

**The ontological unity of reason and revelation
as demonstrated by Hegel
in his *1827 Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion***

by

Lee Kuhnle

Lee Kuhnle

299 Dovercourt Rd, Apt 2
Toronto, ON
M6J 3E2

The Canadian Centre for German and European Studies
230 York Lanes Building
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, Ontario
M3J 1P3

lckuhnle@yorku.ca

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Abstract

Underlying the secular policies in many modern European and non-European societies is the supposition that the religious is not necessarily constitutive of society at large, and that as a result religion can be limited or even removed from other manifestations of cultural expression. This paper argues that the religious is intrinsically intertwined in the fabric of social life and can neither be isolated nor eliminated from the cultural context of which it is a part. The attempted removal of religion from society is philosophically grounded in a spurious ontological separation between the seemingly irreconcilable epistemologies of reason and revelation. The failure, however, to rid the public sphere of the religious gives one good ground to question the validity of the epistemological principle that reason is distinct from revelation. The goal of this paper will be to examine and critique the philosophical claim that reason and revelation are in fact ontologically separate from each other and therefore distinct forms of knowledge. Further, this paper will investigate the form and content of religion, and a definition predicated on a holistic formulation of the religious as intrinsically and necessarily constitutive of society will be proposed, with radical implications for the secular state in all its variegated institutional expressions.

Résumé

La priorité donnée aux politiques laïques dans de nombreuses sociétés européennes et non-européennes (dans l'ère contemporaine) implique que la dimension religieuse n'est pas nécessairement constitutive de la société en général et que, *de facto*, la religion peut être limitée, ou même retirée d'autres manifestations de nature culturelle. L'argument de cette communication est que le religieux est inhérent à la fabrique de la vie sociale et ne peut être isolé ni éliminé du contexte culturel dont il fait partie. La tentative de séparer la religion de la société est fondée sur la séparation ontologique (et erronée) des épistémologies de la raison et de la révélation – apparemment inconciliables. Cependant, l'échec des tentatives d'évacuer le religieux de la sphère publique nous procure une bonne raison pour mettre en question la validité du principe épistémologique séparant raison et révélation. Cette communication consistera en un examen et une critique du postulat philosophique que raison et révélation sont en fait séparés ontologiquement et, ainsi, deux formes distinctes de connaissance. En outre, cette communication se penchera sur la forme et le contenu de la religion, et proposera une définition fondée sur une formulation holistique du religieux en tant qu'élément intrinsèque et nécessairement constitutif de la société – avec des implications radicales pour ce qui est de l'état laïque dans ses expressions institutionnelles diverses.

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Introduction: The Range of the Present Analysis

Secularism has been an explicitly stated organizational principle in many modern European and non-European societies. In March of 2004, for example, French President Jacques Chirac signed into law a bill that banned the wearing of “ostentatious” religious symbols in public schools (Kramer 2004). In the context of European and especially French history this law was neither surprising nor unprecedented. Germany, the Netherlands, England and non-European countries such as India and the United States have all passed similar laws which attempt to isolate religion and separate it from the public realm (McLeod 2000). Underlying these secular policies is the supposition that the religious is not necessarily constitutive of society at large, and that as a result religion can be limited or even removed from other manifestations of cultural expression. Due largely to the trajectory of European history, and specifically to the intellectual revolution that occurred during the Enlightenment, an institutionalized partition between religion and society was codified. As will be shown, however, the religious is intrinsically intertwined in the fabric of social life and can neither be isolated nor eliminated from the cultural context of which it is a part.

The attempted removal of religion from society is philosophically grounded in a spurious ontological separation between the seemingly irreconcilable epistemologies of reason and revelation. Reason, rhetorically at least, has come to be the implicit guiding principle of most modern day public institutions, such as schools, government ministries and universities (Chadwick 1975; McLeod 2000). A rhetorical, that is, apparent distinction, however, is by no means an actual one. France’s failure – and that of all other countries which have tried to institutionalize secular policies – to rid the public sphere of the religious, gives one good ground to question the validity of the epistemological principle that reason is distinct from revelation, one that supposedly roots modern societal institutions in secular soil.

The goal of this paper will be to examine and critique the philosophical claim that reason and revelation are in fact ontologically separate from each other and therefore distinct forms of knowledge. The underlying questions that will guide this analysis probe the very nature of knowledge: What does one know (if anything) by means of revelation and what by virtue of reason? Is one approach to knowledge superior to the other? Further, this paper will investigate the form and content of religion, and a definition predicated on a holistic formulation of the religious as intrinsically and necessarily constitutive of society will be proposed. A classification of religion as an inextricable part of the fabric of culture and society will have radical implications for the secular state in all its variegated institutional expressions.

While an implicit distinction between reason and revelation has been upheld in modern secular institutions, some in the European philosophical-theological tradition have given credence to reason as a methodological principle to uncover the mysteries of creation. From St. Anselm’s (1033 – 1109) ontological argument to René Descartes’ (1596 – 1650) maxim, *cogito ergo sum*, reason has been recognized as tantamount to a religious responsibility. It will be demonstrated below that thinking, of which reasoning is a specific manifestation, is indeed inherent in any meaningful definition of religion, and that thought is the very means by which religion, properly conceived, is engaged. The insight that reason is unavoidably connected to

religiosity, was systematically articulated by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), in his 1827 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Hegel's far-reaching investigation into the nature of religion provides answers to the questions posed by the present analysis. Hegel shows that reason and revelation are indeed ontologically related, thereby demonstrating that religion and the (supposed) secular world are fundamentally inseparable. This paper will examine the arguments, methods, and conclusions, presented in the *Lectures* with respect to the essential unity of reason and revelation, and draw conclusions specifically in relation to the secular state.

The analysis will be divided into five sections. The first part of the investigation will situate the history of secularism within the European political-religious framework. A succinct historical overview will demonstrate that the endeavors to institutionalize secular policies in the modern European political tradition are the result of a process that began as early as the 17th century. The subsequent three sections, comprising the bulk of the analysis, will deal with Hegel's investigation into the nature of religion. The stages of Hegel's dialectical method will be discussed in turn and while Hegel's analysis is profound, his discussion of Judaism and the Roman religion as they relate to infinite subjectivity will be critiqued. The last part of the paper will show the ramifications that the interdependence of reason and revelation has for the secular state and its philosophical substratum. A holistic definition of religion as provided by Hegel will be of central importance. Based on the necessary conclusions that such a definition implies, it will show that there is in fact no ontological distinction between reason and revelation, and therefore, there cannot be a political philosophy, which is based upon that very premise. The paper will conclude by showing that there is not now, and can never be, an actual secular state.

1. The Rise of European Secularism

Although the term secular has existed for hundreds of years (Keddie 2003), it only began to resemble its modern formulation, as the complete extraction of the religious from the public realm, quite late in the Enlightenment. The various meanings the word has borne over the centuries attest to the turbulent political-religious history of the European continent. Etymologically, "secularism" derives from the Old French *seculer*, which in turn is descended from the Latin *saecularis*, from which the word laicism also derives (Keddie 2003). Initially, the term referred to members of the clergy who left behind the monastic rules of the order, or to the transfer of ecclesiastical lands to lay ownership as occurred in the Reformation (15 – 17th century) and later in the French Revolution (1789 - 1799) (McLeod 2000). The broader use of the term can be traced back to the 19th century historian W.E.H. Lecky who, in 1865 referred to a "general secularization of politics," citing a tendency for political parties to consider reasons of state, as opposed to religious motivations, as grounds for war (McLeod 2000, 1).

