

Scott's discursive habits of oppressed people, common and expected ancient Jewish reactions to Roman ideology, etc.). Heilig concludes that an anti-Roman subtext is indeed relatively probable in Paul, but more careful study conducted on such grounds is still needed.

Predictably, Heilig's conclusions and suggestions all look convincing to the degree that the reader shares the ideas of likelihood involved in a given chapter's argument. *Hidden Criticism* spends a lot of time, for example, asking questions about Paul's most likely "intentions," as reconstructed based partly on our understanding of his "personality" (pp. 83, 117, 155, 173, 235, 241, 305). However, if scholars like Laura Nasrallah and Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre are right in stressing that the authorial voice(s) of Pauline letters must always present – in good ancient epistolary form – strategic authorial *personae*, it is not clearly likely that we can recover "Paul's personality" from his letters, or that such intuitions are likely to help us divine any hidden personal intentions. It is even less clearly likely that we can use stories about Paul from the book of Acts to psychologize him, as Heilig does now and then (pp. 38, 115, 137, 232, 237, etc.). At its best, then, *Hidden Criticism* is a necessary, measured and open-minded call for due diligence in scholarly engagement with the anti-Roman Pauline subtext hypothesis. At its worst, it is a valuable reminder of the generally desultory state of the question.

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**Jon Stewart. *Hegel's Interpretation of the Religions of the World: The Logic of the Gods*. Oxford: OUP, 2018. xvii + 321 pp.**

Reading Hegel is never innocent. As one of the most formidable and challenging intellects of the nineteenth century, Hegel's thought resists being transformed into a museum piece – even exegetical work is forced to consider the real impact Hegel's ideas have on contemporary thought. In his book *Hegel's Interpretation of the Religions of the World: The Logic of the Gods*, Jon Stewart produces some fine textual work contextualizing Hegel's views on religion and the debates it caused in his time. However, the work ultimately fails as a convincing account of religion, precisely because

it wants to be an innocent historical reading, thereby misconstruing the actual philosophy going on in the texts it addresses. In order to properly substantiate this claim, some background information is first necessary.

Religion was a subject of predilection for Hegel, and one can find an important text from every period in his career on the subject, each bearing a mark on Hegelian thought as a whole. While *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* (partially translated as the *Early Theological Writings*) witnesses the birth of the Hegelian dialectic, religion is the penultimate moment of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – that which gathers together all previous historical stances – and his late lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, which concern us here, show us Hegel's prowess as both logician and historical thinker.

These last lectures on the subject, given at Berlin in 1824, 1827, and 1831, would seemingly represent the mature Hegel's definitive views on the matter, the last word on the subject before its author's death late in 1831. Almost from the time they were pronounced, however, they created a fundamental ambiguity among Hegel's disciples. While traditionally seen as a right-left cleavage, a closer look at the literature yields a whole spectrum rather than a divide. The hard-right Hegelians are unabashed Lutheran theologians. Somewhat more circumspect theists, such as Karl Ludwig Michelet, occupy a centre-right position. The centre-left position belongs to mythologizing philosophers of religion, such as David Strauß, for whom Christianity is still consummate and not merely consummated. Finally come the strong leftists, headed by Bruno Bauer (to boot, a former right Hegelian), who lost his professorship by claiming that there had been no historical Jesus. It was Bauer who founded the infamous Doktorklub that reared a younger generation of left Hegelians, among them Karl Marx. In the mix one also finds the wildcard that was Feuerbach, a left Hegelian by temperament, but one who never professed to speak for the master: rather, Feuerbach set about showing some of the internal inconsistencies in Hegel's views on religion.

While this chaos was partly due to the lack of critical editions of the lectures, the most fundamental ambiguities have survived the excellent textual work of Walter Jaeschke and the equally laudable English translations by Peter Hodgson and company. There is no lack of contemporary literature on the subject, and while the debate is more poised, the varied positions represented by the likes of Robert Williams, H.S. Harris, Bernard Bourgeois,

and George di Giovanni – not to mention Jaeschke and Hodgson themselves – are sometimes irreconcilable even on the narrowest of exegetical points.

Given the freshness of the current debate (Jaeschke's and Hodgson's editions were still coming off the press into the 1990s), wisdom would dictate a return to the texts themselves. This is precisely what Jon Stewart's book does. In all of their iterations, Hegel's lectures are threefold in presentation: the first section deals with the concept of religion, the second with the historical development of the concept through world religions ("determinate" religion), and the third with a Christian (or perhaps post-Christian) philosophy of religion, what Hegel calls "consummate" or "revealed" religion. While the first and third sections have been amply discussed, little has been written on the second section. To this reviewer's knowledge, Stewart's book is the first monograph in any language to offer a systematic reading of the second section, closely following Hegel's account of the religions of the world.

Stewart follows Part II of the lectures systematically, offering a well-researched composite portrait of the different iterations of the lectures, and making it clear where they diverge – notably, Hegel will reassess Buddhism and Judaism a number of times. After an introductory chapter on Hegel's methodology (I will explore the significance of this in a moment), and a treatment of the preliminary lecture on immediate religion or "magic," Stewart brings us on an East-West odyssey through the lectures, starting in Imperial China and meandering through Tibet, India, Persia, Palestine, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and finally, Christian Europe. Each chapter begins by situating the particular religion in question within the whole. The author then identifies Hegel's sources and explores contemporary debates around the subject. Finally, a close reading of the text itself is offered, often accompanied by footnotes drawing connections to the sources already identified.

