

HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AS A PHENOMENOLOGY¹

JON STEWART, Institute of Philosophy Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia

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The present article takes up the issue of whether Hegel's accounts of religion can be regarded as phenomenological analyses. This is a complex issue that concerns both the "Religion" chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the Berlin *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. At first, an account is given of how Hegel understands phenomenology. Then this is used as the basis for an evaluation of his analyses of religion in the *Phenomenology* and the *Lectures*. The thesis is that these two analyses, although separated by many years, in fact show clear signs of methodological continuity and can indeed be regarded as phenomenological at least on Hegel's own definition. This reading offers us a way to resolve the long-standing problem of whether the *Phenomenology of Spirit* can be seen as a genuinely unified text. Moreover, it shows the little-recognized connection between Hegel's early philosophy of religion and his later philosophy of religion from his Berlin lectures.

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– Consciousness

Hegel is known for his early work the *Phenomenology of Spirit* from 1807. In the Introduction he outlines the basic approach of phenomenology. This work, however, has confronted commentators with a number of interpretative difficulties with respect to the issue of his phenomenological methodology. Primary among these, the question has been raised about the unity of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a whole.² There is compelling philological evidence that Hegel changed his mind about the nature of the work while he was writing it. According to Hegel's original concept, the book was only intended to consist of what is now the first three chapters, namely, "Consciousness", "Self-Consciousness", and "Reason". As the work developed, he gradually saw the need to supplement these analyses with the further chapters "Spirit", "Religion",

¹ I am grateful to my kind colleagues Jozef Sivák and Jaroslava Vydrová for encouraging me to return to phenomenology.

² See Haering (1934), Pöggeler (1966), Fulda (1973), Stewart (1995), Stewart (2000).

and “Absolute Knowing”. While the original three chapters traced the movement of consciousness of the individual, as would be expected in a phenomenological analysis, the latter seem to make a leap from the exploration of the individual consciousness to broader phenomena such as history and religion, which transcend the experience of the individual mind. Given this shift in Hegel’s conception of the work, which seems to reflect two quite different books, it might seem that the word “phenomenology” that appears in the title can only properly be applied to the first part of it, that is, to his original conception. This would suggest that the accounts given in the chapters “Spirit”, “Religion”, and, if one will, “Absolute Knowing” are not phenomenological in any real sense.³ According to this view, for whatever important information they might add to Hegel’s argument in the work, they cannot be said to follow Hegel’s phenomenological method, strictly speaking.

In the present article I would like to explore the question, raised by the philological discussions about the composition of the work, of whether Hegel’s accounts of religion can be regarded as phenomenological analyses. This is a complex issue that goes beyond the problem just sketched with regard to Hegel’s account in the “Religion” chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As is well known, Hegel’s most detailed account of religion comes in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* which were given during his Berlin period. It seems clear that Hegel’s view of the religions of the world developed over time, as is evidenced by the rather different versions of the material that he presents in the different lectures from 1821, 1824, 1827 and 1831.⁴ It is natural and understandable that Hegel would continually supplement his accounts in his lectures with new information that he read in the interim. This was a particularly important point given the fact that during this time there was a wealth of new information flooding into Europe about the different religions of the world as Indology, Egyptology and Persian Studies first began to establish themselves as scholarly fields.⁵ This raises the question about the relation of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* to the material on religion from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which was written some 15 – 20 years earlier. In comparison to the rich accounts given in the *Lectures*, the “Religion” chapter in the *Phenomenology* appears to be little more than a fragment. Despite the difference in the amount of coverage and the degree of detail in the discussions of religion in the *Phenomenology* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, there is nothing fundamentally contradictory about them. Although I cannot argue for the claim here,⁶ I believe that this is just a more extreme case of

³ See for example Pöggeler (1993, 221 – 223).

⁴ Hegel (1983 – 1985), Hegel (1984 – 1987).

⁵ See Labuschagne and Slootweg (2012), Stewart (2018).

⁶ See Stewart (2008).