Lecky's lament, however, represents the culmination of a religio-political process in European history that began much earlier. Secularism – unlike the typical formulation, which posits an extraction of the religious from the public realm – can best be understood as the deliberate strategy to divert political power away from institutionalized religious organizations, historically the Roman Catholic Church. While struggles between pope and king had been part of

the European political landscape for hundreds of years,¹ the Thirty Years War (1618 – 1648), which devastated the European continent, led to a degree of religious tolerance – codified in the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) – and allowed the secularization project to begin in earnest (McLeod 2000). The most important lesson learned from the Thirty Years War was not, however, that people should be free to choose the denomination that best suited them, but rather, that citizens could not be relied upon to serve the interests of their sovereign above those of the Church (Beland 2003; McLeod 2000). The Thirty Years War, more than any other political-religious event before it, demonstrated the need for worldly leaders to inculcate the loyalty of their citizens to the state (Beland 2003).

The French Revolution and its aftermath, especially in the Third Republic (1875 – 1940), set loose the drive to institutionalized secular policies. The Catholic Church, as had been the case throughout European history, was a powerful political actor during the Revolution. Usually siding with the elites against the revolutionaries, the Church was quickly recognized by the latter as a valid political target. Alexis de Tocqueville argues that the Church was the most vulnerable wall in the entire hierarchical superstructure, and if a re-organization of authority and society was to truly succeed, the political authority of the Church would have to be toppled (de Tocqueville 1955). During France’s Third Republic, many of the grievances concerning the political power of the Church were set down in policies aimed at diminishing the influence exerted by religious institutions. By 1905 French schools, and other public bodies, were officially secular (Beland 2003; McLeod 2000). The rest of Europe soon followed suit (McLeod 2000).

Besides the havoc that political-religious wars had wreaked upon the people of Europe, the intellectual breakthroughs of the 17th, 18th, and especially the 19th centuries, radically challenged the truth-claims (especially those relating to the natural world) churchly institutions had upheld. If the Church could be proven wrong about the position of the Earth in relation to the sun, for example, then its seeming infallibility in spiritual matters could also be laid open to question. Scientific treaties, such as those of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) or Isaac Newton (1643-1727) (both devoutly religious), did much to discredit the monopoly on knowledge that the Church had been enjoying. By the time the writings of notable anti-religionists such as François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694 – 1778) were published, atheism was becoming a fashionable trend among the literary avant-garde. The 18th, and in particular the 19th centuries, however, produced remarkable insights into the nature of religion. The theories put forth by Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804 – 1872), among others, examined religion from radically new perspectives. Definitions of religion were proposed that highlighted its social, specifically its political or psychological, aspects over its theological truth-claims. In 1878, for example, Friedrich Engels (1820 – 1905) began a polemic against religion by stating that, “All religion [...] is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men’s minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural

¹ An example of the political turmoil between church and state was witnessed on Christmas day in the year 800 C.E. Charlemagne was reportedly furious at having been crowned king by Pope Leo whilst kneeling down to pray. The symbolic authority the Pope had allowed himself, having demonstrated by this action that the Church was sovereign over the worldly rulers, spurred Charlemagne’s anger.

forces” (Engels 1878). The intellectual trend of the Enlightenment – typified by Emanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) – to categorize and quantify all forms of knowledge – a trend that made these new insights and definitions possible – outlived its usefulness, however. The new approaches to religion ossified into pat critiques which began to be perpetuated, uncritically, well into modernity.

It was during the 19th century that the thesis fusing secularism and the process of modernization was first systematically articulated by Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857); a thesis that has exerted its normative dominance throughout European social thought ever since. According to this argument, humanity is in a process of emerging from a dark state of religious naïveté into a fully realized non-religious world. Despite the fabulous wealth of evidence suggesting the contrary – that secularization and modernization are by no means co-dependent variables of one social equation – the secularization-equals-modernization thesis has, while not always expressed explicitly, formed the backdrop of assumed expectancies upon which secular policies and the very notion of a secular state are based.

The recognition of the Church as a political threat in combination with the remarkable advances in the fields of knowledge overtly grounded in the dictates of reason, especially those of the natural sciences, resulted in a general discrediting of the authority of churchly institution. Many of the polemics that were legitimately directed against the Church as a political organization, however, were seen as invalidating the metaphysical truth-claims of theology. The merging of religion, specifically theology, and the Catholic Church as a political body, lies at the center of a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of religion and is one of the foundations upon which the erroneous view of secularism as an actually existing social phenomenon is based. As a result the secular project has, historically, defined religion almost exclusively along political (and perhaps transcendent) lines. Although the political influence institutional religious bodies can have upon a society can (theoretically) be constitutionally regulated, religion in the broadest sense of the term cannot.

As the above survey indicates, the Catholic Church and religion, specifically theology, are by no means identical, and it is thus not valid that the critiques levied against one should simply be transferred to the other. As pointed out in the introduction, however, the philosophical claim that underlies the secular concept, the rift between state and religion, is that there is an ontological dissimilarity between the domains of reason and of revelation. While it is evident that the political might of the Catholic Church (and the Protestant Church as well) had detrimental effects on the inhabitants of Europe, the attempted extraction of religion from social life is predicated on an oversimplification of the religious as political or psychological, a notion which, as was just indicated, was first (systematically) proposed during the Enlightenment. In order to re-examine the validity of the notion that the religious is not essentially constitutive of modern secular societies, and to challenge the claim that reason and revelation are distinct epistemologies, a discussion of Hegel’s view of religion as presented in his 1827 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* will follow.

2. The Concept of Religion

Hegel begins his discussion in the *Lectures* by answering the putatively simple question of what religion actually is. As was discussed above, secularism is predicated on an inherently political definition of the religious. Religion, while to some extent political, is much more expansive in scope. Hegel defines religion as, in essence, thinking about God, the “relation of human consciousness to God” (Hegel 1988, 76). What Hegel understands by the term God will be discussed below. Critical for the present section of the investigation is the logical implications of his definition of religion which will show the ontological unity of reason and revelation.

Hegel’s notion of religion is deceptively simple. Is the proper definition of religion actually *thinking* about God? Certainly, the act of thinking about God cannot be rejected as constitutive of a holistic articulation of religion. Hegel, however, argues that thinking is not merely constitutive of religion but is its essential characteristic, which challenges the notion of revelation as an immediate apprehension of Truth.

Revelation is distinguished from reason precisely on the grounds of immediacy (*ibid.*, 99). Whereas reason according to Hegel is essentially a form of mediation between the thinking subject and its object of contemplation, revelation (so it would seem) is the direct and unmediated apprehension of Absolute Reality (*ibid.*, 87). Biblical texts, for example, relate how God revealed Himself to His chosen people. In Genesis it is not written that Abraham reasoned (about) God and thus came to know Him but rather that he grasped Him directly, that is, that God was revealed to him. Would it not seem that Hegel’s definition of religion is unsound? Should it not be revelation that is the determining characteristic of religion? Is revelation not religion’s epistemology? If God grants knowledge directly, as the Bible appears to indicate, then revelation is properly the domain of religion, and although thinking (that is, mediation between subject and object in consciousness) may represent a (small) part of the total concept of religion, it certainly does not look as if it is religion’s central component. Indeed, that is the standard answer that has been given (either implicitly or explicitly) since the Enlightenment, especially in the context of secularism, in which revelation is understood as the immediate knowledge of/from God, and putatively has no bearing upon, and is fundamentally distinct from, the domain of reason.

