where imagistic presentations are left behind? Or do the religious symbols retain their independent richness and validity as a source of thought? Does philosophy supplant religion or complement it? Hegel's famous pronouncements on the subject prove to be themselves challenges to interpretation, and the contributors to this volume do not agree.

These issues concerning the relation of religion and philosophy speak not only to historical questions of Hegel-interpretation, but also to our own attempts to understand our situation and our world today. Do we live in a time which can be only addressed by science and abstract concepts? Have our self-analyses and self-reflection so distanced us from earlier modes of communication that we can only relate to traditional symbols by taking them from the intimacy of tradition into the strange public intimacy of rational validity, which is supposed to touch us at the anonymous level where we define ourselves as knowing subjects? Since the Enlightenment and the Romantic reaction to it the modern world has been struggling with the relation of the different modes of knowing. Hegel tried to define a position that was neither Enlightenment distance nor Romantic subjectivity; his theories about religion (and art) play a crucial role in this regard. These essays explore those theories and different ways of reading our position as rational subjects in a world that seems at times to exceed rationality and at times to be thoroughly disenchanted.

There is a related contemporary issue: Hegel insists that there is a final unifying systematic language in which spirit speaks its world to itself. Much is written today against any such proposal that would counter the multiplicity of perspectives and the privilege of difference. In various ways the authors of these essays wonder what kind of total language Hegel was proposing, and whether its relations to other kinds of discourse might be more subtle than at first appears.

In the first essay Walter Jaeschke, editor of the new German edition of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, argues for a dominant relation of philosophy over religion, and discerns an "end of religion" thesis in Hegel's lectures that is somewhat parallel to the

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famous claims about the end of art. Martin de Nys replies to Jaeschke's views with an interpretation claiming a mutual interdependence of religion and philosophy and the continuing validity of religious symbols and doctrines within the philosophical synthesis. Similarly, Stephen Rucker argues that within the system philosophy must turn back to religion for its own nourishment. Robert Williams examines the current relation of philosophy to religion and Hegel's notion of tragedy, exploring the possibility a non-foundationalist theology based on Hegel.

Martin Donougho probes the relations between myth and philosophy; he discusses the received ways of discussing myth and mythology at the time Hegel was writing, and examines the work of Conrad Creuzer, a friend of Hegel whose methods of studying myth influenced Hegel and provided a stimulus for Hegel's own distinctive views on symbolism and early religion. Louis Duprç shows how in the different lecture series Hegel shifted his structure for interpreting the place of the historical religions, and explores the resistance of these religious traditions to the kind of unification that Hegel wanted to achieve.

In his presidential address to the Hegel Society, John Burbidge examines Hegel relation to traditional Christianity; he adduces evidence that Hegel's experience and thought was deeply Christian, but that the movement of that thought in today's world would lead Hegel beyond standard Christianity. Burbidge's paper discusses Hegel's connection with Christian mysticism; two other papers discuss that relation in more detail. Cyril O'Regan studies the complex connections and differences between Hegel's philosophy and the mysticism of Meister Eckhart. Clark Butler argues for a reading of Hegel's logic of God as an updated version of the heretical Joachimite Christianity of the late middle ages.

Stephen Dunning studies how despite initial hostility Hegel finally reconciles speculative generality with the resistant particularity of religious belief and practice. The issue of particularity is brought up again in other essays. William Desmond gives a close reading of Hegel on the classic problem of evil; he concludes that Hegel's nuanced treatment still remains inadequate to the singularity of evil and of our response to it. Sarah Lilly Heidt examines Hegel's treatment of the individual and community, bringing recent French criticisms to bear on the degree to which Hegel's notion of community might be repressive in itself, and yet also foreshadow our world of shattered community and nomadic individuals. In a somewhat more optimistic vein, Michael Vater studies the relation of religious and political/social community in Hegel; by examining the ways Hegel mediates the immediacy of religion he brings the essays full circle to the theme Walter Jaeschke introduced, by suggesting the passing away of specifically religious community into the social whole.

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