Hegel supplementing his analysis with more information as he came across it, and there is nothing inconsistent in these two statements about religion. Therefore, when we ask the question here of whether Hegel's account of religion can be regarded as containing phenomenological analyses, we can draw on his analyses in both the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.⁷

A second set of problems that arises from the study of Hegel's accounts of religion and phenomenology is what exactly is meant by the term "phenomenology"? As is well known, Hegel's understanding of the term and his actual phenomenological analyses seem to be rather different from the phenomenology of Husserl and the later tradition of thinkers that usually are placed under this label.⁸ These differences have led many commentators to dispute whether Hegel can even rightly be claimed to be a part of the phenomenological movement at all. In the present article, I wish to confine myself to Hegel's own usage of the term "phenomenology". While there has been a great expansion in phenomenological analyses in recent years, not least of all in the sphere of religion,⁹ to include these studies would be impossible in the present context. At the end of the article I will make some suggestions about the connections between my phenomenological reading of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and later developments in phenomenology, but this is not my goal in the present work. To demonstrate these connections would of course require an extended work in its own right.

In this article I wish to argue that we can indeed understand Hegel as following a phenomenological methodology both in the "Religion" chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and, more controversially, in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, that is, when this is judged by Hegel's own understanding of what such an analysis is supposed to look like. The connection between Hegel's phenomenological method and his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* has remained unrecognized presumably due to the fact that Hegel does not explicitly use the term "phenomenology" in his lectures. This thesis has important implications not just for the text-internal problem of the unity of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* itself but also for the continuity of Hegel's philosophy of religion in general and the relevance of Hegel's philosophy

⁷ It should also be noted that Hegel uses the term "phenomenology" in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. But it is understood there as one of the sciences of "Subjective Spirit" together with anthropology and psychology, Hegel (1971, §§ 413 – 439, 153 – 178). By contrast, his very brief account of religion in that work comes in the section "Absolute Spirit."

⁸ There is a rather expansive literature on this subject. See, for example, Kirkland (1985), De Waelhens (1954), Ladrière (1959), Lauer (1975), Rauch (1981), Spielberg (1976, vol. 1, 12 – 15), Henrich (1958), Staehler (2019).

⁹ See, for example, Kristensen (1971), Van der Leeuw (1963), Bettis (1969). In this context we might also think of The Society for Phenomenology of Religious Experience.

of religion today.¹⁰ With regard to the text-internal problem, this reading offers us a way to understand the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a genuinely unified and continuous text. Moreover, it shows the connection between Hegel's early philosophy of religion (as represented by the "Religion" chapter in the *Phenomenology*) and his later philosophy of religion from his Berlin lectures. Casting the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* in the light of phenomenology opens up new possibilities for interpreting Hegel's philosophy of religion and finding inspiration in it.

I. Hegel's Phenomenological Methodology

The first task is to establish clearly what Hegel means by "phenomenology" as a method so that we then can determine if his analyses on religion can be said to follow this. As noted, in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel presents his methodological statement for the work.¹¹ This analysis can be seen as a critical reaction to the theories of previous philosophers, especially Kant, whom the new method is intended to correct.¹²

According to Kant's idealism, space and time are not actual things in or properties of the world but rather belong to our faculty of perception. Similarly, causality and relations of substance and accident are not features of things in the world but instead constitute a part of our cognitive faculties, which structure and determine objectivity as we perceive it. He dubs "representations" (*Vorstellungen*) those things that we perceive in the world that are produced as determinate and discrete objects by our cognitive faculties. But it makes no sense to talk about representations if we cannot talk of things which are represented. So Kant's view results in a two-world split since these representations are contrasted to things as they are in themselves, that is, independent of the structures and forms that our cognitive faculties impose on them.

In his Introduction Hegel demonstrates the problems that result from this view and proposes an alternative model. According to the correspondence theory of truth, a thing is considered true when our representations match up to it. A statement or theory is true when it corresponds accurately to some external reality. So our real interest is in how things really are and not just in how we happen to perceive them, which might well be subjective or erroneous. This, however, raises the question of how we can be sure that we know the original thing as it is in itself in order to compare it with our representations. Kant's transcendental philosophy seems inadvertently to end in skepticism since it is impossible to know how things are in themselves apart

¹⁰ The issue of the consistency of Hegel's philosophy of religion with Christian dogmatics and ethics is discussed in Šajda (2009).