A closer inspection of Hegel’s characterization of religion, however, eliminates the apparent ontological distinction between reason and revelation since the definition posits two terms: a (human) subject and an object, which, with regard to the present inquiry into religion, is God. If knowledge is to be introduced into this equation, if subjective consciousness is to know anything about its object, then there must, by necessity, be mediation, that is, there must be a relationship between the subject and its object (*ibid.*, 154, 157, 159). In cognition, thought is the relationship between subject and object; thought is mediation (*ibid.*, 154). Hegel demonstrates that if there was only the object of contemplation, without a (differentiated) subjective consciousness, then there could be no knowledge for there would be no subject to engage the object (*ibid.*, 164). Conversely, if there was only a subjective consciousness without an object of contemplation, then nothing could be known about the object, since there would be no object to know (*ibid.*, 164).

For knowledge to exist, therefore, there must be at least two terms that stand in relation to one another in consciousness (ibid., 161). A relationship is the mediation in thought between subjective consciousnesses, or as Hegel also terms it, thinking spirit, and God (ibid., 90, 96, 161). Thus, in any apparent instance of immediacy, as in the biblical revelation of God to Abraham, there is in fact mediation, since there are always at least two terms that exist in relation to each other (ibid., 99). The seemingly irreconcilable distinction between reason and revelation is eliminated by the recognition that there is no actual immediacy, since in immediacy – a situation in which there is no relation – there can be no knowledge. Thus, revelation, which is a form of (or means to) knowledge, an apparent direct apprehension of Truth, is also, and must necessarily be, a form of mediation.

At this juncture in the investigation, Hegel has already supplied answers to two questions posed at the beginning of the paper. First, the definition of religion must, by necessity, include thinking as its central component, since only through thought does a relationship between subjective consciousness and its object of contemplation exist (ibid., 79, 96, 110, 115) without which there could be no (religious) knowledge. Second, revelation and thinking – that is, reason, specifically in terms of religion, reasoning about God – are not in fact ontologically distinct from one another (ibid., 157). Subjective consciousness is, in reasoning about God and in revelation, a relationship with the object of contemplation, and that relationship is thought (ibid., 76, 90). To think about, that is, to reason God, is therefore, to reveal God. God is revealed by reason and thus, revelation is the thinking about God. Hegel thereby also supplies the justification for an argument touched upon in the introduction – that the act of reasoning God is itself a religious responsibility, for it is only by reasoning God that God is revealed. Reasoning about God is a religious duty.

Although, through Hegel, a proof for the ontological unity of reason and revelation has been suggested, a thorough investigation of religion, based on Hegel's analysis, must be engaged in order to establish a viable stance from which to critique secularism. Further, the ramifications of viewing reason as indistinct from revelation shall also be considered. It will be seen, for example, that the logical imperatives forced upon the investigator as a result of Hegel's definition of religion not only invalidate any ontological distinction between reason and revelation but also unite the fields of religion and philosophy.

If, as Hegel suggests, thinking is constitutive of the essence of religion, then religion and the philosophy of religion are not in fact distinct from one another, for both endeavor to engage the same object, Absolute Truth, in thought (ibid., 87). Religion, and the philosophy of religion, Hegel maintains, are unique forms of (or means to) knowledge because they contain the object of their inquiry within themselves (ibid., 76 – 78). Thus, philosophy only explicates itself when it is explicating religion (ibid., 78). The interrelatedness of the philosophy of religion (the thinking about God) and religion (also the thinking about God) supplies Hegel, and this present investigation, with a methodological foundation from which to examine religion. Religion and its object, God, will be investigated philosophically, that is, through reason, by means of the Hegelian dialectic.

3. The First Term of the Dialectic of Spirit: The Primal Division

The mediation between subjective consciousness, thinking spirit, and its object, God, is the foundation of the Hegelian dialectic, which deconstructs the process of coming to know the Absolute Object in history. The dialectic is the act of religion; it is the relationship between the thinking subject and its thought object. These two terms and the relationship that binds them will be discussed separately in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of religion and to allow the ramifications that necessarily follow to be examined. In the following analysis, it will be seen that religion is an act of relationship, which cannot be considered a static object but must be understood as dynamic, as a process.

Hegel's dialectical method is simultaneously the subject of his inquiry and his conclusion. The first chapter in the *Lectures* discusses the primal division between God and thinking spirit. Since, as was just indicated, religion is the relationship consummated by thought, between subjective consciousness and God, the dialectic, as a whole, must incorporate this elemental distinction. If the dialectic did not maintain the distinction, then nothing could be known, since, as was also seen earlier, there must be at least a thinking subject in relation to its object for there to be any knowledge whatsoever. The first term of the dialectic, then, is the primal division between God and subjective consciousness (*ibid.*, 135).

Hegel calls the subjective aspect of this primal division spirit (*ibid.*, 102, 110, 129). Spirit, however, is not an exact synonym for subjective consciousness. Spirit is by definition subjective consciousness in relation to its object, that is, in relation to God (*ibid.*, 129-31, 213). Spirit is thus movement; it is dynamic, since it is subjectivity in relation (*ibid.*, 102). Knowledge is in the domain of spirit, for knowledge can only exist if there is mediation between subject and object, that is, if there is thought (*ibid.*, 110). If spirit is subjective consciousness in relationship to its object, if spirit is thought and knowledge, then all previous and subsequent claims regarding the dialectic are made from the vantage point of the third dialectical term, from the vantage point of thought. In the first instance of the dialectic, however, there is no thought, there is only feeling (*ibid.*, 134).

There is no knowledge in the primal division, since subjective consciousness does not yet have insight into the content of its object of inquiry. While the precondition for knowledge is that two terms are in relation in consciousness, the simple existence of two terms in relation is not a sufficient condition for knowledge to exist. Hegel suggests that the two terms of the primal division, subject and object together, are certainty, feeling or faith (*ibid.*, 135). That is, while something is known to exist so long as subjective consciousness is in relation to its object, nothing can be known about it, since the content of the object is inaccessible. The object is obscure, as it has not been demarcated and thereby differentiated. Only by making the object determinate, making it representational, can subjective consciousness gain insight into it (*ibid.*, 79, 134). Determination of content is thus the second term of the dialectic. The first term is the subjective aspect of the primal division, and the second term concerns its objective aspect.

To return to the main topic of this investigation, the nature of religion and secularism, given Hegel's insights into the means to knowledge, it follows that faith, which has traditionally been deemed a defining characteristic of (biblical) religion(s) does not suffice as a minimal

criterion upon which to base any truth-claims since faith does not have insight into the necessity of its content (ibid., 136). Knowledge of any kind, and religious knowledge in particular, cannot be based solely on faith because faith is not knowledge. The (Enlightenment) criticisms of religion as a dangerous and inherently unreasonable form of knowledge find their justification in the formulation of faith as unreasonable. Religion, understood simply as faith in a certain creed or doctrine, is indeed unreasonable, as the subject cannot think, that is, reason, the necessity of its suppositions. Religion, as suggested above, is subjective consciousness thinking about its object. But, in order to engage in thinking, determinations must be made regarding the content of the object under consideration.