The book has much merit as a history of ideas that situates Hegel within the tradition of eighteenth and nineteenth century German orientalism. Stewart's capacity to identify what sources were available to Hegel, what he had read, and what his contemporaries thought on the same subjects, is remarkable. The number of original historical theses that one can draw from what Stewart has laid bare could allow for much original work, and this alone makes a strong contribution to existing literature. He has paved the way for new work on Hegel's relationship to both Creuzer and Herder, and

his masterful presentation of eighteenth century German Indology in what is probably the book's best chapter establishes a new front in the old debate between Hegel and the Romantics – the latter see in India a Rousseauian utopia, while Hegel, argues Stewart, critically distances himself from this viewpoint. Stewart also adroitly deals with the question of “orientalism,” claiming that because one must understand Hegel's reading of history to understand his thought as a whole, one cannot simply dismiss these lectures as outdated eurocentrism.

Stewart is surely right about this last point. Two centuries of debate over these lectures, however, situates the answer to Hegel's understanding of religion elsewhere: in Parts I and III, or perhaps even further removed, in the religion chapter of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. One is forced to call into question whether the exposition of determinate religion can, on its own, say anything accurate about Hegel's philosophy of religion. The fact that none of the participants in the debate sketched above rely at all on this section (even Jaeschke remains deliberately mute on it) speaks loudly, and should condition our approach. If there are conceptual conclusions to be drawn from determinate religion, they must be considered in tandem with the first section, the concept of religion, ideally referencing the ample scholarship done on the lectures as a whole. Stewart, however, has largely chosen to ignore Part I of the lectures, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (his occasional references to it repeatedly accuse Hegel of obscurantism), and, most damningly, the secondary literature. Even Jaeschke and Hodgson are confined to the last section of the bibliography. Unfortunately, no matter how close a reading such an approach incorporates, it will always be missing key elements. Ironically, the gravity of some of these omissions may be the only thing about which Hegelian philosophers of religion agree.

Here is where a look at Stewart's methodology section becomes necessary. As a means of explaining religion's progression as Self-recognizing Spirit, Stewart begins the chapter by presenting the Master-Slave dialectic as a paradigm of recognition. Compounded with this, he suggests that religion's progression is one of Spirit rising above nature and arriving at Christianity – a claim bafflingly supported by using the lectures on the philosophy of history in greater measure than those on the concept of religion. This culminates in the assertion that the goal of Spirit is freedom, and that religion's development is one of increasing freedom that brings us to Christianity, where God and humans finally recognize each other as

free subjects. This narrative is at the centre of Stewart's reading of Hegel's historical account of religion (see pp. 16-17). While it has merit, it overlooks a number of key points. Entirely missing is the idea of representation (*Vorstellung*), the fundamental idea that Hegel uses to describe religion throughout his career. Religion is Spirit recognizing itself *as* Spirit, and not just as Other. Its journey involves a community's representation of its absolute Essence as being outside of itself *qua* representation, but really within the community all along. As Jaeschke uncontroversially says, representation is the theoretical form of religion.<sup>1</sup> Recognition is not recognition of one's freedom – or someone else's for that matter – but the recognition that Spirit was there all along, or to speak theologically, to see that God is with us. In Hegel's own words, "the community itself is the existing Spirit, the Spirit in its existence, God as a community."<sup>2</sup>

The notion of representation makes us realize that, *pace* Stewart, earlier moments in the historical progression are not necessarily more primitive. What is immediately present in "magic," for example, is in fact an immediate expression of what discourse will unpack as being mediated: Hegel knew that ancient "primitive" religions had complex ways of life and did all the things that religious communities have always done. What evolves is Spirit's recognition of itself *as* Spirit – in other words, its recognition that it can contain its own meaningful expression of existence. Meaning is in the community's life, and not beyond it in some (represented) other. If there is a struggle here, it is happening at another, deeper level of determination, and not that of self-consciousness, as in the Master-Slave dialectic.

To put it simply, Stewart never really identifies what is at stake, neither in the question of religion as a whole, nor in its individual manifestations. An example will suffice to make my point: in exploring Hegel's criticism of the Egyptian afterlife as being merely a continuation of finite existence, Stewart suggests that this is an indirect argument, asserting that Hegel does indeed have a theory of immortality, since a higher concept of the afterlife would involve that of "essential characteristics" living on rather than a mere continuation of life as it is (pp. 184-185). Here, Stewart is fundamentally

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1. Walter Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 180.

2. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, (3 vols.) trans. Peter C. Hodgson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984-7), 3:331.

arguing that immortality cannot be what Hegel would call a bad infinity. Yet even a higher, “good” infinity would be inappropriate here: the infinite belongs to the logic of being, the earliest part of the Hegelian system. It cannot be carried all the way through the progression of concepts and ideas we find in religion – in fact, by the time we have arrived at the Egyptians, we have already left it behind.

It is precisely this sort of latitudinarian conceptualization that makes Stewart’s transitions from one religion to another opaque. Other than the fact that we seem to be on a journey from East to West, there seems to be no necessity leading us from one sort of religion to another; different religions are merely a contingent string of topographies that Stewart was never interested in justifying. Because we never leave the realm of Being or reflections on self-consciousness, the real movement of Spirit’s self-recognition – one of deepening levels of determination based on necessary moves stemming from the categories themselves – is lost.

In sum, isolating determinate religion from the rest of Hegel’s writings on the matter casts him as a sociologist of religion. To ask whether he was a good one, a bad one, or a historically relevant one is ultimately a task of obfuscation, one that moreover flattens out what really matters: the development of the concept of religion. No matter how much one knows about Hegel’s reading habits and their historical context, it cannot be forgotten that he was first a philosopher, and his vast erudition was marshalled in defense of philosophical goals. If Hegel is merely a German orientalist – which is all he can be even on the most charitable reading of Stewart’s interpretation – then there is no real reason to read him at all; like an ancient deity whose worshippers are no longer, he would merely fade away.

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