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Philosophy of Religion in  
Classical German Philosophy*

Edited by Giulia Bernard  
and Barbara Santini

G. Bernard, L. Fonnesu, M. Glatzel, K. Hong,  
T. Mauri, B. Santini, S. Schick, M. Tangorra,  
P. Valenza, D. Vanden Auweele, Y. Xia

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## *Reason in Check. Philosophy of Religion in Classical German Philosophy*

v *Introduction*

Giulia Bernard and Barbara Santini

### *Essays*

1 *Job's Loneliness. Theodicy and its Failure in Kant's Thought*

Luca Fonnesu

21 *St. John 1.1 or Luke 23.46? Fichte and Jacobi on the Truth of Christianity*

Stefan Schick

51 *Die Bedeutung des religiösen Bewusstseins in den Psychologievorlesungen Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermachers*

Matthis Glatzel

75 *Il destino del cristianesimo nella filosofia della religione di Hegel*

Pierluigi Valenza

103 *The Borders of an Uncertain Object. Nature, Desire and Magic in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*

Manuel Tangorra

- 133 *Die anthropologische Konzeption in Hegels Religionsphilosophie und ihre Problematik*  
Kaiyuan Hong
- 157 *From Religious Philosophy to Philosophy of Religion. A Path in Schelling's Late Philosophy*  
Tommaso Mauri
- 179 *Revealing Reason's Limits and Rebuking Heidegger: Schelling's Late Thoughts on God and Religion*  
Dennis Vanden Auweele and Yu Xia
- 207 *Mitteilung of the Absolute: Performing Knowledge in the Philosophy of Religion*  
Giulia Bernard
- 239 *Religionsphilosophie: kein Abschied von der Letztbegründung. Hölderlin und die Gottesfrage im Ausgang von Kant*  
Barbara Santini

### ***Book Reviews***

- 253 A. Tomaszewska, *Kant's Rational Religion and the Radical Enlightenment. From Spinoza to Contemporary Debates*  
(Paola Rumore)
- 259 B. Norris, *Schelling and Spinoza. Realism, Idealism, and the Absolute*  
(Giovanni Temporin)

- 265 P. Dews, *Schelling's Late Philosophy in Confrontation with Hegel*  
(Michael Hackl)
- 271 M. Feldmeier, *Freiheit und Rationalität. Zur Rolle F.H. Jacobis im Denken Søren Kierkegaards*  
(Roman Winter-Tietel)



# PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION IN CLASSICAL GERMAN PHILOSOPHY: AN INTRODUCTION

by Giulia Bernard\* and Barbara Santini\*

*Vernunft und Freiheit bleiben unsre Losung,  
und unser Vereinigungspunkt die unsichtbare Kirche<sup>1</sup>.*

We are very glad to present this special issue of «Verifiche. Rivista di scienze umane», titled *Reason in Check: Philosophy of Religion in classical German philosophy*. This issue is devoted to the historical and systematic development of the philosophy of religion within the framework of classical German philosophy.

The expression ‘philosophy of religion’ has been in use since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. Although not yet aligned with the contemporary understanding of a philosophy that examines religion as its object, the expression could have referred, at first, to the rational theology of the Enlightenment. Its earliest recorded uses, in 1772 by Sigismund von Storchenau and later by Carl Leonhard Reinhold in debates on Kant’s doctrine of postulates, suggested an attempt to employ philosophical methodologies in addressing religious topics such as the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. A significant shift occurred with Kant, who departed from traditional philosophical theology in addressing these topics. In the aftermath, diverse shapes of ‘philosophy of religion’ were developed, rooted in the philosophical projects of the main figures of classical German philosophy – ranging from transcendental philosophy to non-philosophy, speculative philosophy, positive philosophy, among others. As a pivotal theme in classical German philosophy, where it emerged, ‘philosophy of religion’ proved to

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel’s letter to Schelling, January 1795, in G.W.F. Hegel, *Briefe von und an Hegel. Band I*, ed. by J. Hoffmeister, Hamburg, Meiner, 1952, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> See W. Jaeschke, *Religionsphilosophie*, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 8, ed. by J. Ritter and K. Gründer, Basel, Schwabe Verlag, 1992, p. 748.

be a crucial locus for exploring the relationship between the finite and the infinite, the concepts of the absolute, subjectivity, our community-oriented nature, as well as issues of *Bildung*, morality and historicity.