A determination is a limit. To make an object of consciousness determinate is to create parameters. These borders demarcate what the object is and thereby allow subjective consciousness to gain access to that object, or, as Hegel puts it, penetrate the content of consciousness (ibid., 137). An object in the world, a chair, for example, is thinkable precisely because it is determined within certain limits that differentiate it from other objects and everything else around it and from the subject. Thus, a chair is known to be a chair by virtue of the limitations that define chair-ness, and thereby is known not to be a table, a thought, or a piece of music. The process of delineating an object is demonstrable by examining games; as games only make sense because they have rules, there are limits that dictate what the purpose of the game is, what actions or moves the players may engage in and by what criterion to determine who has won and who has lost. Only by virtue of determinations can subjective consciousness engage and penetrate the content of its object. The primal division between subject and object is posited in the first term but leaves the content indeterminate. Determination of the object, therefore, allows the object's contents to be contextually understood, related to other objects, and investigated according to its own structures and configurations. A determination thus gives subjectivity insight into its essential necessity because a definition situates the object within a nexus of existence, which can then be examined, tested, and reasoned. Determination of the content is the second term in the dialectic, and therefore the second term in the investigation into the nature of religion.

Determinate objects are by definition finite, since a determination is by definition a limit. The finite, however, has no genuine limit in as much as there is always a beyond, regardless of how vast the content is construed. The thinking subject, in order to recognize a limit as a limit, must occupy a place beyond it (ibid., 173). A chair, for example, is known to be a chair because the subject contains the limits of a chair within him or herself, that is, is situated beyond the limitations that define chair-ness. If the subject did not engage the object from this vantage point beyond the object's limitations, then the determinations would not be recognized as limits. Indeed, there would be no recognition at all. A limit, that is, the finite, is thus apparent, but not actual (ibid., 170). The only true actuality can only be totality, that is, the infinite, which is God, which is Spirit (ibid., 114-17, 405-06).

The first dialectical term is the primal division, which leaves the content indeterminate; the subjective aspect of that relationship is the proper domain of feeling or faith, since the content of the object is known to be but cannot be penetrated. The second term concerns the object of consciousness. It is the making of determinations about the content which allows subjectivity to penetrate the content of the object. The third and final term is the negation of the

determinations of content, since they are recognized from a position beyond the limitation as inherently un-actual, which is the proper domain of thought (ibid., 134, 154-55). Thinking is the reconciliation between subject and object since, in occupying a place beyond the limitations of representation, subjectivity negates the finite nature of the content but, unlike the first term, allows for a relationship, mediation, between subject and object to be (ibid., 484). It is from this third dialectical position that a proper notion of thought and thus of spirit, history and religion can be articulated.

The recognition of the determination as inherently un-actual has a bearing upon an elemental distinction that Hegel announces at the beginning of the *Lectures* between finite subjectivity and infinite subjectivity, two categories that broadly situate human consciousness in relation to God. Subjective consciousness is in relationship with its object, which has already been established as the basis of religion and the dialectic. If subjectivity is in relationship with a finite object, then the relationship must be finite. However, if there is no actually existing finite, if the only actuality is the infinite, and if subjectivity is in a relationship with an infinite object, then that relationship must be one of infinity, for there can be no finite relationship with the infinite. An infinite relationship with the infinite object is infinite subjectivity. Only as infinite subjectivity is spirit actually spirit in the true sense of the term, since spirit is only spirit when it has itself as object. Spirit can have itself as object only in the third dialectical position, the point at which thought is engaged (ibid., 103). The dialectic, which posits thought (thinking spirit/Spirit thinking about spirit/Spirit) as the dynamic agent, thus generates each stage of the dialectic and is simultaneously its end point. Based on this line of reasoning, Hegel states at the beginning of the *Lectures* that, “God is the beginning and end of all things” (ibid., 76). For, an inquiry can go no further than (or begin otherwise than) with Absolute Truth.

To expand on the nature of the dialectic as a whole, it will be noted that there can be no movement from the finite to the infinite, since the two are not in fact distinct categories (ibid., 405). Determinate religions, examined below, are finite, because the content of the object of consciousness, God, is construed in them as limited. Although determinations are necessary to penetrate the content, it is the recognition that the limit is not actual that allows infinite subjectivity to be. Hegel articulates the discovery at hand when he states that knowledge of God is infinite movement, that it is an elevation to (and from) God (ibid., 162). The infinite movement is twofold: it is a passing over from the finite to the infinite (or rather a recognition of the fundamental incongruity of the finite as an ontological category), and it is a movement from subjective content to objective actuality, it is absolute subjectivity (ibid., 162).

The dialectic is thus the relationship of the thinking subject to its object of contemplation. The relationship can exist because there are two terms, thinking spirit and its object, the object can be known by virtue of determinations, which, because they are recognized as determinations means that spirit is already beyond them. Thought, then, is the proper domain of the relationship between consciousness and God. As Hegel states, “religion is spirit that realizes itself in consciousness” (ibid., 104).

Hegel, however, questions the very notion of a beginning with regard to an inquiry into spirit. Since thought and knowledge only properly exist in the final instance of the dialectic, the

inquiry can only be engaged once it has already arrived at the end. For this reason, Hegel's method is also his theory and conclusion. The dialectic is the end and the beginning.

According to Hegel the dialectic, however, does not only explicate the realm of epistemology. The three stages of the dialectic are replicated in grand historical movements, as they are in subjectivity. The previous analysis has focused primarily upon subjectivity in relation to its object. The same stages of the dialectic are discernable in the divine historical process. The following discussion, dedicated to examining and critiquing aspects of Hegel's analysis of historical religious epochs, will demonstrate how the dialectic manifests itself on the societal plane.

4. Determinate Religions: Finite Subjectivity

The first instance of the dialectic of religion is the precondition for a relationship and thus for knowledge to exist; it is the primal division between subject and object. The second part of the dialectic is where religion, in the sense of a relationship between subjective consciousness and its object, can first be articulated, as only at the second moment is the determination of the content engaged. As subjective consciousness is in relation with its object, it will be seen that the nature and quality of the relationship and, therefore, of subjectivity is determined by how the object is demarcated. As was indicated above, if the content of the object is finitely limited, then subjectivity is necessarily finite. Only if subjective consciousness occupies a place beyond (all) finite determinations, is infinite subjectivity, predicated on an infinite relationship with an Infinite Object, possible.

In the second section of the *Lectures*, Hegel investigates and organizes world religions according to the determinations they formulate with regards to their content, that is, the definitions of god/God upon which their theologies rest, and thus the subjectivity that these determinations foster. Each religion, from Chinese Taoism to Greek Paganism, finds a niche in Hegel's schema.

Hegel argues that determinate religions situate subjectivity in a relationship of un-freedom (ibid., 356). As established, for a determination to be recognized as a limit, subjectivity must occupy a place beyond it. However, in determinate religions, subjectivity, by definition, has not negated the confines of its content and is thus determined by them. The subjective experience of nature (or natural) religions, for example, is that the elemental environmental forces are believed to, and therefore do, control humanity. In this finitely anthropomorphized characterization of nature, subjective consciousness delimits the object of its relationship as a dominating agent. The religious relationship based upon such a restricted depiction of the object results in a fundamentally un-free subject, a subjectivity that is wholly determined by its ontological circumstances. Similarly, Hegel suggests that the ancient Greeks were not free in the way people today are free because they allowed themselves to be determined from without, that is, by fate (ibid., 357).