¹¹ Hegel (1977, 46 – 57), Hegel (1928 – 1941, vol. 2, 67 – 80).

¹² See Pippin (1989, 16 – 41), Stewart (2000, 14 – 31).

from the way in which our cognitive faculties present them, that is, in space and time and as structured by the categories.¹³ Since our cognitive apparatus is, so to speak, hard-wired with the forms of perception and the categories of the understanding, we cannot escape from this. Indeed, this is what presents for us the objective world of discrete objects in the first place. On this view we have the familiar representations produced by the mind, and these stand over and against the things-in-themselves, which we can know nothing about. It is thus impossible to determine whether our representations are veridical reflections of the world. Confined to our representations, we are forever cut off from the world as it is in itself.

Hegel's proposal to resolve this problem is to replace this picture with a coherence theory of truth, according to which both our perceptions and the things-in-themselves are "for consciousness".¹⁴ In other words, he argues that it is a mistake to conceive of the thing-in-itself as something radically different from or other than thought. Instead, it too is a product of thought since it is simply an abstraction from experience, an imagined idea of how things would appear to us if *per impossible* they were not mediated by our cognitive faculties. In this sense even the thing-in-itself is an object for consciousness. Thus there is ultimately nothing hidden behind the veil of consciousness.

Evidence for the correspondence theory seems to be found in the experience of error and correction. We perceive or take a certain thing to be true, but then in the course of our experience, we learn, based on new information, that this was wrong, and we are obliged to correct our view. Animated by common sense, the correspondence theory interprets this as at first being in error and then discovering the truth and making the subsequent correction, as if we initially had merely a representation and then in the second instance managed to get hold of the thing-in-itself. This is, however, a misunderstanding since the second view or perception is just as vulnerable to error as the first one. It too might well be corrected by subsequent experience. This leads Hegel to suggest that in cases of this kind we are not comparing representations (the false views and perceptions) with things-in-themselves (the true views and perceptions) but rather representations with other representations. Indeed, we are constantly evaluating and re-evaluating our views and perceptions on the basis of new experiences. We constantly correct views when we find them to be in conflict with the new information.

Hegel formulates this in terms of comparing the experience of something with the concept of it. We have concepts that we use to understand the world: truth, beauty, justice, etc. Then we have experiences in the world that we make sense of by means

¹³ See Hegel (1995, vol. 3, 426 – 427); Hegel (1928 – 1941, vol. 19, 554).

¹⁴ Hegel (1977, 52 – 55 *passim*), Hegel (1928 – 1941, vol. 2, 75 – 78 *passim*).

of the use of these concepts. When we see an action that is just or unjust, we evaluate it with the concept of justice that we have in our minds. Does the concrete, empirical action match up to the concept? We declare that X is a just action, or Y is a true statement, or Z is a beautiful work of art. In each case a particular, the immediate experience, is critically evaluated and then categorized under the universal. These evaluations are subject to change as new experiences come along. Hegel's methodological point is that both the experience and the concept fall within the sphere of the subject or are for consciousness. Neither is separate in some transcendent realm that cannot be used for comparison as was the case with the thing-in-itself.

This insight leads Hegel to propose his phenomenological methodology. Instead of embarking on the impossible task of trying to determine if our representations match the things-in-themselves, we should instead see how they match our concepts and other representations. This is perfectly possible since both the representations and the concepts are in the sphere of consciousness. It is a question of just comparing the representations or the phenomena themselves, that is, what appears to consciousness. Hence Hegel presents the idea of a phenomenology as a study of the phenomena, in contrast to the older models of truth based on a correspondence theory.

The phenomenological approach implies that human cognition is a smooth, ongoing stream of representations which are constantly compared with one another and constantly subject to revision based on their relation to the concept. This contrasts to the more sterile model of individual episodic moments, whereby an individual representation is tested by comparison with an intended individual thing-in-itself, and then the matter is decided once and for all. The phenomenological model seems to match better our actual experience, where we are constantly making and revising our judgments. Thus, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* traces a long sequence of different object models and experiences in order to determine the truth.