‘Philosophy of religion’ as shaped in the classical German philosophy has recently experienced revived interest<sup>3</sup>. Amid the current contributions devoted to this topic, the special issue of «Verifiche» aims to address the structural complexity inherent in it. The rationale of the special issue is the conviction that ‘philosophy of religion’ can serve as the prismatic centre of a constellation of issues that closely connects epistemology, ontology, metaphysics, ethics, anthropology, aesthetics, philosophy of history, political philosophy and philosophy of education. This interconnectedness has the potential to fundamentally question the very nature of philosophy, along with its means, aims, and methods. The special issue of «Verifiche» intends to tackle these questions and underscore their critical potential for contemporary debates within both metaphysical and post-metaphysical frameworks.

The idea for this special issue of «Verifiche» originated from the international conference *Vernunft in Schach. Religionsphilosophie als Schlüsselfrage der Klassischen Deutschen Philosophie / Reason in check. Philosophy of religion as a key question in Classical German Philosophy*, hosted by the University of Padova on June 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The

<sup>3</sup> On the recent revival of the interest in philosophy of religion within classical German philosophy, see M. Kühnlein, H. Ottmann (eds.), *Religionsphilosophie nach Hegel. Über Glauben und Wissen nach dem Tod Gottes*, Heidelberg, J.B. Metzler, 2021; G. Sans, J. Stoffers (eds.), *Religionsphilosophie nach Fichte. Das Absolute im Endlichen*, Heidelberg, J.B. Metzler, 2022; A. Tomaszewska, *Kant's Rational Religion and the Radical Enlightenment. From Spinoza to Contemporary Debates*, London, Bloomsbury, 2022; M. Kühnlein (ed.), *Religionsphilosophie nach Kant. Im Angesicht des Bösen*, Heidelberg, J.B. Metzler, 2023; B. Dörflinger, *Studien zur Religionsphilosophie Immanuel Kants*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2023; M. Gottschlich, R. König (eds.), *Zum Sinn von Religion. Perspektiven mit und auf Hegel*, Leiden, Brill, 2023; A.J.B. Hampton (ed.), *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and the Ends of the Enlightenment. Religion, Philosophy, and Reason at the Crux of Modernity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023; B. Santini, *Morale e religione. Hölderlin interprete di Kant*, Napoli-Salerno, Orthotes, 2023; R. Okazaki (ed.), *Religionsphilosophie in und nach der Klassischen Deutschen Philosophie*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 2024.



conference aimed to understand to what extent ‘philosophy of religion’ in classical German philosophy is intertwined with the development of new models of rationality and agency, which in turn enable a critical, fundamental reassessment of reason and freedom. This perspective is further developed in this issue of «Verifiche», exploring how different projects of ‘philosophy of religion’ by the thinkers of classical German philosophy disclose paramount conceptual resources to address thinking and action at once to confront epochs of crisis. Precisely these resources can be valuable for addressing contemporary challenges in the philosophy of religion.

The volume consists of papers from invited contributors (Luca Fonnesu, Stefan Schick, Pierluigi Valenza, Dennis Vanden Auweele, Yu Xia) and contributions selected through a call for papers (Matthis Glatzel, Kaiyuan Hong, Tommaso Mauri, Manuel Tangorra), in addition to the articles by the editors (Giulia Bernard and Barbara Santini).

Luca Fonnesu’s *Job’s Loneliness. Theodicy and its Failure in Kant’s Thought* opens the issue. Fonnesu investigates the collapse of the Kantian project of a rational theodicy based on practical reason. To this end, he examines the figures of Job in Kant’s essay on the failure of rational theodicies (1791).

The essay *St. John 1.1 or Luke 23.46? Fichte and Jacobi on the Truth of Christianity* by Stefan Schick analyzes Jacobi’s and Fichte’s respective philosophies of religion. Discussing the diverging remarks on the truth of Christianity in their interdependent late philosophies, Schick shows to what extent Fichte misconceived Jacobi’s main philosophical intentions and subsequently failed in his attempt to integrate Jacobi’s original philosophical concerns into his transcendental philosophy.

In the essay *Die Bedeutung des religiösen Bewusstseins in den Psychologievorlesungen Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermachers*, Matthis Glatzel explores the importance of religious feeling in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s lectures on psychology. Glatzel particularly highlights Schleiermacher’s unique derivation of religious feeling from feelings of respect for humanity and nature, a derivation that is not found elsewhere in his work.

The essay *Il destino del cristianesimo nella filosofia della religione di Hegel* by Pierluigi Valenza investigates the fate of Christianity in Hegel's philosophy of religion along two main lines: the necessity of an external object for religious imagination and the impossibility of universalizing love, which undermines the practical aspect of religion. By reconstructing the trajectory of Hegel's thought on religion, Valenza emphasizes that philosophy plays a decisive role in shaping a dynamic and open religious community.