Freedom, by necessity, is only possible in the third instance of the dialectic where the finite boundaries of the content are known to be inherently un-actual and an infinite subjectivity,

that is, subjectivity in infinite freedom, is in an infinite relation with the Absolute Object (ibid., 213). Only in the third instance of the dialectic is spirit an actual category and history an actual concept. For, in the third position of the dialectic, in the infinite mediation between subject and object, spirit is in an actual, that is, infinite relation with Spirit (ibid., 474). In this third instance, the content of the object is recognized as Absolute, and as subjectivity is in relation with the object, it must be in an absolute, that is, infinite relationship with its object, for this is the only relationship that can be had with the Absolute (Object). Hegel's very insights into the nature of infinite subjectivity afford the opportunity to critique his notion of determinate religions as presented in the *Lectures*, for they contradict the logical imperatives of his own theory. Critiques of Hegel's model of determinate religions will be engaged after a brief explication of his theories concerning the relationship of finite subjectivity is presented.

It is incumbent upon this investigation to examine the incongruous arguments that Hegel presents in the second section of the *Lectures*, as the aim of the analysis is to arrive at a wide-ranging and inclusive understanding of religion. Such an understanding will pose a significant challenge to the over-simplifications of the religious that are foundational to secularism as an ideology and which were and are perpetuated in the secular state. A reliable description of religion can only be proposed, however, if the problems of Hegel's analysis, upon which the present inquiry relies, are critiqued and scrutinized. It must be established whether his characterization of religion is logically consistent and does not collapse under the weight of its own implications.

To begin, however, it is necessary to review the main tenets of determinate religions as presented in the *Lectures*. The principal problem is centered around the idea of Hegel's assertion that there is an historical evolution of subjectivity in relation to the content of its object, specifically, the determinations made regarding the object of consciousness, God. Hegel maintains that in each new religious epoch there is a fundamental shift in subjectivity predicated on the relationship with the religious object, which is demarcated in radically new ways. The proposition is a continual re-evaluation of the object of consciousness which continues until human subjectivity is ripe for a total negation of determinations by (recognizing that it is) occupying a place beyond them, but not, however, by returning to (an imagined) state of indeterminateness. In the last stage of the religious relationship, the determinations of the object's content are sublated and the object is engaged as it actually is, Absolute and Infinite. Before that can occur, however, Hegel suggests that subjectivity passes through various relationships codified in historical religious examples. What will be seen below, however, is that based on Hegel's own conclusions regarding the ontological nature of the finite and the infinite, these movements or evolutionary steps of subjectivity in an upward spiral to freedom are not possible. It will be shown that subjectivity cannot move to the infinite from the finite. Hegel also suggests, contrary to his earlier explication, that the Roman and the Jewish religions serve as a(n) (impossible) bridge to infinite subjectivity (ibid., 433).

In part two of the *Lectures*, Hegel intimates that, as with all expressions of the dialectic, the dialectic of determinate religions is a two-fold process of determination and sublation. Subjectivity constructs determinations as regards the object and thereby comes into a relation with the object. Hegel attempts to demonstrate that the determinations made by one religion are negated by a successor religion in reaction to the previous expression, which in a sense forms an

antithesis and which then instigates its own determinations of the content of the object. Hegel's reasoning is guided by the supposition that subjectivity-in-relation to its object is a process of upward (or outward) progression. Each religion defines the object of its relation in more expansive terms than did its predecessor.

Hegel demonstrates correctly that only by making determinations about the content is subjective consciousness put into relation with that content, that is, it is penetrated; it can be known because it has form (ibid., 79, 92, 128-29). In sublating these limits, subjectivity is situated beyond the parameters of the determinations (ibid., 128-29). Subjectivity, occupying a place beyond the determinations, makes new determinations regarding the content, re-situating subjectivity in, yet again, a place beyond. As Hegel argues, the content of subjectivity's object is accordingly determined in ever more expansive ways, as with each negation subjectivity occupies a place beyond the previous limitation. Hegel claims it is the dialectical process of determination and negation that constitutes world religious history. According to this line of reasoning, Taoism, for example, is a reaction to previous, less developed religions of magic, because in Taoism the content of the object is delineated more broadly than it was in the religions of magic that historically preceded it (ibid., 236). As each new religion determines the content of subjectivity's object in more expansive and inclusive ways, the final stage of religious relationship, so Hegel argues, is produced from the final set of negations, and the ultimate religious expression, that where subjectivity's object is determined as infinite, is established and an absolute relation is ensues. An upward spiral leading through the finite and arriving at infinite subjectivity is, however, logically impossible, as was already shown. However, the critique of Hegel's notion of movement from finite to the infinite is intricately related to the problematic characterization of Judaism and the role of the Roman religion. This last point will be engaged before a discussion regarding the evolutionary aspect of subjectivity in relation to its object is engaged.

Hegel's discussion of the finite religion in his *Lectures* is devoted to tracing the temporal development of finite subjectivity, the last expressions of which, according to him, were Judaism and the Roman religion. Hegel argues that in these two religious manifestations, subjectivity relates to its content in significantly new ways, forming the basis from which infinite subjectivity can arise. Religions of nature, the Greek religions and other instances of determinate religions often defined the content of their object as anthropomorphized nature deities. These deities had mostly natural or human characteristics that were negated to be replaced by ever more powerful and consequential deities. Finally, reasons Hegel, there arose an historical period where two religious expressions embodied revolutionary potential. Judaism and the Roman religion in combination present the (impossible) bridge to the infinite. In these religions, the content of subjectivity's object was still determined in a finite manner, but Judaism grasped God for the first time as spirit (ibid., 357) and the Roman religion comprehended the expediency and purposiveness of its content.

Although in Judaism God is for the first time known as Spirit (ibid., 357), Hegel writes: To begin with, then, God is known as spirit whose determinations are rational and ethical. But this God still has a particular content, i.e., is still only his ethical power. God's appearance is that of beauty; but this appearance is a natural material and a soul of sensible, external stuff or of sensible representation. (ibid., 357)

Indeed, the determinations would seem to be even more restrictive than what is read in the citation above, as God is (often) understood not only in ethical but also in nationalistic and ethnic terms (*ibid.*, 372). Spirit is striving for the realization of itself as infinite subjectivity, and this can only be accomplished in relation with an Absolute content. A content that is determined along any lines short of absoluteness does not allow for an absolute relationship and, as such, restricts the subject to finite subjectivity.

However, if, as Hegel's analysis demonstrated earlier, revelation is intrinsically linked with reason, and if reason, being a form of thought, is only properly expressed in the final instance of the dialectic, that is, in the consummate religion, then Judaism, in/to which God reveals Himself, must itself be part of the third dialectical instance, part of the consummate religion and, therefore, is not an example of finite subjectivity. The realm of revelation is that of mediation and thus of thought; it is spirit, and an instance of the consummate religion. According to Hegel's own reasoning, there cannot be revelation without mediation (*ibid.*, 154), and, thus there can be no revelation without an actual instance of Spirit. For, as Hegel also concluded, the proper notion of spirit is to be self-revealing; spirit is subjective consciousness in relation to its object, which, if revealed, must be infinite. If, as Hegel suggests Judaism is an instance of finite subjectivity, then there can be no revelation, otherwise, Judaism is also an instance of infinite subjectivity, since spirit is in absolute relation with the Absolute. If, God is for the first time known as Spirit (*ibid.*, 357), then Judaism is revelatory and is engaged in infinite subjectivity.