The fluid element of human cognition opens the door for the element of history, which Hegel is so famous for introducing. If it is the case that we are constantly comparing our ideas and perceptions, and these change over time, this implies that they also change over history, that is, over longer periods. A complete picture of epistemology would thus also involve an account of this historical dimension, where an examination is made of the changes in thought and belief that have occurred over time.¹⁵ This motivates Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to write the "Spirit" chapter, which is dedicated to precisely this, a wildly ambitious overview of human history, with an eye to the changing views that are characteristic of the individual periods. His account of religion is a natural extension of this approach.

¹⁵ See Pippin (1989), Pinkard (1994).

II. Hegel's Account of Religion: The Concept and the Experience

The "Religion" chapter in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is divided into three parts, "Natural Religion", "Religion in the Form of Art", and finally "The Revealed Religion". Under the rubric "Natural Religion", Hegel treats very briefly Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and Egyptian polytheism. What these religions have in common is that they revere some object of nature as the divine: Zoroastrians worship light and fire, Hindus worship different plants and animals, and the Egyptians also worship animals such as bulls and baboons. The next section "Religion in the Form of Art" is dedicated to the religion of ancient Greece. Here the divine is conceived as a self-conscious, anthropomorphic entity in contrast to an object of nature. Finally, "The Revealed Religion" refers to Christianity, which Hegel takes to be the highest form of religious development. With the doctrine of the Trinity, Christianity combines both the objective and the subjective conceptions of the divine found in the previous religions.

The question now is whether Hegel's account here can be taken to be phenomenological in the sense that he outlined in the Introduction to the work. While it is clear that the religious beliefs of an individual can be made the subject of a phenomenological analysis, the matter becomes more complicated when the issue is one of beliefs held in common by larger groups of people. It makes sense to talk about the religious experience of individuals in the way that people today discuss the phenomenology of religion, but can this same approach really be applied to groups of people who presumably have different experiences? The key is that Hegel takes each of the religions treated to represent a specific concept of the divine. They all conceive of God or the gods in different ways, and these different views dictate many other aspects of the various cultures in question. So at the beginning of each analysis, Hegel describes what he takes the given concept of the divine to be. In Zoroastrianism, the gods Ormuzd and Ahriman are conceived as light and darkness. In Hinduism, the gods are conceived as sacred plants and animals, e. g., Hanuman the monkey god or Ganesha the elephant god. These ideas represent the concepts that the experiences are tested against.

These conceptions of the divine correspond to the different object models presented earlier in the work in the "Consciousness" chapter.¹⁶ The Zoroastrian conception corresponds to the analysis of the concept of pure being in "Sense Certainty". Light is, like pure being, something indeterminate, which must find some determinate instantiation in the world of sense experience. This leads to the object model of substances with properties that Hegel treats in the "Perception" chapter. This corresponds

¹⁶ I have argued for these parallel analyses in Stewart (1995) and Stewart (2000).

to Hinduism in the “Religion” chapter, with its deification of the many objects of sense perception. Finally, the object model involving hidden forces that produce specific effects in experience that Hegel treats in “Force and the Understanding” from the “Consciousness” chapter corresponds to the conception of the divine found in the Egyptian religion. These parallels suggest that the analyses in the “Religion” chapter are intended to follow the same development and logic as those in the “Consciousness” chapter. It would seem to follow from this that the “Religion” chapter is also intended to be a phenomenological analysis like the “Consciousness” chapter.

Similar parallels can be pointed out in the “Self-Consciousness” chapter and “Religion in the Form of Art”. In the former the truth is thought to reside on the side of the self-conscious subject and not in the world of objects. So also in the corresponding section in the “Religion” chapter the truth or the divine is no longer considered an object of nature but rather a self-conscious subject.

In the “Consciousness” chapter a certain object model was presented, and then the analysis turned to what Hegel called the experience of consciousness, where it was tested for consistency. Hegel describes this as merely looking on to see how objects are in fact experienced and then comparing this experience to the stated conception of the object. In each case, contradictions arise which compel the natural consciousness to reject the given object model and replace it with a new one. A similar movement is found in the “Religion” chapter. At first, the specific conception of the divine is presented, and then an analysis is given of the way in which the divine is experienced. This can mean how the divine is presented in ritual, mythology, art, etc. In these analyses the given conception of the divine each time proves to be inadequate and must be rejected and replaced by the next one that is thought to be more consistent.