Manuel Tangorra's contribution *The Borders of an Uncertain Object. Nature, Desire and Magic in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* explores how Hegel opens the possibility for a new perspective on the diversity of historical religions by placing the anthropological structure of consciousness at the center of discourse on the believing subject. Tangorra argues that grasping the epistemic operation underlying this new scientific intelligibility requires identifying the dysfunctional borders of the concrete existence of religions. To this aim, Tangorra analyses the role that the concept of 'magic' plays in Hegel's lectures on philosophy of religion, particularly in the section devoted to 'determined religion'.

The essay *Die anthropologische Konzeption in Hegels Religionsphilosophie und ihre Problematik* by Kaiyuan Hong further explores the issue of anthropology as it is elaborated in Hegel's philosophy of religion. Hong seeks to understand the connection between two anthropological conceptions: the one at the beginning of Hegel's philosophy of spirit and the one in his philosophy of religion. Hong's thesis is that the anthropological and genealogical approach to religion does not align with Hegel's concept of religion based on Spinoza's metaphysics of immanence.

Tommaso Mauri's contribution *From Religious Philosophy to Philosophy of Religion. A Path in Schelling's Late Philosophy* supports the thesis that Schelling's late philosophy (1827-1854) progressively transforms from a religious philosophy to a philosophy of religion. Mauri shows that (Christian) religion, initially taken as an auxiliary and guiding source of philosophical reflection, gradually becomes a specific object of philosophical speculation. Ultimately, this shift provides an account of the epistemological framework within which Schelling's philosophy of religion fits.

In *Revealing Reason's Limits and Rebuking Heidegger: Schelling's Late Thoughts on God and Religion*, Dennis Vanden Auweele and Yu Xia revisit and reassess Heidegger's critique of Schelling, focusing on the latter's later work. Vanden Auweele and Xia argue that Heidegger fails to recognize Schelling's important innovations in rethinking the ground, the divine subject, and the nature of systematic thought. According to their interpretation, Schelling advances beyond the problematic aspects of modern philosophical thought.

Giulia Bernard's contribution *Mitteilung of the Absolute: Performing Knowledge in the Philosophy of Religion* explores different models of philosophy of religion centered around a key concept pivotal in reshaping rationality and transcending mere historical knowledge: the concept of *Mitteilung*. Bernard demonstrates that *Mitteilung* is not only the self-expression of communicated content but also a transformative experience for both philosopher and audience, challenging the philosophical discourse itself. The investigation underscores a fundamental meta-philosophical gradient of philosophy of religion, as it emerges within diverse projects developing a cosmic rather than scholastic philosophy in the world.

In *Religionsphilosophie: kein Abschied von der Letztbegründung. Hölderlin und die Gottesfrage im Ausgang von Kant*, Barbara Santini investigates the possibility of a philosophy of religion project in Hölderlin in light of a well-established line of interpretation that reconstructs the relationship between the genesis of the philosophy of religion and the crisis of ontotheology. Santini aims to show the genealogical constellation in which Hölderlin can be productively placed and the contribution he makes to it. Santini's study focuses on Hölderlin's late reflection on the question of God, with the aim of demonstrating that his project of philosophy of religion is far from dismissing the question of the ultimate grounding.

The volume ends with a section of reviews devoted to publications on the philosophy of religion in classical German philosophy. This issue offers reviews of: Anna Tomaszewska's *Kant's Rational Religion and the Radical Enlightenment. From Spinoza to Contemporary Debates* (by Paola Rumore), Benjamin Norris' *Schelling and Spinoza. Realism, Idealism, and the Absolute* (by Giovanni

Temporin), Peter Dews' *Schelling's Late Philosophy in Confrontation with Hegel* (by Michael Hackl), and Majk Feldmeier's *Freiheit und Rationalität. Zur Rolle F.H. Jacobis im Denken Søren Kierkegaards* (by Roman Winter-Tietel).

We wish to sincerely thank the authors who participated in *Reason in Check: Philosophy of Religion in Classical German Philosophy* for their outstanding contributions, as well as the referees for their invaluable dedication and efforts. We also express our appreciation to the scholars who enriched this volume with their insightful book reviews. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the editorial staff of «Verifiche», especially Francesco Campana, Paolo Giuspoli, Paolo Livieri, Armando Manchisi, Elena Nardelli for their substantial work in the final stages of publication, as well as to the scientific coordinators for their unwavering support of this project.

Lastly, we wish to remember Walter Jaeschke, an esteemed scholar in the field of philosophy of religion within classical German philosophy, who eagerly embraced participation in the project from its inception but, regrettably, was unable to witness its realization. This special issue of «Verifiche» is dedicated to his memory and influential legacy.