Hegel betrays a degree of inconsistency in his dealings with the historical manifestations of religion that are irreconcilable with his overall theoretical and highly insightful analysis of religion. Another critique, regarding the nature of the finite and the infinite with respect to Judaism and Roman religions, will be engaged presently. For Hegel suggests that the Roman religion is the mediation between Judaism and Greek religion and thus represents a transitional phase to infinite subjectivity in the consummate religion.

The content of the Greek gods is beauty and that of the Jewish God is the ethical. Hegel argues that these particularities are lost in the Roman religion; both the Greek and Jewish deities lose their individuality (*ibid.*, 376). The wisdom of the Jewish God, once restricted ethnically, is freed in the Roman religion from its enclosing territorial bonds. The individuality of the Greek gods, their distinguishing features analogous to the various dispositions reflected in nature, is transmuted in the Roman religion. The content of spirit's object is determined for a purpose, Greek gods incarnate as bureaucratic officials whose office is universalized. The purpose of the Roman gods is first and foremost the state (*ibid.*, 377). The Roman religion is, according to Hegel, however, a pathological expression of the religious. The light-heartedness that characterized the relationship of the Greeks to their gods has been replaced by a deadly seriousness in the religion of expediency. The pathology arises in the fact that the state, for which the content of the Roman gods is determined, is an external and worldly end. The content is not part of God's nature proper, although it is certainly encompassed by God in the final dialectic category, that is, Absolute. Hegel writes that, "the purposiveness is external [i.e., finite]; if it were grasped as internal [infinite] it would be God's own proper nature" (*ibid.*, 378).

Historically viewed, Hegel's argument is seductive. The Roman religion and Judaism were cohabitating at the time that Christianity, the consummate religion, came into worldly

historical existence. Could it not be, as Hegel argues, that the conflation of the two relationships with respect to their determinations regarding the divine object did not result in a revolutionary re-situation of subjectivity? Were the determinations incorporated in the two religious expressions not finally sublated by the One historically incarnation of Truth, by Jesus Christ? According to Hegel's own systematic analysis of the nature of religion and the necessary relationship that this entails, such a movement or evolutionary progression from one form of subjectivity to another is impossible.

Hegel correctly demonstrates that there is no movement from the finite to the infinite (ibid., 405-07). The finite is not an actual ontological category since there is always a place beyond the limitation, which itself is inherently arbitrary (ibid., 405-07). The only true actuality, as was seen earlier, is infinity (ibid., 405-07). If the finite is not actual, then there is no bridge between the two. The infinite is not a measure of quantity but an expression of totality. There can be no historical movement from the un-actual, from the finite, to the actual infinite, since the infinite is the Absolute, and there can be no movement to, in, or through the Absolute by virtue of its Absoluteness. The finite and the infinite are not in opposition to each other, in fact, they are not at all ontologically related to each other. What this insight means is that subjectivity cannot move through evolutionary steps towards an infinite relationship with the Absolute. It will now be shown why the consummate religion cannot arise out of determinate religions.

It was suggested above that Hegel hypothesized an upward spiral of subjectivity relating to its object, finally resulting in infinite subjectivity. By occupying a place beyond the previous determinations, subjective consciousness extends the perimeters of its determinations, until finally the content is construed so vastly that infinite subjectivity results. Such a movement to infinity is impossible. As was just suggested, infinity is not a measure of quantity but of absoluteness. If subjectivity is continually re-defining its relation to its object by expanding the limits of the objects content, then the process will be infinite. There can be no arrival at infinite subjectivity from the finite realm. The finite content is always, and will always remain finite, regardless how large it is. The process of negating a finite limit and re-situating subjectivity in relation to another finite construction of the object is an infinite process that by virtue of infinity can never result in infinite subjectivity. Logically there can be no progress to the Absolute, to infinity, or infinite subjectivity. Therefore, the Roman religion cannot be, as Hegel argues, the bridge to infinite subjectivity, by virtue of his own (convincing) demonstrations and proofs regarding the ontological character of the finite and the infinite.

Following the same line of argument as above, either Judaism is an instance of infinite subjectivity and thus intrinsically related to the consummate religion, Christianity, or Judaism has no bearing upon, and no relation to, Christianity. Judaism is either an expression of an infinite relation with the infinite – and only in that relation can there be revelation – or there is no revelation at all. If this is true, then the later conclusion would have the embarrassing consequence that the God who was “revealed” to Abraham would not be, and have no relation to, the God who was revealed to Jesus. According to the imperatives of Hegel's own investigation, his treatment of determinate religions is contradictory. Hegel's primary definition of religion, as thinking spirit in relation to its object of contemplation, is not, however, threatened by his own mistaken deductions.

Although Hegel's applications of his own theories as they pertain to the historical manifestation of determinate religions and their relation to the consummate religion are suspect, the tenets supporting his explication of religion are not. Hegel's description of determinate religions is inconsistent, yet, the measure by which this discrepancy is recognized derives from the logical conclusions that follow from his very own theories, and therefore, the underlying propositions are the very standard by which Hegel's erroneous views can be critiqued. The investigation can, therefore, proceed to an explication of the final stage of the dialectic, the consummate religion, the instance of thought and spirit, so as to complete Hegel's construction of the religious. As suggested earlier, a comprehensive definition of religion will afford a vantage point from which to critique secularism and its policies. It will be demonstrated below, for example, that, in a comprehensive understanding of religion, God must necessarily be constitutive of an inclusive definition of community. If God is indeed constitutive of a proper notion of community, then communities are by definition religious, and secular ideologies predicated on the removal of the religious from social life, will further be shown to be baseless.

5. The Consummate Religion: Infinite Subjectivity

The ramifications of the claims made in section 2 of this paper regarding the ontological unity of reason and revelation and the nature of the finite and the infinite will now be explicated. Based on the logical implications of Hegel's arguments described thus far, this section will demonstrate that only in the third instance of the dialectic is there actually a concept of spirit. It will also be shown that the fundamental nature of spirit is freedom. Such a situation can only come to be in the third dialectical position. Thought is the mode of relationship between subjective consciousness and its object, and thought is the third instance of the dialectic. The fact that spirit is by definition the subjective relationship with God in thought (*ibid.*, 103, 161) will be shown to have important implications for the formulation of God as constitutive of community. The nature of spirit, as well as the centrality of thought in relation to revelation, will form the basis of a fundamental critique of secularism.

The third instance of the dialectic is spirit. Hegel argues that spirit is subjectivity in relation. Only in the third instance is the relation actual, because only in the third instance does spirit have as object that which it really is (*ibid.*, 103). If spirit is subjectivity in relation, then this logically implies that spirit must be in relation with an other, as there cannot be an atomic relation, that is, there can be no relation in immediacy (*ibid.*, 129). To be for an other, to relate to, or to manifest for an other is the very dynamic of spirit and the dialectic of religion. Spirit, by definition, entails the other; spirit is spirit only when manifesting for an other (*ibid.*, 129).

Much of the preceding discussion has focused on the subjective aspect of the relationship that is religion. Hegel, however, demonstrates that God too is Spirit (*ibid.*, 90, 131). If, following the structure of his argument, God was revealed to Abraham, as purported in biblical narratives, then Abraham must have been (or must be) in relation with God. There can be no revelation without relation, and if God was revealed, then God was manifesting for an other, for Abraham, otherwise there would no revelation. If God were not Spirit, if God did not manifest for the other, which is subjective consciousness, then nothing could be known about/of God, since there could

be no relation with God. To be for an other, to manifest for an other, is the very definition of spirit, as spirit is (subjectivity in) relation.