Given the parallels between the “Consciousness” chapter and “Natural Religion”, and the “Self-Consciousness” chapter and “Religion in the Form of Art”, there seems to be little doubt that Hegel regarded the analyses of the “Religion” chapter to be continuous with those of the early chapters in the book, which follow a phenomenological method in a way that is uncontroversial. Most importantly, the analyses in the “Religion” chapter follow the model for that method as presented in the Introduction to the work, comparing the concept with the experience, which in the case of religion means the concept of the divine.

III. Hegel’s Account of Religion in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*

The relation of the “Religion” chapter in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to the later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is a large question that cannot be adequately resolved here. Suffice it to say that the material that appears in the former text can be regarded as the beginning of the considerably more developed analyses in the lectures.

As just noted, the analysis in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* treats very briefly Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and Egyptian polytheism before moving on to more detailed discussions of Greek polytheism and Christianity. This follows the same basic pattern that appears in the lectures, which add more detail to the treatments of these religions and introduce accounts of other religions as well, such as the ancient Chinese religion, Buddhism, Judaism and Roman polytheism.

The pattern of analysis that Hegel follows in the lectures resembles closely that sketched in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In each case he introduces a new religion and begins by establishing the conception of the divine in it. The concept of the divine is the object of religion, just as the concept of justice is the object of jurisprudence or political philosophy, and the concept of beauty is the object of art. Again, each religion has its specific idea of God or the gods, and this is what Hegel tries to articulate at the outset. This represents the universal. This belongs to the more abstract and difficult parts of Hegel's analysis as he tries to characterize the nature of the gods in his own somewhat enigmatic language. Thus, he designates the conception of the divine in Judaism as "the One"; the Roman divinities are called the gods of "expediency"; and the Zoroastrian god Ormuzd is dubbed "the god of light".

Then he examines the forms of worship or religious service in the different religions, usually under the rubric "The Cultus". This corresponds to the particular in that it represents the vast array of concrete religious experiences. Here Hegel often goes into great detail to outline the various religious practices and beliefs of the different world religions. This represents the manifold forms of experience of the divine that different peoples have in the different religions.

That these are experiences that are for consciousness in the phenomenological sense is clear from Hegel's analysis. He notes that it might be objected that in the different myths that make up religions there is nothing but falsehoods and imaged beings. Hegel answers this objection with the claim that these are also representations or concepts that have arisen from the human mind. He explains,

[The gods] are discovered by the human spirit, not as they are in their implicitly and explicitly rational content, but in such a way that they are gods. They are made or poetically created, but they are not fictitious. To be sure, they emerge from human fantasy in contrast with what is already at hand, but they emerge as essential shapes, and the product is at the same time known as what is essential.¹⁷

¹⁷ Hegel (1984 – 1987, vol. 2, 658, note 409); Hegel (1983 – 1985, vol. 2, 549 n).

A part of his point is that any human representation should be evaluated seriously. While we might regard the notion of the Greek gods as absurd today, at the time this was a natural production of the human mind that was determined by the many factors of the Greeks' culture, history, geography, etc. It was a conception of themselves as a people. It would of course be absurd for us today to co-opt their view since our cultural and historical background is completely different. When judged by our experience, the Greek gods cannot help but look to be absurd myths. But from the experience of the ancient Greeks, their gods were an organic part of their general worldview. When they saw a statue of Athena or read the Homeric poems, the representations of the gods that they found in these experiences were compared with their other experiences and constituted a coherent whole.

The key is that with Hegel's organization of his analyses in the lectures he follows what he designated in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a phenomenological method. He compares the concept with the experience of concept, in this case, the concept of the divine in the different religions, with the experience of religious practice. In each case he finds some shortcoming that needs to be sublated and thus brings in a new concept or a new religion. In his lectures he follows the same general pattern of first presenting a concept and then examining the experience of it.