God, in Hegel's theory, cannot be reduced to subjectivity, since God is Absolute. However, the necessity that God is Absolute must also include the condition, by virtue of Absoluteness, that God is Spirit. Thus, as Hegel argues, Spirit/spirit is the having of itself as object, and the having of itself as object can only occur in relation, in thought, since thought is mediation, which is the third instance of the dialectic (*ibid.*, 103, 129, 131). The third dialectical position is the first time that a true and actual concept of spirit, and by extension history can be articulated, since spirit is only spirit when in relation with itself as it actually is (*ibid.*, 131).

Given this concept of God, it follows that God must, by necessity also be free. God by definition is Absolute (*ibid.*, 114-15, 117-18), and there can be no condition that determines Absoluteness. If God were not free, then God would be contingent upon something else, since the condition of God's bondage would have to be something other than God. To maintain that God is un-free because of the very fact of being God, which is being Absolute, is a contradiction in terms, for nothing can be un-free by virtue of itself. It does not follow then that God is un-free, but rather that God, by virtue of being Absolute and not contingent must be free. As God is Spirit, it means that Spirit/spirit is free. Spirit, that is, (human) subjective consciousness in relation to Spirit (*ibid.*, 103, 130), must also be free since (free) spirit is in an absolute relation with a free object. There cannot be a relationship of freedom based on bondage.

In determinate religions, as with the Greeks and fate for example, humanity was in a state of un-freedom because subjectivity allowed the object with which it was in relation to determine it. Only in the consummate religion is humanity actually free, since only in an infinite and absolute relation with an Infinite and Absolute Object, is there infinite subjectivity, which is spirit. If it is in spirit's nature to be free, then spirit only is (and only is free) when it has itself that is Spirit as its object. That is the very definition of the third instance of the dialectic (*ibid.*, 103).

The dialectic is thought (*ibid.*, 121). The first instance is the division between subject and object, the second is the representation of the object, which allows subjectivity to penetrate, that is, gain access into the necessity of its object (*ibid.*, 104, 135). The third moment of the dialectic is sublation and reconciliation, the negation of determinations and the reconciliation with the object, which is and simultaneously comes to be because of thought (*ibid.*, 102-03, 487-89). Thought is the dynamism; it is thought that is spirit in relation with Spirit, in thought. There can be no relation between subject and object in consciousness without thought, and the very definition of thought is the relation of subject and object in consciousness (*ibid.*, 154, 161, 403). Spirit is only free because of thought, and thought only is because spirit is in relation.

The two concepts, thought and relation (which are not wholly distinct from one another) are central to the current analysis of religion and secularism. Although secularism implicitly differentiates between revelation and reason, both are constitutive of religion because of the necessary relation between subject and object in consciousness. The principles of knowledge, as Hegel has demonstrated, dictate that there must be a relation in thought for there to be knowledge and, as was seen, this relation invalidates the supposed distinction that underlies the

rationale of secularism. The logical consequence of subjective consciousness in relation to God has another implication which is pertinent for a critique of secularism. If God is known only in and as relation, then God is present in the community (ibid., 90, 131, 473).

Hegel argues that God is not known through an investigation into nature (ibid., 213), but rather through relationship (ibid., 87, 90, 161). The primary relationship under investigation has been in the realm of consciousness, as subjective consciousness encounters its Absolute Object in thought. The relationship in which God is recognized, Hegel observes, is also communal (ibid., 90). Indeed, there can be no proper notion of community without relationship. A community is relationship, and God is only known through relationship. God, Hegel argues, is present in community and is known through and in community (ibid., 90, 473). If this is true, then the secularist's desire to extract religion from the community must amount to the complete destruction of the community itself. The fact that communities have not dissolved reveals how little secular policies have succeeded in removing religion from the public sphere.

According to the logic of the dialectical structure applied throughout this analysis, the community, by virtue of being relationship in freedom, already is the third instance of the dialectic. Viewed abstractly, the individual in the community is an apparent manifestation of immediacy, a monad. Hegel already demonstrated that the immediate is un-actual; it is an instance where the mediation has gone unrecognized (ibid., 99, 405-07). To recognize the mediation, that is, for there to be a relationship there must be an other with whom the individual can enter into a relationship with. The individual and the other are the primal division, which represents the necessary condition for a relationship (ibid., 135). The other, recognized on the basis of his/her difference, as unlike and therefore not part of the self, is the second instance of the inter-human dialectic, the dialectic of community. The apartness, the dissimilarity of individuals is the rift and is the distance, which must be sublated for a relationship to properly ensue. If the other is understood only on the basis of difference and if the fundamental similarity that unites humanity remains unrecognized, then there can be no relationship. The differentiation of the other without reconciliation is the precondition for all forms of hate and intolerance. War, racism, or gender inequalities, are some of the most egregious examples that are predicated on the disparity of the other without a validation of the intrinsic qualities that bind humans to each other. The similitude of the other must be acknowledged for a relationship to be. A relation between individuals is the recognition of similarity to and simultaneously the dissimilarity of the other. Community, as relation, is the reconciliation of the self with the other; it is the continual affirmation and sublation of the sameness and difference that makes relationship, and therefore the community, possible.

Spirit is subjectivity in relation (ibid., 103, 161). Spirit only is spirit, however, in the third instance of the dialectic, since only in relation is spirit actually spirit (ibid., 103). If, spirit is subjectivity in relation, then Hegel can accurately state that God exists in and for community as Spirit (ibid., 414-15), since God is Spirit and the community is by definition (human) subjectivity in relation. God exists in community as community (ibid., 90, 415). God comes to be for subjectivity only through relation, and that is the community. God is not recognized in the necessity of nature but in relation with spirit, in community (ibid., 213). There can be no actual concept of community without relation and therefore without Spirit, without God.

According to the above exposition of the logical ramifications of the dialectic, it would seem plausible that the ancient Greeks, who, like all humans existed socially, also represented an historical manifestation of the third instance of the dialectic and thus part of the consummate religion. That line of reasoning does not follow, however, since spirit, in order to be spirit, must have itself as object (ibid., 103). Spirit must be in relation with spirit to be spirit (ibid., 131). If spirit has what it truly is as object, then spirit is free (ibid., 213). Indeed, spirit is only spirit if it is free. Thus, spirit is only in an actual relationship if it is free, and it is only free if it has what it actually is as its object. The ancient Greeks, although they existed in social units, were not free, because the object of their relation was determined in a limited manner, limiting their own subjectivity. There was social interaction, and there were social units in ancient Greece, but there was not a sense of community as spirit in relation with itself. The conclusion that the Greeks were not free can be demonstrated through the central component of spirit and community, which is freedom. There is no proper notion of the community without freedom, as not all social relationships, slavery for example, are an instance of the third dialectic, of an actual free relationship. Only in a free relationship, where spirit is in absolute relation with the Absolute Object, is there a true sense of spirit and an actual manifestation of God as community, as relationship. Only in the third instance of the dialectic is a free relationship of spirit possible.

Hegel's theory of religion which implicates God as a central constitutive component of the community will form the central critique of the secularist project. Another main critique was already elaborated and centered on the nature of knowledge and the spurious distinction between reason and revelation. Both insights are the logical consequences of Hegel's definition of religion. Hegel demonstrates that if religion is understood as the act of thinking about God, if religion is synonymous with a relationship with God in thought, then secularism actually cannot exist as anything more than the reduction of the political clout organized religious bodies can exercise in the public realm. If secularism is to be understood as an ideological principle, as the process to extract the religious from society, indeed, as a societal movement away from religiosity, then secularism does not and cannot exist. The removal of religion from society would amount to the very destruction of society, since only by eliminating relationship, that is, the community, and thought, especially reason, can religion truly be expunged.

6. The Critique of Secularism

As shown in the first section of this investigation, secularism is best understood as a deliberate de-politicization of organized religious institutions. The endeavor by states to restrict the extensive political control exerted by religious lobbies is a readily demonstrable social phenomenon. The Catholic Church certainly has less immediate access to the political realm in modern Europe than it did during the Middle Ages, for example, when kings and other heads of state were (often) directly beholden to the wishes of the pope. Another example is that in most ostensibly modern democratic secular countries, schools no longer work to inculcate religious dogma. It is feasible to accurately label some states as secular, if the term secular is intended to denote a general inclination to restrict or eliminate direct access to the political realm that organized religious bodies often strive for. Modern theocracies are evidently not modern secular states, as a theocracy is a social organization in which religious institutions are also the political locus of power.

As demonstrated in the first section's synopsis of the historical development of European secularism, however, the term and the policies passed under its rubric, are aimed not only at the de-politicization of religious institutions, but at a general removal of the religious from society. Certainly the Comtean thesis fusing secularism, as a society free of religion, with modernization, is a theoretical substratum that underpins modern policies regarding religious expression in the public realm. Conflated in the Enlightenment were the domains of politics and theology as they pertained to religion. The goal was, and has been ever since, to reduce and eventually eliminate theology and religion's political clout.

The critique of secularism is not directed at the narrow definition of secularism as an antonym of theocracy. The fact that there are states that use religion as an organizing principle is not at issue. Neither, for that matter, is the critique directed at the relative (ethical or moral) success or failure of theocracies in light of secular states (here used in its restricted sense). The issue at hand is the supposition, implicitly or explicitly stated or maintained, that the religious, not in its institutional expression, but in its broadest and most inclusive sense, can or should be removed from the social realm. The hypothesis perpetuated in modern social institutions, that religion as a body of knowledge is unnecessary or even dangerous, is fundamentally erroneous. While historically some religious organizations can be shown to have had terrible social consequences, the Church in relation to the Crusades for example, religion is neither reducible to nor properly understood when characterized as a codified institutionalized dogmatic belief system.

As the discussion of Hegel's theory of religion, presented in his *1827 Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, has demonstrated, religion is intrinsically linked with human social and intellectual activity. Religion, as many formulations would have it, is not typified by its embrace of unreasonable *Weltanschauungen*. Neither is religion an essentially individual or even asocial activity, which, as the Marxist critique would suggest, redirects worldly frustrations away from class conflict to an imagined future utopia; the supposed opium of the masses. Indeed, as Hegel's theory demonstrates, religion is unthinkable and undoable without a community. This insight, that religion is itself an essential factor in social organization was echoed almost a century later by the eminent anthropologist and sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), who, following Hegel, in one of the few penetrating analyses of religion presented in his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, argued that religion, beyond a (mere) system of belief was a social taxonomy and paradigm for communal organization. Unfortunately, Durkheim's thesis of religion as central to societal organization has not enjoyed as much favor as the Comtean assumption that religion equals social backwardness.

If religion is abstracted from its social context it no longer embodies what it actually is. Reduced to the narrowest possible definition, religion is an absurd arrangement of semi-superstitious principles and illusory future utopias. The construction of religion as an often private and irrational belief system allows a (putatively) rational oppositional philosophy that is, secularism, to appear as a progressive counter force. Secularism is the presumed savior of modern society. When religion is made ridiculous, secularism, as an ideology, seems sensible.

Secularism, in its broadest meaning, the complete extraction of religion from society, is fundamentally impossible when religion is understood in its most inclusive sense. When religion is characterized in a restrictive way, as it has often been since the Enlightenment, those aspects that are not included in the definition do not cease to exist, but merely go unnoticed as constitutive of the religious phenomena. If, for example, religion is formulated as an adherence to, and belief in, a doctrine that makes metaphysical truth claims, then the societal, interpersonal, ideational, or other manifestations of the religious that transgress this boundary, are simply not seen. Modern examples abound of passing over the essentially religious manifestations in the mundane. From the shape that new technological innovation take to the psychological framework used to organize sensory data, such as the perception of time, much has been predicated on a fundamentally religious conception of the universe, even when the individuals in question are not themselves religious in the narrowest sense of the term. During the French Revolution, an attempt was made to replace the Gregorian calendar with an emancipatory, that is, revolutionary temporality. Later, the communist revolutionaries echoed these attempts, as they tried to change all facets of cultural organization from modes of dress to language itself, and although these attempts eventually proved impossible to implement, they connote recognition of the borderless expanse of the religious in society. Unlike many formulations, Hegel's definition does not reduce the religious to an absurdity.

As Hegel correctly states, religion is simply the relation between a subject and the Absolute Object in thought. Hegel's definition does not reduce religion to a mere act of obedience, but allows room for, and indeed implies, all the necessary manifestations that together are religion. The Absolute is Absolute Truth. All acts of thought that attempt to reveal Truth are essentially religious. To seek Truth, to yearn for Truth, and to engage Truth is religion. The ramification of Hegel's definition of religion demonstrated, as does Hegel early in the *Lectures*, that religion and philosophy, when the latter is engaged in revealing Truth, are in essence the same. Any policy, ideology, or political theory that attempts to eradicate the engagement of Truth from society is absurd. If there is an investigation of Truth and a concern for Truth, then there is and must be religion.

Religion is a relationship in thought; religion is thought in its most exalted sense, as it is thought engaged with the Absolute (ibid., 75). As the communist cadre's and French Revolutionaries correctly realized, telling people to think otherwise does not change thought. Thought is rooted and engaged in life. There can be no thought without a thinker and there can be no thinker without a community and society in which that person exists. People, that is, subjects, are essentially social and cultural. There are no peoples without culture, and there are no cultures without people. To change the way people think means, as Marx correctly argued, to change the culture and society in which they exist. If secularism were to truly succeed, it would have to alter every aspect of culture, and yet, even this measure, although it comes closer to recognizing the enormity of the task, would eventually fail, as the goal would have to be the eradication of thought engaged with the Absolute. The social change would have to equal or exceed the vastness of the end, that is, if the aim were to alter the engagement with the Absolute, then absolutely everything would have to be changed. It is highly unlikely that such a radical alteration of society is possible. What is certain, however, is that, considering the implications that such a massive change would wreak, the annihilation of the religious is not desirable.

Secularism, then, makes sense only in light of a highly nuanced and simplified construction of the religious. Yet a definition of the religious narrow enough to validate secular aims essentially misses the very act that is religion. Hegel demonstrated that the logical result of his definition of religion invalidated the putative ontological dissimilarity of reason and revelation. The essence of religion is the revelation of the Absolute through reason. The unity of the two seemingly disparate epistemologies demonstrates the very interconnectedness of religion in culture and thought. Hegel articulates throughout his work that without reason there is no revelation, thus revelation is reasonable. The recognition of reason and revelation as ontologically related invalidates the supposition that secularism stands in opposition to religion. As the finite is not in opposition to the infinite because the finite is not an actual category, so it is with secularism and religion. The secular is not oppositional to the religious, because secularism in the broadest sense of the term cannot and does not exist. The only actuality is the religious, which is intrinsically constitutive of society and culture.

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