The phenomenological element in Hegel's analysis comes out in many ways: (1) He is consistently critical of the idea that we cannot know God, a view that he associates primarily with Jacobi and Kant. This idea can be found in the Enlightenment, specifically in the Deist conception of God as something transcendent and beyond the mundane sphere.¹⁸ This is a conception of God who does not appear. The Enlightenment view feigns a form of intellectual humility by claiming that God cannot be known or that he transcends the human abilities to know. But Hegel's point is that for spirit to be spirit, it must appear. This is a key point that is relevant for phenomenology. There are of course different forms of appearance, but Hegel's view is that God must make his presence known in one way or another in the world. This refers to an issue in Hegel's dialectical metaphysics, where he points out, for example, that a substance is only a substance if it has properties, or a hidden force is only a force if it expresses or manifests itself in the realm of perception.¹⁹ Thus these concepts are complex, having dialectically related elements, which necessarily belong together. His idea is that God is also such a concept. God as spirit must appear in the realm of actuality in order to be real. If we have only an idea of a house or a painting that we never actually make, the idea remains incomplete. Only when it is realized in the real

¹⁸ See Stewart (2015).

¹⁹ See Hegel (1977, 67 – 103); Hegel (1928 – 1941, vol. 2, 92 – 138). Hegel (1991, §§ 136 – 137, 205 – 209); Hegel (1928 – 1941, vol. 8, 307 – 313).

world is it possible to see if the original idea was a good one. Here again it is a matter of comparing the idea or concept with the experience of the actual thing in the real world. As we have seen, this is the key to what Hegel described as his phenomenological methodology.

(2) Hegel believes that this picture is especially relevant for Christianity, which contains the different aspects of the divine in the dogmas of the Trinity and the Revelation. God the Father is an abstract, transcendent idea apart from the mundane sphere. By contrast, God the Son is a concrete entity that appears in the actual world. God reveals himself in the world and thus becomes an object of empirical experience. For Hegel, this is a key element in Christianity that separates it from Judaism, Islam and Enlightenment Deism. He explains,

God is therefore not the void but spirit, and this determination of spirit does not remain for it merely a word or a superficial determination; instead the nature of spirit unfolds for it in that it cognizes God essentially as triune. God is thus grasped in the way in which he makes himself into his own object, and then in the way in which the object in its differentiation remains identical with God, and God himself loves himself in it. Without this determination of the Trinity, God would not be spirit and spirit would be an empty word.²⁰

According to Hegel's view, it is the movement of the different aspects of the divine in the Trinity that gives the Christian conception of God a real content. This is for consciousness and thus can be known.

(3) Hegel appeals to the account given in Acts of the Apostles 17:16 – 34, where Paul is in Athens and argues for the truth of the Christian conception of God.²¹ Paul sees the many temples and statues of the Greek gods and refers to the Athenians' altar to the unknown god. Paul tries to convince the Athenians that the true God is known since he has revealed himself. Thus, the idea of an unknown god is an absurdity since a god who is too weak to make himself known cannot be regarded as a god. A force that does not express itself is no force. A substance with no properties is no substance. According to Hegel, it belongs to the concept of God to be known in the world. An examination of the phenomena or appearances is key.

²⁰ Hegel (1984 – 1987, vol. 1, 124 – 125, note 31); Hegel (1983 – 1985, vol. 1, 40 n). See also Hegel (1984 – 1987, vol. 1, 164); Hegel (1983 – 1985, vol. 1, 73 – 74). Hegel (1984 – 1987, vol. 1, 178); Hegel (1983 – 1985, vol. 1, 86 – 87).

²¹ See Hegel (1995, vol. 3, 475); Hegel (1928 – 1941, vol. 19, 608). See also Hegel (1991, § 73, 120); Hegel (1928 – 1941, vol. 8, 179).

(4) Hegel explicitly describes the Christian religion in the same terms that he used to describe the basic idea of phenomenology. He explains, “A Christian religion that did not cognize God, or in which God is not revealed, would be no Christian religion at all. ...it consists in the being of truth for consciousness”.²² It does not make sense to talk of a hidden God who, like the thing-in-itself, is not an object for consciousness. Hegel associates the God of Christianity with his concept of spirit, which, he claims, is characterized specifically by the fact that it appears to consciousness: “Spirit is itself the process of giving itself this appearance and sublating it, of positing it as sublated; both together are revelation since this show is the appearing of God.”²³ As in phenomenology, there is a comparison of the appearances, as God appears in the world and then again in a different sense in the Holy Spirit. In both cases God is “for consciousness”.

Religious experience is supremely important for Hegel. Although he is often criticized for taking a wholly abstract approach to religion that neglects the emotional side of faith, he in fact is attentive to the value of the religious experience of the individual. His account of the religions of the world is complex and multifaceted, including elements of history, art, drama, law and other fields. Especially in the ancient world, religion was a dominant part of the different cultures, and it overlapped with the other cultural spheres in different ways. Thus, the human experience of religion was similarly complex and multifaceted.

IV. Phenomenology Today

Initially, the modern phenomenological movement that began with Husserl and Heidegger was conceived primarily in terms of epistemology or ontology. It was inspired by the need to find a way of talking about the objects of our perceptions in a meaningful way despite the critical views of the neoKantians who dismissed all talk of knowledge of things-in-themselves. Husserl and Heidegger thus sought the essences or the being of beings in the phenomenological experiences. Later phenomenologists such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty developed this further by applying the phenomenological method to a broader sphere of intersubjective human relations. Gradually the scope of phenomenological inquiry grew to include a rich spectrum of phenomena that went well beyond Husserl’s original conception. Today the field of phenomenological inquiry has expanded enormously, and most anything at all can be used as the object of the method.²⁴ No aspect of the wide spectrum of human experience is regarded as unsuitable for a phenomenological analysis.

²² Hegel (1984 – 1987, vol. 3, 64); Hegel (1983 – 1985, vol. 3, 4).

²³ Hegel (1984 – 1987, vol. 3, 64 – 65); Hegel (1983 – 1985, vol. 3, 4).

²⁴ See, for example, the methodological and thematic connections between phenomenology and the creation of art analyzed with the example of cubistic works (Vydrová 2016).

A part of this development in the broader field of phenomenology is the emergence of the phenomenology of religion or religious experience. Phenomenologists such as Jean-Luc Marion and Michel Henry then established this as a special subfield in its own right. The connection between Hegel's conception of phenomenology from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and his later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is suggestive when seen in this context of the later development of the phenomenological movement. Like Husserl, Hegel's point of departure in the *Phenomenology* is a response to the problem of skepticism surrounding the doctrine of the thing-in-itself in Kant's epistemology. It is from this point of departure that Hegel's phenomenological method is derived. Hegel then later applies this in contexts that he did not initially envision, for example, to the experience of religion. He thus in his own development anticipates the later development of phenomenology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The key here is to recognize his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* as in some ways following a phenomenological method, which has not been done before.

This is of course not to suggest that there are not important differences in the work of Hegel and the later phenomenologists. It is impossible to overlook Husserl's consistently dismissive view of Hegel.²⁵ The point is simply that the expansion of the later phenomenological movement into the area of religion at the time had the look of something new and innovative. However, given the reading proposed here, Hegel anticipated this move in his Berlin lectures.

This can of course only remain a suggestion for further analysis. But there is reason to believe that this suggestion is not entirely off target when we consider that later figures such as Michel Henry developed many of their key ideas in critical dialogue with Hegel.²⁶ Scholars of Hegel's philosophy of religion are keen to point out the centrality of the notion of revelation for his conception of Christianity. But they fail to see that this is also important for his understanding of religion in general. Crucially, they fail to connect this idea of revelation with the idea of phenomenology where things are thought to be revealed to consciousness. This is an aspect of Hegel's thought that has been of interest to the phenomenologist Jean-Luc Marion.²⁷

Since the term "phenomenology of religion" is a new coinage, it has been overlooked that this was in fact what Hegel was doing in his lectures. But once this is recognized, new possibilities are opened. Hegel's vast knowledge of the different religious traditions and his insightful analyses of them can still serve as a rich source of inspiration in discussions about religious experience today.

²⁵ See, for example, Husserl (1965, 76 – 78).

²⁶ See, for example, Henry (1973).

²⁷ See, for example, Marion (2008, 3), Marion (2016, 33 – 34).

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Jon Stewart
 Institute of Philosophy
 Slovak Academy of Sciences
 Klemensova 19
 813 64 Bratislava
 Slovakia
 e-mail: js@jonstewart.dk
 ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9166-5558>